

Under the Rainbow: Oral Histories of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual,  
Transgender, Intersex and Queer People in Kansas

Stephanie Mott  
Oral History

Interviewed by  
Tami Albin

July 8, 2012

<https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/handle/1808/30058>

This interview was made possible by the generous support of the University of Kansas Libraries and the University of Kansas grants 2302114, 2301283, 2301334.

© Under the Rainbow: Oral Histories of Gay, Lesbian,  
Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer People and Kansas

## Copyright and permissions

All oral histories in the *Under the Rainbow: Oral Histories of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer People in Kansas* are copyrighted and protected by copyright law (Title 17, U. S. Code).

Requests for permission to publish quotations beyond “fair use” from this collection should be addressed to:

Tami Albin ([albin@ku.edu](mailto:albin@ku.edu) or [tami.albin@gmail.com](mailto:tami.albin@gmail.com) )  
Director of *Under the Rainbow: Oral Histories of GLBTIQ People in Kansas*  
Anschutz Library  
1301 Hoch Auditoria Dr.,  
University of Kansas  
Lawrence, KS 66045

Requestors must identify:

1. Type of publication
2. Proposed title
3. Specific passages to be quoted
4. Anticipated uses of the passages
5. Publisher’s name
6. Expected date of publication

## Citing Under the Rainbow Oral History Interviews

Your citation should include information that will allow people to find this transcript. Please consult a citation guide (Chicago, MLA, ALA) for the correct citation style for audio/video interviews or transcripts.

Please be sure to include:

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| Narrator’s name              | e.g. Bill Smith  |
| Interviewer’s Name           | e.g. Tami Albin  |
| Date of interview            | e.g. March 26, 2009  |
| Name of project and location | e.g. Under the Rainbow: Oral Histories of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer People in Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas |
| URL                          | e.g. <a href="http://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/dspace/handle/1808/5556">http://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/dspace/handle/1808/5556</a>         |

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

**Stephanie Mott:** Narrator

**Tami Albin:** Interviewer

00:00:00

**TAMI ALBIN:** Turn on this. Alright, so. Looking good. Okay, so today is July 8th 2012 and I'm here with Stephanie Mott. How are you?

00:00:12

**STEPHANIE MOTT:** I'm good thank you, how are you?

00:00:14

**ALBIN:** I'm good. Thank you so much for participating in this.

00:00:17

**MOTT:** Thank you.

00:00:17

**ALBIN:** Um, I really appreciate it. So I'm going to start off this interview the way that I start off all the conversations which is, tell me where you were born and when?

00:00:26

**MOTT:** I was born in Lawrence, Kansas, on December 31st 1957, eleven minutes before midnight. I was actually—my parents told me a story that said that they um, a doctor had talked to them about whether or not they wanted the last baby of 1957 or the first baby of 1958. And I doubt that that conversation ever really took place because my dad was nowhere near the delivery room that—the way that they did things at the time but I expect that there was probably some conversation with my mom. But at any rate my dad says that I was born in 1957 because he wanted the tax deduction.

00:01:04

**ALBIN:** Oh wow. So did you spend your childhood in Lawrence?

00:01:10

**MOTT:** Up until about the age of five and then we moved in a little farm outside of Eudora, Kansas, about seven miles east of Lawrence. And it was a really beautiful place to grow up. Just a big chunk of the Wakarusa river and another creek that ran into it and eighty acres and ten burn (?) and just amazing, amazing beautiful place to grow up. I loved it, I did.

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

00:01:37

**ALBIN:** And so do you have siblings?

00:01:40

**MOTT:** I have two sisters and I have two brothers. One of my brothers is younger and one of my sisters is younger than I am, and one each is older than I am.

00:01:49

**ALBIN:** So you're the middle baby.

00:01:50

**MOTT:** I'm the middle one.

00:01:50

**ALBIN:** Right, right. So what was life like growing up with your siblings?

00:01:57

**MOTT:** It was awesome. I mean, we all got along pretty well. My little brother picked on me a lot and I occasionally smacked him in the back with a tennis racket. Which I got in trouble for, for some reason. But we all got along and we were about two years apart, each of us. And, um—I adored my older brother Dan and my sister Nancy. And got along really well with Julie and not so well with Paul, the little brother. But you know it was a very loving home, my mom is the basis for anything I know about unconditional love. And my dad was a typical dad for the 1960s. He's, you know a product of the Depression and struggled with being able to show his emotions. But he was an excellent provider, an excellent provider. He was strict and hard, but he was a loving father and it was a beautiful place to grow up.

00:02:55

**ALBIN:** Mm-hm. And so what was school like?

00:02:59

**MOTT:** School was okay. I mean I did well in school. Um. Everything was—the word I would have to use to describe it was surreal. Because I was seeing things in a different lens that was—because I was born biologically male and inside I have always identified as female. The very first thing that I remember about myself is knowing that I was

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

female on the inside. And so I would be—it was almost like I was in a play, and I was playing the part of this boy that wasn't me and so all my interactions were based upon this character in this play. And at the same time that I would be trying to do what I thought little boys were supposed to be doing so I wouldn't get beat up, which happened from time to time, I was also looking at the little girls and going, I wonder what it must be like to be able to, you know, come to school and wear a dress and be able to be this person that I could never be. But that was—everything played against that backdrop. Everything in my entire life from the very first thing I remember played against that backdrop of me having to pretend to be someone that wasn't me and not being able to be the person who was me. But still, I was blessed enough to be born into this loving home. And things were okay. You know, I did well in school, I didn't get into much trouble, and pretty much just tried not to get in—you know, tried not to be noticed too much. When I wasn't noticed.

00:04:42

**ALBIN:** Did you ever discuss your feelings of feeling female on the inside with your siblings or parents when you were younger?

00:04:52

**MOTT:** I don't remember having that discussion. But I'm going to tell you, I think I probably did have that discussion and I just don't remember having it. I probably had it when I was very, very young, and I probably had it with my mom because it would have been natural for me to talk to her about that instead of my dad. But in some way the first thing I remember, like I said, knowing about myself was that I'm a—was a girl on the inside. The second thing I remember knowing about myself was I couldn't talk about it and I couldn't tell anybody about it, and I had to hide it. And if I was going to present myself as a little girl I had to be in the shadows, in some secluded place on the farm and in the closet and under the covers at night but never ever where there were any people around. And I don't know how I came to that conclusion. Because I didn't have that feeling about not being able to talk about it in any other aspect of my life. Only in this one particular aspect. I know that that had to come from some place. That that feeling had to come from some place and so I suspect I had that conversation but I don't remember having it.

I'm kind of glad that today as I look back on it that I didn't stick to my guns and continue to say, No, Mommy, I really am a girl. No, Mommy, I really am a girl. And for a long time after I transitioned I was like, You know I wonder how different my life would have been if I'd have done that, if I'd have just said, I'm really a girl and stuck to my guns. And, you know maybe somehow that would have allowed for me to be able to live my

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

younger life as a girl. But the reality was that it's 1960 and what they would have done was to put me in some kind of therapy which very probably would have included electric shock aversion therapy. So it's a good thing that I didn't continue to try to carve out my girlhood at the time.

00:06:48

**ALBIN:** And so what was high school like?

00:06:51

**MOTT:** High school, again you know, once I hit puberty and I started changing—my body started changing in ways that I didn't want it to change. And the lines between boys and girls were becoming far more separated and far more distinct both biologically and socially. And I was not in the place that I needed to be. And from that aspect, you know, I imagine there were a lot of young women who wondered why—you know, thought maybe I was looking at them because I wanted to be with them and oftentimes I would look at them and dream about being able to be like them, to be them. But I did well in school and I still had this loving family that I lived in. And so it was okay.

I tried sports when I was in Junior High and I wasn't big enough to really participate but I could play baseball. And I was a pretty good baseball player and I liked it, and I could shoot the basketball but I wasn't tall enough to be able to shoot it over those other guys. But I got into wrestling and I wrestled a couple of years in High School because I could wrestle against people my own size and I enjoy that kind of stuff. I did a lot of weight-lifting that last two years of high school and I wished I hadn't now because it broadened my shoulders, and something that I can't ever change again. But I had no way of believing that I was ever going to be able to transition at the time. You know, the last part of my high school, or thereabouts, is when Renée Richards tried to get into the United States Open Tennis Tournament as a woman.

00:08:40

**ALBIN:** Right.

00:08:41

**MOTT:** And she's a transsexual woman who—and she tried to get into this tournament and they wouldn't let her play. But the news of all this made its way to our little farm outside Eudora, Kansas. And the first time in my life I'm like, Oh my God, it's possible to transition. But I didn't believe it was possible for me to transition. I thought that if you had connections or if you had money or you had fame that you could transition but for a little farm child from Eudora, Kansas, that was just not going to—that was not going to

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

ever happen. High school—it was good, I did well in my grades, I graduated third or fourth in our class, I'm not sure, of sixty. With a 3.83 grade point average and I did well in math and played in the band and um—it was okay.

But the thing that happened that—it's like, you know, in the summer when it's really hot and you have a really hot day and you get through that day okay and then the next day is really hot and you get through that day okay but maybe it's a little bit harder and the next day it's really hot and you get through that day okay but you're starting to get tired and you're starting to get heavy and it's the same way about this pretending to be somebody that you're not. And as you go from day after day everyday it seems like it gets a little bit harder, a little bit heavier, a little bit harder to carry it, a little bit—you know—and a little bit more time gone by without being able to live this way. And feeling like you have to live inwardly instead of outwardly and not ever being able to light up and be the person that you really are but always having to hide that person. And as time goes by it just seems like every single day it got harder so by that time it was getting pretty hard, by the time I got out of high school.

And as I got older I had more freedoms and I could borrow my sisters' clothes and go hide off somewhere down by the river and scout out some place where I could make sure I could see everybody coming and I could spend some time expressing myself as a girl. But that was all I had and, you know—it's like walking all the way up to the ocean and stopping without ever getting into it. You know, it's kind of like, you get this close and you're so close to it but you can just barely, tiny experience it. So you know how correct it feels and how appropriate it is and how much you want to be able to have it, so it's both healing and harmful at the same time. Because it's both this opportunity to in some fashion express myself as the girl that was inside of me, but at the same time it was a—it signaled to me exactly how correct it was for me to be that way and how much different my life would be if I were ever able to do that. Um. But it—it was okay. It was—I mean it just keeps getting harder and it continued to keep getting harder.

And the other thing that started happening about the time that I was getting out of high school was I started being aware of people's religious beliefs about homosexuals and transgender people. And, you know, I didn't know much about it really. I didn't even know that I was transgender. I knew that I was a girl on the inside, I didn't know what the word was. But I was starting to become aware of people's beliefs that who I was, was an abomination before God. And I always knew that there was something—I knew, and this was within the framework of my knowledge as a child—that there was something wrong with me. And I spent hours sitting in the stairwell of our home where we kept the Encyclopaedia Britannicas, and just thumbing through looking for something

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

that would tell me what was wrong with me. Not—not tell me about me, but tell me what was wrong with me, because I'm like, Well if I can figure out what's wrong with me, maybe there's some kind of a solution. And I was constantly looking for that. How do I stop feeling this way, and how do I feel like a normal boy's supposed to feel? And how do I come to that conclusion? And, you know—and it's one of the things that's very typical with transgender people, is that we try to do the things that we think we're supposed to do in the role that we're assigned at birth because of our biological birth sex.

And I thought very seriously after I got out of high school about going into the service. And this was 1975 when I graduated from high school. And, um, it was just right after Vietnam. And everything that happened with Vietnam and—I didn't realize of course that the United States was getting ready to go into what would be its most peaceful period of—for probably maybe ever. But it was um, scary enough, Vietnam, my brother almost had to go and he went into the ministry, but he almost had to go and I'm kind of like, No I can't do that. But I thought about it, I thought about it because I thought maybe that'll be the place where they can teach me how to be a man. You know, and for a long time that was this torment back and forth between this, how is it that I get to—you know, I can be a girl and then the next minute it's, how is it that I can become this man that I'm supposed to be? And it's always, it's like being pulled in two directions at the same for every single breath you take. And it's—over time it just gets to the place where it's pretty nuts.

00:14:34

**ALBIN:** So was your family religious at all?

00:14:37

**MOTT:** We belonged to the United Church of Christ. And it was again in the 1970s. And what we see as the United Church of Christ in 2012 is different than what you see back then, it was still very, very conservative when it came to LGBT issues. I was only becoming aware of that by the time that I was, you know, seventeen years old. But I was born into this family that—where we talked a lot about God and we went to Church every Sunday. And I was confirmed in the United Church of Christ and I had a lot of different, um, feelings about who I was and how that matched with the religion, but I didn't know really at first that that meant that God didn't—would found me unacceptable to God. Um, I've always believed and I continue to believe in God as the all-knowing, ever-present, all-powerful creator of the Universe, and that has never changed. Everything else I know about God has changed a lot, but that's never changed.



Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

00:15:52

**ALBIN:** So when you were in high school did you date at all?

00:15:55

**MOTT:** I did. I did a little bit here and there. And I was attracted to girls. I was both attracted to girls and also wanted to be one. But, um, I did what I thought I was supposed to do. You know. And I enjoyed it. So, definitely. I dated some. I didn't date a lot. I was not athletic particularly, and not big and not strong and not the kind of guy that the girls swooned over. But I managed to date a little bit and enjoyed it.

00:16:26

**ALBIN:** So after high school, you thought about going into the service, you didn't go into the service, so did you end up going to university?

00:16:36

**MOTT:** I went to the University of Kansas. I graduated—I was seventeen years old in May of '75 when I graduated high school and I did my first semester at KU in the Math Department, with a small math stipend. And um, got through my first semester, I was eighteen—just before I turned eighteen I had completed the first semester at KU, just before I turned eighteen. And did pretty well, got along pretty well. Again by that time I had a car, and I had a little more freedom and I had—you know, I could go places and spend a little more time being able to express myself in different ways as a girl but still not very much, I was still living with my folks and it was made, you know, very difficult like that.

But next semester was pretty good and then the next semester I think is probably when I discovered alcohol and it changed the way I felt. And—actually what it did was it took away what I felt and it took away the shame and it took away the fear. And the fear was a huge part of it by that time because, I mean, for all that time it's like, every single moment you're worried that somebody's going to find out, somebody's going to find out that I think I'm really a girl on the inside and then God only knows what's going to happen. So I live in that fear for every single—and alcohol took it away. And the shame and the—of not being, you know, pleasing in the eyes of God. And the—the shame of not being normal, you know. Everybody, you know, to some degree I think wants to be like they're—like other people and not different, and definitely not different in a way that causes people to think there's something wrong with them. So my scholastic career started going downhill and my alcohol career started going crazy and I spent actually most of the next 30 years of using alcohol and other drugs to hide from my reality.

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

00:18:37

**ALBIN:** So did you end up leaving school?

00:18:41

**MOTT:** I did, and then I came back for a little bit and then I left again. And that was in 1980, I think was the last time that I took any classes at KU. Oh, I got married once for about a year and I got married again, and both times I got divorced. And then I had other relationships after that with women, but they were always—it's the same façade that I was putting forward that I talked about earlier. Everything played on this backdrop of me having to pretend that I was somebody who wasn't me and not being able to be the person I was. And you can't build a relationship with somebody based on a façade like that and have it be successful. And it's the same way that my sisters had clothes that I could borrow when I was a child, my wife had clothes that I could borrow. And—and so, you know, eventually they would find out there was something that was going on with me, and then by that time I was drinking and everything was going downhill and I just couldn't stay in a relationship.

My first wife and I got back together in 1987, and we didn't get married this time but we stayed together for six years and she told me that if I drank that she would leave. And I didn't want her to, and I was very much in love with her, still love her. Um, and so I didn't for almost six years, I didn't have anything to drink. But I also told her that I had to express myself some as a girl. And she already knew that from when we were married that I had stuff going on in the realm of gender identity. But—and everybody who got close to me knew that. Everybody who got even close at all to me knew that there was something going on, but they didn't really know what it was. And so anyway I told her that I needed to do that and she even went and helped me buy some clothes and some make-up and provided some time for me to be alone to be able to express myself and it was the first time that I was ever in any kind of a nurturing atmosphere about being able to be who I was. And—and I started to blossom. And when I started to blossom and I started to—I started to light up in this role of being a girl, but she was quite heterosexual and it just kind of worked our whole relationship. And there were a lot of other things going on, my drinking previously had a lot to do with it and then there was some other stuff going on with my dad and some issues that he had that—we just couldn't stay together. And then—then, in the relationship that I had with my first wife, the second relationship I had with her, we had a child.

And we actually, we bought a house out by Centropolis and I had a job and I got promoted four or five times and things were, you know, because I wasn't drinking things were going really well except for this other thing that was going on with me becoming

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

more like a girl in this atmosphere and her not wanting that to happen. And the stresses that that put on our relationship. But we had a child in 1991 and—you know I cut his umbilical cord and it ranks up there with all the different experiences that I've ever had in my life as being one of the most amazing moments, as it should be in any father's life I think. But at the same time we were drifting apart and—by the time he was four we had split up. And by the time he was five I was drinking again, because I just didn't know what to do. And I'm not making any excuses for my alcoholism. Um. But I didn't have any solutions for the way I felt. And the one solution I had, this woman that I loved who had some acceptance for me the way I was, that was gone and it just seemed like that, I don't know.

Anyway, I turned back to the alcohol and my life started going downhill, crazy downhill again after that. I got into another relationship, it was very honest and open with her, partly because my ex and I were in a custody battle over my son. And this is the first time I ever heard the words gender identity disorder. And my lawyer pulled the DSM, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders, off the shelf in his office, the DSM-3, and opened it up and my lawyer diagnosed me with gender identity disorder right there in his office that day, because I was telling him what I thought he needed to know in order to represent me. And—so that was the first time I had ever heard the words “gender identity disorder.” It was the first time I had ever known that I was—gosh it was 1993, I was—

00:24:25

**ALBIN:** And how did it make you feel having him share these words with you?

00:24:29

**MOTT:** Well I didn't know enough at the time to know that realistically lawyers can't diagnose you with (unintelligible)—

00:24:34

**ALBIN:** Right.

00:24:36

**MOTT:** But it was like, Well, there's a name for it. And this was still pre-internet really, kind of. And it was—there was still no widespread knowledge about being able to look it up like you can today. So there was a certain, you know, relief that it finally had a name. You know. But there was also the recognition that I was—you know, it was going to stand in the way of me being able to even have visitation with my child at some point in time. And actually what they did was—what they did was they sent me to a

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

psychologist to be evaluated and so I'm sitting here looking at this thing, and I'm like, Okay, here I am, I have to—I have to answer these questions in a way that's going to allow me to spend time with my kid. And that's what I did. You know, and I told them exactly what they needed to hear for me to be okay. And I'm fortunate enough to be articulate enough to be able to speak about things, and so that's what I did. I said this and this and this and this and this. And it was everything—Oh, okay, I think you're alright. You can spend some time with your kid. And what didn't happen—what didn't happen was I didn't get any help. I didn't address any of the issues, I was just playing, Oh no, no, it's not like that. I'm just—this is just something that, you know, it's not like I have this inner feeling that I have to do this. It's not like that. And of course it was like that. I had to do that. I had no choice. You know, I had no choice to express myself. It's like telling Mozart not to play the piano.

00:26:20

**ALBIN:** Right.

00:26:20

**MOTT:** You know, and that's exactly what it's like. And it's this thing that's inside of you that's alive, that's beautiful, and you just keep not allowing it to shine at all. But at the time, you know, I told them what they needed to hear. Actually, I ended up having joint custody of my son. Which was pretty cool. But at the same time the other relationship that I got into started going south. And it—and by that time she had a daughter and I'm kind of like thinking to myself, I just can't—I cannot get into a relationship with anybody because I can't do this. You know. And I actually went through a very long, unfortunately still happening, period of abstinence and me be in a romantic or sexual relationship with anybody in 1994. Um, because I was hurting people. And I didn't want to hurt people. You know. And that's one of the thing—sometimes when people talk about transgender people and what we're like, they talk about in the sense of how there's something wrong with us as human beings. And you know what, the thing that mattered was whether or not I hurt people. When it came down to it, it was whether or not I hurt people. And so—I've been isolated.

And, you know, a couple of years later I lost the house and a couple of years later I lost the job. And, you know, things just kept going further and further south, it was really kind of a mess. But I knew—I knew what it was called. And I knew there was a name for it. And then the Internet was starting to take hold in a way that I was actually able to start learning a little bit about it. And um, actually my son's mom looked up some stuff on the internet and printed off a bunch of stuff about transgender and gave it to me. And this was in 1999, Aaron was not quite eight years old. And—and I saw a psychiatrist

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

in Lawrence about the possibility of transitioning. And the psychiatrist seemed as though that what mattered to him was that he got to transition me. Not that he was helping me figure out what I needed to do, but—I felt like from almost the beginning that I was being transitioned by my psychiatrist instead of led to a solution that was—I needed to talk about stuff. I needed to say, How's this going to affect my child? And how's this going to affect my job? And how's this going to affect the people who love me? And, you know, my mom died in 1989 but my dad was still alive and so, how's this going to affect my relationship with him, and all these different things. And it seemed as though that he were dragging me, and I really got the feeling like that I was going to be some kind of a notch on his belt. That he'd never actually had a transgender patient transition before and I was going to be his one. And so I stopped seeing him.

And then I saw another psychologist not too long after that. But I wouldn't tell him what I needed at the time because I was afraid that the same thing was going to happen that happened with the psychiatrist. And that—of course he couldn't do me any good. You know, he's like you need to take anti-depressant. I was kind of like, Okay. You know. I still didn't know. And I still didn't think that I could transition or that it would be okay if I transitioned. And there wasn't really any—there wasn't really any reason for me to think that, I didn't know anybody who was transgender and I still thought, you know, it must be this very rare, very horrible thing that was going on with me. But it just—so, life kind of you know—by that time I was isolating and not spending much time doing anything except drinking and going from place to place and trying to find a way to survive and deal with this—try to be this man that I'm supposed to be but not being able to be that. And really—by that time the weight had got so heavy that it was just really, really hard.

It was really, really hard to carry on. Aaron's mom moved him to New Mexico and, um, the company that I worked for went out of business, and so I decided I'd move to Colorado to be closer to where he was, because I was still able to have some visitation with him in spite of everything that had happened. And I moved into this place in Pueblo, Colorado, in a little hotel apartment. And I'm like thinking, I'm going to start over, okay. I'm just going to get everything together again. I'm going to figure out what I need to figure out and it's going to be okay and I'm not going to drink. And so I'm moving into this little hotel apartment and there's—the lady who's showing me the apartment is the owner of the bar across the street. And there's a liquor store next to the bar. And there's a guy who's stumbling drunk in the parking lot at two o'clock in the afternoon when I am seeing this apartment the first time. And I'm like, Oh this is a good place for me to make a new start. But my alcoholism had taken such a horrible hold on me by then that I really seriously thought it was a good place to make a new start. You know. And of course it didn't work because it was there, it was there for me. You know,

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

I got to go see my son every once in a while, I got to be able to do some things like that, get a job until I had enough money and go on a binge and I'd lose everything and the same thing over and over again.

And by November of 2005 I was homeless. And I called my sisters that live in Lawrence and asked them if I could come back to Kansas and stay with them until I got back on my feet. And for the first time they both said no. They both said no, that they didn't want me to—they didn't want me to not only not come stay at their house but not even come to their house because they were tired of watching me kill myself, they didn't want me around their kids. And I came back to Lawrence for—one of them sent the money to come back and I came back and stayed with some friends for a couple of days while I figured out what I was going to do. And then decided that at the time Lawrence didn't really have a very good homeless shelter situation, it's much better today. But—found out about the Topeka Rescue Mission and found out that the Rescue Mission was hooked up with the Valeo Behavioral Health Care which had a drug and alcohol treatment program and which also had therapists that—so I'm thinking to myself that, well maybe if I go there I can get hooked up and get into alcohol treatment and I can start seeing a therapist.

And—and on November 11th 2005 I called my son and I talked to him and I told him that I was back in Kansas and that I was drinking again and that I had some other issues and that I was homeless and that I was going to get in the Rescue Mission and I was going to try to get into alcohol treatment and I was going to try to get—you know, for about the sixth or seventh time that I told him I was going to do that. And he said okay, okay, okay. And then a half hour later he shot me an e-mail saying he didn't want to be a part of my life anymore. And that was the last time I talked to him, and on November the 12th I enrolled as a guest at Topeka Rescue Mission and started down what turned out to be, you know, it was—it was a horrible, horrible low point of my life but it was the beginning of the upward motion in my life.

And if I were going to describe it in a nutshell it would be that I was finally ready to do what I needed to do to be okay. Which was to figure out how is it that I can begin to live as a woman. And it was, I can't do this living as a man thing, this doesn't work for me, it just doesn't. And I've tried, God knows I've tried. You know, I tried with all my heart and soul really as best I could. And some of it wasn't very good, but—I had come to the understanding that there was no hope for me to be okay and continue to try to live as a man. So I started second or third day at the Rescue Mission I guess, and I was going to the chapel meeting, and of course I was in with the men, nobody knew anything about me being transgender or anything like that. And, um, I started going to go the chapel

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

meetings because there was—the alternative was to sit in the day room with all these men that were—you know, many of them very, very coarse and very—unpleasant. And I’m trying to pick my words carefully here. But it was a difficult place for me to be.

And it was very—so I would go to the chapel meeting because it was better than being in the day room. And I started going to the chapel meetings and like the third day that I was going to the chapel meetings the guy that was running the meeting said, Does anybody want to stand up and accept Jesus as your Savior? And I did. And I stood up there and—and of course I’m still living the same lie that I had always been living but I had been so disconnected from God for such a long time and I had always believed that—of this all-knowing, ever-present power that had created the Universe. And at the same time thinking that this God hates me, who I am. But also, you know, it’s like, I have to do something different here and so I began to get reconnected a little bit with God.

Um. And it was—I started going to a little church that wasn’t too far from the Mission in Topeka. And I met this guy, it was a little Southern Baptist Outreach Church, and an eighty-year-old Southern Baptist minister in the pulpit and only three or four people in the congregation. And they found out I could play the piano so I started—you know, I got involved right away. I was playing the piano for the services. And this particular pastor wasn’t politicking from the pulpit, he was just preaching about God. You know, and he didn’t say anything about anybody lesbian, gay, bi or transgender and so, you know, I was comfortable there and started developing a relationship with him as a pastor, and started getting better. You know, and I’d gotten further and further removed from that last, you know, that last drink and healthier physically and spiritually and emotionally and—and then I was able by January of ’06 to get into the Valeo Treatment Center and get into the resident program. And spent the next twenty-two days I think in Valeo.

And, you know—nobody knew still, you know, about me. But on day twenty-one, I told the nurse that—it’s funny the way I described it. I described it that there was a girl inside my head. And the way I described it, it sounded—because by that time I had a pretty decent understanding of what transgender was. But the way that I described was more like a mental illness than a gender disconnect. You know. And it’s not because I thought that, it’s because I thought that was more socially acceptable. I thought that I would be better off if these people thought I was crazy than if they thought I was a girl on the inside. You know, and so I described it that way, I described it my friends that way, a couple of friends that I had that I stayed with when I first came back to Kansas. And that’s the way I described it my nurse and I described it to the nurse practitioner. And, you know, they’d been telling me that I was going to be—that there wasn’t going to

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

be any openings in the Stepping Stone, which is a men's reintegration facility—it's kind of like a half-way house only it has onsite councilors—for months maybe even and that I was probably going to have to go back to the Mission after I got out of treatment. And then I came out on day twenty-one, it was supposed to be a twenty-eight day treatment program, and I came out on day twenty-one and on day twenty-two all of a sudden they had an opening at this reintegration facility, and I'm kind of like, Oh my God. I've come to understand that that had nothing to do with it, and I've come to understand that Valeo Behavioral Health Care does a very fine job of dealing with people who are transgender.

It just turns out that there was some unexpected openings that came up. But at the time I'm sitting here going, I'm supposed to be here twenty-eight days, on day twenty-one I tell you about me and on day twenty-two you kick me to the curb. You know. And I'm thinking to myself thinking, this is, you know. So I go to this reintegration facility called Stepping Stones, and I met a councilor named Daryl. And, um, he's got a big stack of papers on me and we're having our first meeting, and I'm like, Have you read that yet? And he's like, Yeah, a little bit. And I says, Well, you know about me then? And he says, Oh no. And I say, Well, inside I'm a girl. And he says, Okay. And it was the first time that I had gotten that response from somebody in that—from somebody who had some power, some control, some ability to help me or guide me and it was the first time I had ever gotten that response, Okay. And he says, Well I have a daughter who's gay. And in his mind that was the same sort of thing. But to me to have him say that was like, Okay. You know. And that was the first time that I ever actually had somebody I could talk to about it. Really, really talk to about what was going on on the inside. And you know, he was—he's a dear friend, even to this day, you know.

Um. He saved my life. He saved my life, because I don't know how much longer I could have kept it going and banging into walls without going back and picking up a drink of alcohol. And he—he listened to me and he helped me be able to establish you know, some of the connections that I needed to make in the community. And then he—what he did was he called—I had been trying to get hooked up with a therapist at Valeo and because they deemed that I was neither a threat to myself or anybody else I went down to the bottom of the waiting list and for two consecutive months every single day this man called Valeo and said, Do you have a therapist for Stepha—for Stephen yet? Do you have a therapist for Stephen yet? And every single day for two months they said, No. But right at two months they said, Yeah. And then I got started to see this interim therapist and—not interim, that's not the right word. Um. She wasn't a therapist she was—I can't think of the word, Tami. An intern. She was an intern.



Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

So I was able to see this interning therapist and it was the first time, you know, since all this other stuff happened with the psychiatrist and the psychologist back in 1999 and this was 2006 in April by then. And I don't think she was very comfortable with me, I don't think she had any idea what to do with me. But she asked me to do something that turned out to be another one of the most remarkable things that ever happened to me. Was, she had me draw on a piece of paper a line—a square with lines in the middle so I had four quadrants. And in the top left quadrant it was like, write down everything good that can happen if you transition. And down here it's like, write down everything bad that can happen if you transition. And over here is write down everything good that can happen if don't transition and everything bad that can happen if you don't transition. And I filled out the quadrants and it was clear to me that there was no way I could live as a man and be okay. That I didn't know what was going to happen if I started to transition but there was no way that I could live as a man and be okay. So it really didn't leave a whole lot of other choices, I guess.

And I knew at that point in time that I needed to—I needed to transition. And it's the first time that I knew that I couldn't really live as a man. And I knew that—that it weren't working for me. And I knew that I needed to transition but this was kind of like the first time that I gave myself permission. And said, No, I know you need to but go ahead and do. And I started thinking about how do I go about this process and try and learn more about it. It was really scary 'cos, you know. I was looking and I was trying to find a support group for transgender people in Topeka and I was, by that time I'm google-capable and I'm all over Google trying to find something and there wasn't anything there, there was nothing there.

You know, there's a couple of little churches, the Unitarian Universalist and the Metropolitan Community Church that kept popping up, you know. But it wouldn't—and I was real scared and it was kind of new territory for me and trying to figure out and—but I could never find any place where I could go talk to another transgender person. And—I don't know, I started hanging out with some folks in the LGBT community—LGB community, the T didn't come along until after I got there. But some folks, some lesbian and gay and bi folks. And, you know, we were friends, I'm sure they thought I was a gay man. And then in May I decided it was time for me to tell them about who I was and I said I had Gender issues. And the words came out like that. I couldn't even hardly say gender issues. It's a little bit different today. And one of those girls came up and asked me if I wanted to go out for ice-cream. And another one of the girls came up and started talking to me and asked me what my name was. I'm like, You know my name, it's Stephen. And she's, No, what's your name? And, Oh, yeah, Steph. And I went by Steph for a long time.

And, you know, and these friends of mine, they met me with love. And, you know, I—that very first, very frightened step out into this place where I had absolutely no idea what was going to happen and I was met with love. You know. I hear people talk sometimes about how the LGB community doesn't much understand or care about the transgender part of the LGBT but my experiences have been that—that everybody has been welcoming and loving and supportive and—a few years later I would be baptized as Stephanie and the two women who stood up with me are both lesbians, are both very dear friends of mine. And, you know, that's been my experience with that. But, I just can't imagine, you know, how blessed I am because it could have been a completely different way. And for other transgender people when they come out like that it is in a completely different way.

And you know, again, I'm six months that I hadn't had a drink yet at that point, and you know, I don't know, but instead of getting shot down I got lifted up. And it seemed like one of those girls, the one who asked me my name, a couple months later asked me to go to MCC, Metropolitan Community Church of Topeka, and she said, There's transgender people there. And I'm like, No there's not. And she says, No there is, there's transgender people there. And I'm like, No. And she says, And they have a support group. And like I said, I'd been looking for a support group and I couldn't find one. Okay, I have to go see this thing, and so I went. Actually just over six years ago, July 2nd of 2006. And I went of the first time as Stephen and I met this other transgender girl and she'd transitioned already and she looked like a girl. And—I'm like, No she's not, she's just a regular girl. And she was right there, and I could touch her and talk to her and see her. And you know, everything that I felt from the time I was just, you know, when I heard about Renée Richards and I'm thinking to myself, well I don't have money and I don't have fame and I don't have connections and it's not possible for me to transition. Everything I thought about all that stuff just vanished and for the first time in my life I believed it was possible for me to live as a woman.

And I went back to that same church again the next week. And the pastor did a sermon on Second Corinthians 5:17, which says, Therefore if anyone is in Christ they are a new creature. All things are passed away but all things are become new. And I was so sure that the pastor, Pastor Paul, was preaching at me, saying, It's okay with God for you to transition, give yourself to Christ. And the old, the male, will be passed away and behold, the new, the female, will become new. And that was the most amazing feeling of my life, not only to know that there people who would accept me for who I was, but I found this in the house of God. And again, you know, God has always been this creator of the Universe, mega-cool God thing going on, that—and for the first time in my life I

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

thought, Wow, you know, it's okay with God for me to be who I am. And everything changed.

There's a scene in the movie *Fried Green Tomatoes* where Evelyn Couch is talking to her husband Ed Couch about having Miss Threadgoode come and live with them in their home. And Ed's kind of like, Ain't going to happen. And Evelyn's kind of like, She changed my life. And this goes back and forth for a little bit, and finally Ed says, What's changed? And Evelyn says, The air and the light. And then the movie keeps moving on like that she didn't just say the most profound thing that's ever been spoken in the history of humankind. But she did. But she did. Because what she said was the air and the light have changed, and the air is every breath I take and the light is everything I see. And that's what changed, in that moment for me, in those two Sundays at MCC of Topeka was that, that every breath I will ever take from now on for the rest of my life changed and everything I will ever see from now until the rest of my life changed.

And—you know, it's only gotten better since then, it really has. It's the following Sunday I went back to that little church and said goodbye. The one that I had been going to when—when I got out—when I was living at the Rescue Mission. And told them I found a place where I needed to go, and they all wished me well. And then the following Sunday, the first Sunday, the July 23rd of 2006 that I went to MCC of Topeka as Stephanie. And the girl who invited me to the church took me to the thrift store, the Salvation Army thrift store, and bought me—the Salvation Army, isn't that ironic?—but the Salvation Army thrift store and bought me a dress and a purse and a pair of shoes and some really cool earrings and I stuck 'em behind the seat of my pick-up truck because I was living in a men's half-way house at the time and I couldn't exactly get dressed at the half-way house and drive to the church.

But I drove to the church that Sunday morning and sat out in the parking lot and argued with myself for about fifteen minutes because I thought still, even though I knew I was going to be accepted, I had already seen that, I was still afraid, I was still—you know, a whole lot of unknown stuff here, this is way different territory than I have ever been in any time in my life, this way huge leap of faith. But I'm kind of like, I have to do it. I have to do it because if I don't do it then when am I ever going to, you know. And so I went into the church and went down into the basement and changed clothes in the women's bathroom. Another transgender person guarded the door because we thought that we didn't want any cisgender women, and regular women, coming in. And discovering what looked like completely a man in a dress, you know, changing clothes in their bathroom. And I didn't realize of course that in that church it wouldn't have made any difference because they—they don't necessarily get it, they don't necessarily

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

understand that there's really a woman in here, but what they get is that, that I see myself that way. And that I'm not a harm to them, I'm not a threat to them. And that if we're going to go in the bathroom then we're going to go into the bathroom to use the bathroom and that's what we do.

00:53:26

**ALBIN:** Right.

00:53:26

**MOTT:** And it's not—there never was an issue there but I didn't know that. I didn't know that. But I changed clothes in the bathroom downstairs and then I went upstairs in the parlor and the pastor gave me this great big hug and I got, you know, all this love and hugs and handshakes and greetings and kindness from people. And, you know, it's the kind of love that Jesus talks about in the Bible. It's that, I have love, you look like you can use some, here it is, no strings attached. And that's the kind of love that I found there.

And then I went and I sat down in the pew inside the Sanctuary and I looked up at the cross and I felt truth in self in the eyes of the Lord for the first time in my life. And then they passed round the attendance book and I signed my name Stephanie Mott for the first time. And I don't know about the sermon that day but I know that, you know, the Communion that day, the pastor who attends MCC, who did my Communion that day, served my Communion and then she put her arms on my shoulders and said, God bless your daughter for the faith that she has shown in you, and Stephanie was born. And I haven't looked back. And it's been quite an amazing journey since then.

00:54:46

**ALBIN:** I'm just going to change my tape.  
(Tape change chatting)

00:55:53

**ALBIN:** Okay, so now we're rolling again. So, Stephanie was born.

00:55:57

**MOTT:** Yeah.

00:55:57

**ALBIN:** And so that was in 2006?

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

00:56:00

**MOTT:** This was in July of 2006.

00:56:01

**ALBIN:** July 23rd.

00:56:03

**MOTT:** Mm-hm.

00:56:04

**ALBIN:** Yep.

00:56:06

**MOTT:** Well, you know, I mean, at first it was the only place that I had where I could be me. But it was a place, around people. And it was the first time I ever, ever—that I could, I mean, even when I was together with my ex and she would allow me to express myself, but it was never—it was always just me. So this was the first time ever that I could go be Stephanie. Around people, in the light of day. And what an amazing, you know, thing to be able to experience. But—it was the only place that I could go. And I was kind of like, I need, you know—now what? Now where? How do I go about, you know, becoming Stephanie in other places? Because by that time I already knew I needed to transition, and there wasn't really any way for me not to do that.

And I actually asked the therapist that I had at Valeo, the intern therapist, if I could start coming there as Stephanie and she was very, very uncomfortable with the idea. And it was so clear that she was uncomfortable with the idea that I didn't even pursue it again after that. And that was kind of a bad thing, a kind of setback, not a serious one. But very shortly after that she was—she moved out of state and I got another therapist, this time actually a licensed therapist. And she didn't know anything about transgender, she didn't know anything about what I needed to do. But she knew everything about making a space for me to talk and feel comfortable about talking about what I needed to talk about. You know, and she was—she understood my feelings and my pain and my struggles. And she understood everything like that. And we started talking and I started revealing myself to her and she started learning more about transgender, and I started learning more about transgender. That's the thing that a lot of people don't understand, is that I didn't know anything either. You know, this was all brand new to me as well. But, you know, she just created the space for me to be able to talk about what would happen, and we talked about—we talked about what would happen at work, and how would I go about coming out at work, if I did. And she didn't tell me what I needed to do

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

but she helped me try to figure out what for myself I needed to do. And then at the same time I was, you know, beginning to—in this space, you know, where I got to be me.

And going with the Topeka Transgender Alliance and actually for the first time spending some time around people who were transgender and learning from them about how they did things and what had happened and different stuff. And then, you know, they would—the TTA—would go on little fieldtrips to places like Hair Secrets where we would learn about wigs and breast prostheses because they carried those products for women cancer patients. And to make-up—how to put on make-up and different things like that. And we would—people would talk about this thing and that thing and it was all, you know, it was like that little girl conversation that I never got to have as a child. You know, where you talked about, oh, you know, what clothes do you wear and how do you sit. You know, everything. Everything about being a girl that I never had anybody I could talk to about before. All of a sudden I had people I could talk to. And people in the church were amazing. So even though it was the only place that I could go, I was beginning—I was beginning to learn to live outwardly for the first time in really my life. It was the first time in my life that I'd ever, you know, started to learn how, and I had to learn how to do that. But the more I did it, the more I knew I loved it, you know. And it was an incredible time and ever since I was a kid, every once in a while I've written poetry.

But beginning in May of 2006, it's like the dam burst open and words started flowing like crazy. And I was writing one or two or three poems a day sometimes, just about how I felt and different things that were going on. And that continued to happen for a year and a half. That, you know, very seldom that more than a day or two would go by that I didn't write some kind of poetry or prose about my journey. So I started being able to express that part of myself too, and put words to some of these feelings that I had never actually been able to do that before. And then the therapist that I was seeing said, Oh yeah! when I said I wanted to come as Stephanie. And she said, Oh yeah! Absolutely. And that was just exactly what I needed for her to say. And so I had another place all of a sudden where I could go. And by that time I'd moved into a little house that I still live in, and it's across a street from a school. And, you know, I was worried about that. I was worried about that because I would occasionally be coming out the door as Stephanie and not really looking like a girl, and then most of the time coming out the door as Stephen. But I tried not to, you know, I didn't go outside when the kids were in the school yard and different things like that. And tried to make—be very careful about that. Kept seeing the therapist, joined the Church I guess in October of that year. And I was baptized shortly after that as Stephanie, which was a really cool thing to have happen. It was a great cool thing to have happen. And it's—it was, you know. I don't

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

know. It was like—it's like turning Stephanie over to God for the first time instead of whoever over to God. You know. And saying that I'm going to try to live my life according to the teachings and example of Jesus Christ which is my personal view of what Christianity is and should—is supposed to be, and hasn't got to do with anything else. It—it was like the beginning of my relationship with God as Stephanie.

When I was—I never actually thought about that until just now, about what that really meant to me. I knew it had this huge meaning to me, but I never really thought about that until just now. But it was like that was the beginning of a relationship between me and Jesus and me and God. And—and well, how cool. So I was, you know, it was October by the end of that and I'd been seeing a therapist for six months so I could start hormones.

01:03:31

**ALBIN:** Mm-hm.

01:03:32

**MOTT:** So I made an appointment with a doctor. And I found a doctor because of another transgender person from the TTA, they said go to my doctor. And I called the doctor and I said, I want to make an appointment. They were like, I don't have any appointments—I don't take any new patients. I'm like, I'm transgender. And she took me. And she continues to do that to this day.

01:03:57

**ALBIN:** Wow.

01:03:57

**MOTT:** That the only new patients that she takes on today are transgender people, as far as I know. There may be some exceptions to that. But she understands that, um, that it's hard for transgender people to find a doctor. And that a lot of doctors are not transgender-friendly. And—and, you know, there's no way, they don't put it on their signs, on their shingles. It's not, here I am, Doctor such-and-such and, by the way, transgender people are welcome.

01:04:25

**ALBIN:** Mm-hm.

01:04:26

**MOTT:** They should. They don't have to put it on their shingle, what they should put on their shingle is a rainbow colored triangle, or something like that. That says, Here we are, and we welcome anybody. But, anyway, I found this doctor and made this appointment and had the therapy behind me that qualified me for it. And then, then the appointment got canceled. And I was devastated. And then we made another appointment and even before that appointment happened it got canceled. And then finally I had the appointment and, um, I told her about my therapist and, um, my therapy and talked about what it was going inside of me and how, you know, this is a girl and I have to be who I am and all this history, and my alcoholism. And, you know, by that I'm almost a year without a drink. And—and how much different my life is and found the church and all this support group and, you know, I start lighting up whenever I start talking about being able to be who I am. And she's like, Okay. You know. And so I walked out of there with a prescription for estradiol and—which is estrogen—and spironolactone, which is a testosterone blocker.

01:05:48

**ALBIN:** Mm-hm.

01:05:48

**MOTT:** Doesn't stop the production of testosterone but it stops it from doing its deal. And went to Walgreen's and I gave them the prescription. And I was—you know, I was so excited, it was crazy. And the girl says, Do you want to wait or do you want to come back? And I'm like, I'm gonna wait, excuse me! (laughs) So I waited and a half hour later I had my prescription. So I went out to the car and took my first dose of estrogen before I ever left the parking lot, because I mean, I had waited a lifetime for this. And it was so exciting that this was getting ready to happen. And—then, it takes a couple of weeks for the estragon to build up in your system enough that you can really feel it. And when it happens, it happens pretty, pretty powerfully.

01:06:42

**ALBIN:** Mm-hm. So what happened?

01:06:45

**MOTT::** (Sighs) I was—I was just all of a sudden filled with these, these different feelings, emotions and some of them ones that I knew from before but were way more powerful and some of them were feelings I didn't even know what they were or what they meant or anything, and it was back and forth between different feelings. And, you know, it was just like one second I'd be mad and one second I'd be happy and the next



Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

second I'd be depressed and (phone ringing) the next second I'd be afraid and the next—you know and it was just back and forth and back and forth, all very quickly and very unpredictably. And I'm kind of like, Oh that's what that feels like. (laughs) And—um, you know fortunately for transgender people our hormone levels don't change from one day to the next and—because of the medicines that we take. And so I don't have to go through that, that range—change of emotions that comes with variations in my estrogen levels. Unless I change my medication, which I only had to do a couple of times. But—or unless I have to go without my medication, which I had to do when I had my surgery.

But that first time it was, I mean it was—(sighs). It was beautiful. It was extraordinarily, unimaginably beautiful. But at the same time interesting and revealing. And, you know, that's actually the first time in the series of the different things that have happened where I started to—to realize how little I knew about women as a man. And what it was like to be a woman as a man. And the different—you know, the comments that you hear about women and their cycles and how they are and different things. And I'm like, You guys don't have a clue. Because just a minute ago I didn't have a clue. And, you know, it was the beginning of the unveiling of the mysteries of womanhood at the same time, for me. And not only the mysteries of womanhood but the myths that had been so prevalent in the male-dominant society that we live in.

And—so this was like that first—this was probably my first step towards becoming a feminist. I didn't know at the time. But definitely, I was aware of—that I had a different understanding than I'd ever had before about what it was like to be a woman and how society feels about that. Which was—it was a revelation. It was definitely a revelation about that. But all of those things happened in like a period of hours and, you know, really in that first—when it really hit my system, the presence of the estragon and the lack of the testosterone, doing its thing. And it was—it was amazing. It was absolutely amazing.

01:09:47

**ALBIN:** So did you have a shot or is it a pill form?

01:09:49

**MOTT:** I took a pill.

01:09:50

**ALBIN:** Okay.

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

01:09:51

**MOTT:** There is—you can get a shot. It's, um, generally prescribed for people who have reasons why they can't take the pills. Medical reasons why they can't take the pills, and I don't, didn't have any. Um. It's less expensive.

01:10:06

**ALBIN:** Right. I've had friends who have been taking—who have been on T.

01:10:10

**MOTT:** Now, a lot of times that's a shot. That's a shot. And they do have a gel for the testosterone for the male—the female to male transsexual. Um, but it's not as powerful and doesn't work as quickly—

01:10:27

**ALBIN:** Right.

01:10:28

**MOTT:** —as the shot. So for them, if they can take the shot then that's—

01:10:32

**ALBIN:** Right.

01:10:32

**MOTT:** That's what they're going to want to do, definitely. But um, oh my God, what a journey that began, you know, with the hormones and then—the, you know, oh a couple of weeks later I guess I started feeling this tenderness in my breast area that I'd never felt before. And it was quite tender. You know. And I had some of my female friends were telling me, you know you could probably get them to do something about that. And I'm kind of like, Well why would I want to do that, this is awesome! You know, because it was this (sighs) amazing thing that was happening to me and—and, um, you know—a little bit at a time changes started happening in the way that, that a transgender person appears with the male-to-female is the skin starts to get a little bit softer. And the um, breast growth and mostly the other thing is redistribution of body fat. Which basically means that my belly's no longer up here but it's a little bit lower. Some of that was supposed to come to my breasts and some to my hips, and a little bit in the ass I guess. But really those are the three things that change. Nothing changes with respect to body—you know bone structure, or anything like that. And the voice doesn't change for male-to-female. And um, facial hair really doesn't change, maybe a little bit lighter

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

but doesn't really change. And—but there is a little lightening of hair on the arms and the legs.

But I was, you know, looking in the mirror like a little girl waiting to see my breasts grow and a little at a time starting to see some changes and feel, you know, all those changes and then one day I was driving down 21st Street in Topeka and I hit a pothole, and I got a little jiggle in my right breast. And, Oh my God! It was the most—the first thing I thought was, Where's another pothole? I want to feel this again. But it was, you know, it's just little things like that, slow, little tiny changes that you start noticing that at first you don't notice and—and then you know, when you go out you go out in public and people are not doing a double take any more. You know, at first there's—they'll do, it's a double take. It's that they'll see you and then they'll stop and they'll look at you again. I was like, What? You know.

And early on when I was first—before I first started my transition I would go out in public after church with people from the church, and we would go to a restaurant for lunch. And sometimes people would get up and move from their table because they didn't want to sit next to me. And, you know, and then sometimes, you know, the servers, the people who worked at the restaurant wouldn't be savvy and sometimes they wouldn't—you know, I don't think it was a question of kindness or unkindness, I think it was a question of—of knowing how to deal, how to respond in situations like that. But slowly more and more often it was ma'am and then—and people were starting to—I could tell that people were seeing, more so like I was seeing at first.

And then I had to work on my voice, and oh my God I had to work on my voice. You know, over and over and over again, because the voice doesn't change. And, you know, people are like, Well men talk like this, and people were giving you advice about how women talk, and talking different stuff like that. And there is a difference between how men talked and how women talked and a difference between how men used their hands when they talked and what women do. And all these different differences that I'm starting to try to pick up on. And figure out, okay, exactly how am I supposed to do this? I sat in front of the television and watched the six o'clock news, and when the lady spoke I would say the same thing she said, using the same inflection that she said, that she used. Because what the real difference is in my voice, is I just talk in the upper part of my voice range. But the difference is that men have a tendency to talk in the same tone all the time, it's pretty monotone. But women are all over the place, and I had to learn how to be all over the place.

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

And as soon as I started doing that people started seeing my voice, hearing my voice as female, even though it wasn't that high. And it took me a while to learn how to do that, because I remember I was starting to look like a girl and I went to the movies and the—and walked up and they asked me what I wanted and I'm, I want some popcorn (monotone voice). You know, and it was—and he looked up at me, like that, and it didn't make any sense to me. But—but it got better. You know. And I made a decision not to get a voice coach partly because of money, partly because I knew from the beginning that I was going to try to save up money for surgery. And everything else that you spend money on is money that you don't have for surgery. And you have to be, you know if you're going to get there you're going to have it—it's going to take a long time and it's—you know, gonna have to go without in some places in order to be able to do that. And, um, I knew that, somehow I already knew that someday I would have the surgery. But I made this decision not to try to get a voice coach and not to try to force my voice into being different. And I don't know exactly why, because I've seen a lot of trans people who are like, all over the tapes and voice courses and practicing and using the—you know, their voices in different ways that are not natural. And no, I don't want it to be not natural, I want it to be natural and I want to let it develop on its own, and that's the choice that I made.

And you know, now it's been a while so I don't have to think about it anymore, I just talk. And I don't have to think about where I put my hands any more, I don't have to think about how I sit anymore, I don't have to think about how I walk anymore. But for a long time, it was every single thing that you do, you have to think about it. And it's really hard for it to be natural when you're thinking about it and doing it at the same time. It's really—it's really hard not to stand out during those particular times. But the discovery is—is miraculous. You know. And I guess I'm one of those people who, where I was taught as a child that—the value of learning and how to learn. You know, and I went—you know, the discovery has just been incredible.

The discovery of myself, and the discovery of my womanhood and the discovery of other people, the psychology of how people react to me and how—and what works and what doesn't work and what's important and what's not important and how people react and how they don't react and what they see and what they don't see and what they think and what they don't think. All those things. And, you know, it's like being on this amazing psychology journey, of not just my own psychology but humanity's psychology at the same time. So all of this has been thrilling to me, because it's been this endless learning experience about how do I say this, how do I do that, you know. And how do people react to this and what's important. And as that evolves, one door—you know, it seems like I get an understanding of something else, something else opens itself up

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

completely to me getting a whole new understanding again. And it was really cool. You know, it's been that way with my discovery of my feminism. And it's been that way with so many different things. That—it's all, you know, today it's like when I go talk, it's about understanding that the words that I choose in my journey and my story make a difference in the imagery that people take away. Because it'll be the imagery that they remember, and not the—not the feelings and the thoughts. And I know I'm getting way of track here, but—

01:19:17

**ALBIN:** No.

01:19:17

**MOTT:** —but, so when I tell my story—I didn't do it when I was talking just a little bit ago, but when I tell my story today, when I start talking about the bathroom in the church and I'm like, Okay, I didn't want the women to walk in and find this—what looked like a man changing clothes in their bathroom. And it turns out that in that church it wouldn't have mattered anyway because the cisgender women and the transgender women all go in the bathroom and mix and everything. And so, we all go to the bathroom for the same reason, which is to fix our hair. And what I learned was that I just created a different image in somebody's mind about a transgender person in the bathroom. And that's what I mean about this never-ending discovery of—of the journey and how people react to the words that I choose.

And of all the different images that stand in the way of transgender equality, the image of transgender people in the bathroom is the most powerful. You know. And people use that horribly against us, and if I can create the image of me, a transgender woman in there fixing my hair, to replace that, then that's pretty powerful stuff. So all of that stuff started unfolding, you know, at the same time. And I was just beginning to—to learn a little bit about who I was as a woman. And what these feelings were that were either brand new or far more powerful than they'd ever been. And—and tears. And trying to figure out, What am I going to do about tears? You know, because I had spent a lifetime fighting them back. You know, I can't—I'm not allowed to cry. I didn't know. I thought that, you know, women were allowed to cry and men were not, girls were allowed to cry and men were—and boys were not. But, you know, I've learnt over time that that's not really true.

But at the time that's the way I saw things and I'm kind of like—you know, I've spent all my lifetime holding back my tears. Because if I cried it was, it was—it was an invitation for somebody to try to stick my head in a toilet when I was in school. You know. If I

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

cried, it was seen as weakness and—and you know, advancing in your career, you can't—you can't be that way. You have to—you know. And almost never do you get to be that way. But—but, um, all of a sudden, you know, they were different, the tears were different. Because they weren't quite so taboo anymore. And at least in my own mind they weren't quite so taboo anymore. And—but I had to learn how to cry. I had to learn how to cry because I'd spent a lifetime not crying. I'd spent a lifetime not crying and I had to learn how to do that again. And that took some time, and even still today it's not, you know, it's not the—not the easiest thing in the world. But sometimes they just come, you know.

01:22:21

**ALBIN:** Yeah.

01:22:21

**MOTT:** And sometimes I have no idea why I'm crying, I just cry. You know. And sometimes I know exactly why I'm crying. And—but, um—but then I've come to understand that there's a health issue for me if I don't cry from time to time. You know. And I've actually come to this place in my journey where I understand that I'll be feeling a particular way and I'll just look at my mom or somebody and I will say, I need to go cry. I just need to go cry. I just need to cry. And then I'll feel better—I'll feel different about it.

01:22:57

**ALBIN:** Yeah.

01:22:57

**MOTT:** You know. So, I mean yeah, all of that stuff is just brand new. And it's—it's trial and error for the most part. There aren't, you know, a lot of different things that you see from other transgender people that didn't really fit well for me, and, um, for instance I decided early on that I wasn't going to use any breast prostheses. And my thought was—and it's not that there's anything wrong with that for anybody—but my thought for me was that I've waited a lifetime to be who I am, why would I want to start being somebody else that I'm not right now? You know. And so I made that decision. And I—you know, made the decision that I would try to dress in an age-appropriate fashion, or at least kind of in an age-appropriate fashion for—and it served me well. It served me very well. But there were some little decisions like that that I made, that I had no idea how important they were going to be and how well they would serve me once I did that.

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

01:24:09

**ALBIN:** So you were working during all of this time? And so how were you negotiating—I mean you talked about leaving the house sometimes as Stephen and sometimes—

01:24:22

**MOTT:** Right.

01:24:22

**ALBIN:** —as Stephanie. So, when you went to work were you Stephen?

01:24:26

**MOTT:** Yeah. For a very long time actually. I had a year on the job in May of '07. And, um, it seemed like it was time, you know, by that time I was—a lot of my friends knew and it was—it just seemed like it was time to come out on the job and, um, of course I did my research. Before I ever went to the work for the company that I wanted to work for, I checked through their EOC<sup>1</sup> policy and found out that they had sexual orientation in it. Obviously I wasn't expecting to find gender identity but I found out before I ever went to work for them that they at least had that.

And it was, um, I had this really cool supervisor and she—she was just really nice and one of those people that you could talk to. So when the time came—as a matter of fact I was planning, I had surgery scheduled on my hip, I had both my hips replaced because I have avascular necrosis, which is loss of blood supply to the—loss of blood supply to the upper leg bones. So my hip joints were degenerating. And I had one scheduled for replacement in June of 2007 and I thought to myself that I would wait 'til after that surgery before I came out on the job, because, just in case.

01:25:51

**ALBIN:** Yeah.

01:25:51

**MOTT:** Just in case that I lost my job, I would have my surgery. But that one day in May I woke up and it was just the right day, I just knew this is the day I'm going to do this. And so I went in that day and I told my supervisor that I needed to talk to her and that I wanted to tell her about something that was going to affect my life. And after a little bit she made some time and space for us to have a conversation and I sit there and I laid it all out on the table, you know, for her. Everything about my alcoholism, about

---

<sup>1</sup> Equal Opportunity and Compliance.

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

my, um, needing to be who I am. And that's the way I presented it and this is one of those decisions I made that has worked well for me. I didn't go in there and say, This is who I am and here it is, too bad. I went in there and I said, I want to continue to work here, I have to transition to be okay, but I want to continue to work here and I want to talk to you about how can we do that in a way that's the least invasive for the company and the for the people I work with.

And it served me very well. Um. She said—all this worry when you said you needed to talk about something that you were going to leave, that you were going to find another job. You know, and then a couple of days later when she and I passed in the hallway and there wasn't anybody else around, she called me Stephanie. She did. And I talked to the HR director, the same thing, told her the same thing—how can we do this so that it works well for everybody, as best as it can for everybody? And she was like, um, We'll figure it out. And I didn't really know at the time—I knew that the company was headquartered in New Jersey but I didn't really understand because I didn't have the knowledge of the political side of it and the rights side of it, civil rights side of it at the time to understand what that meant. Because the company was headquartered in New Jersey where the RA had legal protections against trans—for discrimination against transgender people. The corporate policy therefore reflected the same thing.

01:28:03

**ALBIN:** Right.

01:28:04

**MOTT:** And so it really wasn't an issue with that. Um. The bathroom was really the only issue. And the company already had a unisex bathroom and apparently the company had already had a transgender work there before, that didn't work there still when I was there. But—so they had a unisex bathroom and I was assigned to that bathroom, This is your bathroom, you use this you, you don't use any other bathrooms. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. You know, and then they said, Okay you're going to go off for hip surgery, so while you're gone we're going to have a conversation with everybody who works here and we're going to tell them you're going to come back as Steph. You'll be presenting as a girl, it's not work-related, don't talk about it. And I'm kind of like, Okay, that's fine. You know, That's fine. I'll use this bathroom, tell them that, that's all good, that's all perfect. And of course I had no idea and they had no idea how messed up that really was.

But, you know, at first, you know, I went back to work after my surgery and I had, you know, some people who stopped talking to me. And I had other people who started



Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

talking to me, who'd never talked to me before. So, you know, from that standpoint I think it was probably a wash. But I had people coming up to me and going, Well we're not supposed to talk about this but, and then they would say, I think you're courageous. Or they would say, I'm glad you found yourself. Or they would say something like that. But it was always prefaced by this, I'm not supposed to talk about it.

And then it took a long time for people to get the pronouns right. At first I was getting he-d a lot. And again I made a decision that I was not going to take that personally. And you know, give them some time and wait for some stuff to happen and time went by and there were some people who were still struggling with it. And I put a note up on my computer monitor where I—that says that, My name is Stephanie, my pronoun is she. And I didn't do anything else, I just put that up there and it seemed to go away. I don't know if somebody, you know, somebody said something to the people who were struggling with it, but—but you know what really is important to me to—to make an understanding of the difference between someone who makes an honest mistake and somebody who is malicious about it. And if somebody's not malicious it hurts, don't take me wrong, it hurts, but I can't—I can't take it personally if it's just an honest mistake. And I don't get he-d much anymore but every once in a while I do and, of course, then I get off track again here but I usually get back on track. You know, I would always get he'd at the Sonic. You know, I'd go order my Route 44 lemonade during happy hour and they'd come back, Thank you sir. You know, and then they'd come out to the car with it and they'd get this funny look on their faces like, Okay. Because I didn't look like—I was looking like a girl by then but, um, but I didn't sound like a girl on the microphone.

And eventually it changed. You know. And I learnt enough. And that was one of the most—and I never get he'd on the microphone anymore. They still—they hear a girl. I don't know why they hear a girl, they do, and I'm real happy about that. But, um, but anyway, back to on the job. It got better, nobody was mean to me. There were people who—and there are people where I work today that know about who I am and you know, you'll come around the corner and they'll have a smile on their face and they'll make eye contact with you and the smile will (clap) it's gone. And it's replaced by this mean look, frown kind of a thing going on. And it's kind of like, Okay, you know, was that really necessary? But I try not to let it bother me. But that happened, you know, fairly regularly with a few of the people. Um, my supervisor was awesome. My supervisor's supervisor was awesome, my supervisor's supervisor's supervisor, the manager of the—he was, um, he was not. He didn't—he clearly didn't like who I was. And even when at one point (unintelligible) he and I were working opposite directions to a crosswalk in downtown Topeka and he bailed out of the crosswalk to—and the way I took it was so he

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

didn't have to walk beside me. Um. It was very clear to me. There was never any doubt in my mind that he probably would have terminated me on the spot if he'd have known—if he'd have had abilities to do so. But he didn't and he couldn't and—but then the other thing was the bathroom.

And there was, you know, there was only one stall, it's the unisex bathroom and it's got a lock on the door and you can only get in there if nobody else is in there. And there were some guys that figured that out, that if they went in there and spent a long time, that I couldn't get in there. And they wouldn't, they would—actually I would sometimes be standing out there for fifteen or twenty minutes. And this is fifteen or twenty minutes of time that was cutting away at my incentive pay because we were getting paid by how many clips of the electronic articles that we could cut out from newspapers and magazines for our clients. And so it was cutting into my incentive pay to have to stand there and finally, you know, one day I just—I'd had enough and I marched back into the clipping room where we worked and announced to my supervisor that something needed to change, I needed to be able to do something like this. And they got me in the HR office and I was pretty fired up. And, um, and the HR manager, this is what she said to me, at one point in this conversation was, Have some patience with us, this is the first time we've ever gone through this. And I'm like, Do you think I've gone through this more than—this is the first time I've ever gone through this. You know. And that was one of those understandings. All of a sudden I didn't realize she didn't realize that I had no idea what I was doing. That I was feeling my way through it just the same way that they were. And so it was another one of those, Oh my God. You know, it caused me to start thinking about things a little bit differently.

But then they started letting me use one of the three women's bathrooms as their solution, which was—and I told them it was temporarily tolerable, was my response to that. That—because, what it does is it puts the impetus on somebody else to, if you don't like being in the bathroom with her, go use a different bathroom. Instead of putting the impetus on me to—which is good. What it doesn't do is it doesn't identify me as a woman. And so it's better, but it's still bad. And—but it is at least—temporarily it's a workable solution that I've actually—in a Kansas high school, where I was asked about advice with how to deal with a situation like that, I said now this is a temporary solution, but I've actually used that and said, Tell them that they can use one of the better bathrooms and if somebody doesn't like being in the bathroom with them, they can go find a different bathroom to use. And it's better, it's still not right. It's better. I don't know, um, but, you know, they were—it was cool to see which women continued to use the bathroom that I was allowed to use and which ones didn't. And of course I was very appreciative of the ones who were courageous enough, or who were open-minded

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

enough to share a bathroom with me. You know, it had separate stalls, it's not like anybody, you know, could see my business. But that was cool.

Gosh, about a year later I got laid off, along with half the workforce. And I'm totally convinced that it had nothing to do with the fact that I was transgender. Might have been helpful if I hadn't spend so much time standing in the hallway waiting on the bathroom because what they did make the decision based on was our number of clips per hour and mine was not high enough. Which, um—but I think it probably still would have been that way. So I don't really think it had anything to do with me being transgender.

01:37:03

**ALBIN:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm. How did your family react?

01:37:08

**MOTT:** Oh, well. You know—and here again is one of those decisions that I'm glad I made it that way. I involved my sisters, and my brothers were both gone, they were both gone, and my parents were both gone before I—before I transitioned. Everybody who got close to me knew I had something going on with gender, but, um. My—I involved my sisters in the decision for me to transition instead of making it and saying, I'm going to do this. I went to each of them and said, I'm thinking about doing this and I want to hear—I want your input. And it gives them buy-in. And it was a good choice for me to be able to do that. You know, one of my sisters said, It's about time. And the other one said, What about Aaron, what about your son? And I'm like, You know, I can't be a parent to Aaron if I'm not okay. And I can't be okay if I'm trying to live as a guy, I just can't do it, it's pretty obvious that I can't do that. But, um, you know, they had to go through a process of losing their brother. And it's not at all unlike the process of having somebody you know die. And where, you know, they spent almost 50 years with this brother in their life, and he's gone. He's not there anymore. And so there's a grieving period that has to take place. There has to be that loss of the brother before there can be the acceptance of the sister. And so it took some time, but it happened. It happened.

And, you know, when my mom was alive and I would call her after every KU basketball game and we would talk, that was our talk time, you know, during basketball season, we would talk about the game and then we would talk. And then after mom dying I would call my sister Nancy after every game. And so after I started, you know, my transition I would call her after every KU basketball game, and they play a lot of basketball, and we would talk. And it just kind of kept that tradition going. And it was—today, you know, I

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

call her and talk to her and she's always the same way. And we'll talk for hours, and we talk about everything under the sun. Our families and our work and the weather and our lives and our dreams and our goals and men and whatever. And, you know, it's just like sisters, it's just like three sisters today. Now, they are not really a part of my day-to-day life but they hadn't been really a part of my day-to-day life in a long time. And so I don't think that has anything to do with me being transgender, it has to do with how busy everybody is—

01:40:04

**ALBIN:** Right.

01:40:05

**MOTT:** —and that kind of stuff. But it took some time. Both my brothers were gone and both of their wives struggle, I think, with who I am. One, she just doesn't talk to me, so there's not really—even if we've been in the same place for a family function, there's some very tense hello, how are you, kind of stuff. But not much going on there. My other sister-in-law was very outspoken about that she thought I was making a horrible mistake that I was going to be very unhappy with me. And, um, I'm like, Okay. You know, believe that, that's fine. And I don't have any problem with that. I'm still going to do what I need to do to be okay. And I did with each of my sisters and sisters-in-law, I said I'm going to leave it to you about what you tell the kids about. Some of the kids were still, you know, pre-teen even at that time, or barely pre-teen even at that time. And—but I said, I will come and help you, but I can't make that decision for you about what you're going to tell them, that needs to be yours, and so you tell them what you want to tell them. And I remember going, and this was just before I started my transition, going out to my sister-in-law's little farm west of Topeka and going out there and sitting there at my niece's, youngest niece's, graduation, and thinking to myself, that would be the last time that they ever see Stephen.

Because I knew it was that point in my transition that it was time for me to start—you know, that I was getting close to going full-time. And, um, I didn't know for sure how that was going to go. Because I knew, you know, even then I knew it was going to be a problem for her. But when I started my transition I came out to her and everything, I had just got through describing, and so she—you know, she was pretty clear that she didn't care for this stuff. And a few years went by and I got a—I got a card in the mail from—to Steve Mott from my niece, inviting me to her—hi!—inviting me to her wedding. And, um.

01:42:44

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

**ALBIN:** (Calling Sherrie re cat)

01:43:14

**ALBIN:** Okay, so I apologize for the cat interruption.

01:43:17

**MOTT:** Okay.

01:43:20

**ALBIN:** So you got an e-mail—you got a note from your niece.

01:43:24

**MOTT:** Right, I got a card in the mail addressed to Stephen Mott, from my niece inviting me to her wedding. And so—there's no way I'm going to go as Stephen, I can't, you know, I just can't. And I thought about it and it didn't take very long for me to understand that I just can't do that. You know. And, um, but I don't know what she knows, I don't know if she knows about me or not because I don't know what her mom told her. So, I'm kind of praying about it and thinking about what am I going to do, and finally it occurs to me that I should write a letter to her mom and say, Hey, you know I don't know how to respond to this because I don't know what you've told them and I don't know if they know about me or not. But, you know, Stephen can't—Stephen isn't and really never was. And I want to come, I want to be there, but I can't come unless it's as Stephanie. And, um, I waited and I waited and I waited and I waited and finally it's getting up fairly close to the wedding and I was like, Well okay, and she—I got a letter in the mail addressed to S Mott from my sister-in-law. And she still to this day sends me letters and cards from time to time addressed to S Mott. But, um, in the letter she said that she had showed my letter to each of the kids and, um, that they wanted me to come. And so then I could call my niece. So then I called my niece and I said that, um, I want to come, you know I want—if you want me to be there I want to be there. And she says, Yes, I want you to be there. And so I went. And, um, you know—my sisters-in-law still continue to be fearful for me and the choice that I've made, um, 'cos I think really it is—it's based in love and of their ability to love and—

01:45:35

(Cat interference)

01:45:47

**MOTT:** I think it's based in love and their ability to understand and their ability to love. And not, you know, it's not spiteful, it's just what they believe. But little by little my

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

nieces and my nephews are coming back into my life. And that's a good thing, I'm really glad. You know. We'll see, you know, what happens. But—but I can't allow that to be a part of what I do as far as being—taking care of myself, I have to do what I have to do to be okay at this point in my life, I don't swerve from that very far for very long because I have to be okay, if I'm not okay then I can't be anything to anybody. I have to—I have to be Stephanie in order to be okay.

01:46:38

**ALBIN:** Mm-hm. So you were laid off from your—from your one position—Casey? What is it with these cats? It's the thunder isn't it, it's scaring you—so you were laid off from this position where you were doing the electronic clipping. And, um, so then—so did you get another job after that or—

01:47:06

**MOTT:** Yeah, it took some time. Um, I was laid off in February of 2009. And I actually went back to school in May of 2009 at the University of Phoenix Online, because I decided I wanted to learn some different skills. And I'd worked most of my life, my jobs had been in manufacturing and I'm very capable, I have some very good mechanical skills but I didn't really feel like that's what I wanted to pursue as far as my—as far as my career from that point forward. So I enrolled at the University of Phoenix Online in their human services management program, and, um, then continued to look for a job. But I was trying to find a—I wanted to find a job that I was going to—it was going to be a good job. And I was actually only applying for particular jobs that were, were jobs that—not good in the sense that they paid well but good in the sense that they had, you know, I don't know, I applied for a job with the Chamber of Commerce and I applied for a job with the Easter Seals Foundation, the Kappa Easter Seals and I applied, I was applying for—

01:48:22

(Cat interference)

01:48:34

**MOTT:** I was applying—I was applying for those kinds of jobs. And I applied for a job in the—with Shawnee County as a patient services specialist in the health agency. And actually I had an interview but I didn't get hired for that job because they were—gave preference to somebody who was Spanish, could also speak Spanish. And, um, and I applied for another job in the emergency communications center, the dispatch. 'Cos I thought, Well that would be kind of cool, you know, different kind of, you know, thing like that. And at the same time I applied for that the lady in the HR office sat at the County

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

said, Now pay attention, there's going to be an office assistant opening coming up in the next week or so, so pay attention and watch for that. And so I saw it when it came up and I applied for that. I did some testing for the communications center and did well on my testing, but when I was at first not hired for the job at the County, and they hired somebody else, but the person that they hired decided they didn't want the job. And so then I ended up getting into another round of interviews and I got the—at that point in time I got the job. It's kind of interesting, because one of the things that I'm sure—I know, because I've been told, helped me get that job, was I presented—I had to have a certain amount of experience as an office assistant, and I'd never worked as an office assistant. But I'd been the outreach ministry coordinator for the church. And so I took a portfolio of all the different—the brochure, and the fliers and the spreadsheets and things that I had had done, and well I did that, and I used my experience as an unpaid office assistant—a outreach coordinator for the church as my office assistant. And she said—my boss later told me that I was the only one who brought a portfolio, so it turned out to be a good thing.

But, you know, when I first started looking for a job I was—I was thinking to myself that, Okay, here I am, I'm looking like Stephanie, my name's still Stephen, what am I going to do? And my original approach was just, I actually put on my cover letter that I was transgender. Because I'm like, Okay, if they're not going to hire me, they're not going to hire me. If they're not gonna, you know, get it out the way, it's going to come up, there's nothing I can do about it. And then I have a friend here in Lawrence who is a personnel manager and he's like, What are you doing? And I'm like—he said, Well focus on your qualifications. And I'm like, Yeah, okay, I know but—and he's like, No, just cross that bridge when you come to it. So I actually went to the Workforce Center in Topeka, and took some tests and started working with them towards finding a job and I got a job counselor there and after I was talking to her about what I was doing, and she was like, No, she said, Put Stephanie, apply as Stephanie, even though that's not what your—not what your license says. Because that's who you are, and don't complicate things. And she helped me rework my resume and then, you know, not too long after that that I got my job. At first it was, you know, a series of—nobody would ever return my—you know I never got any calls for interviews and even then there were a lot of people looking for jobs.

But—but I didn't know how to handle it and I didn't know what was the right way to do this. And it's kind of like, well I don't want to go through the thing of actually getting hired and then have them find out that I'm transgender and then not get hired because there's no protections for transgender people pretty much anywhere in Kansas, with very few exceptions. And, um, at the time there wasn't any. And, um, but it was just not

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

functional as far as people, you know, are kind of like—I needed to be talking to them about the fact that, you know, I can type sixty-five words a minute and I needed to be able to talk about things like that instead of talking about—my leads just needed to be something different. And once I started doing that then, you know, I got a job pretty quickly after that. Um.

01:53:16

**ALBIN:** I'm just going to change the tape quick.

01:53:18

(Tape change chatting)

01:54:09

**ALBIN:** So, um, so you got your job fairly quickly, and so if you applied as Stephanie and your driver's license still said Stephen, how did you—because don't you have to show ID when you—

01:54:26

**MOTT:** I did.

01:54:25

**ALBIN:** When you get a job? Yeah.

01:54:26

**MOTT:** I did. And—you know, so I didn't have to show it until I went in for orientation, that was the day I had to show it. And by that time I'd actually set up a time for me to get my name changed. And I started on August the 17th of 2009 and my name change court date was August the 27th of 2009, ten days later. And, um, you know, I walked in and prepared for whatever, you know, whatever's going to happen here is going to happen. And I thought it was kind of cool that the way it worked out, that they tried to hire this guy—'cos I'm always analyzing everything and trying to figure out is this good or is this bad or what? And then they tried to hire this guy and then he didn't get it and now they're in the process where that they, you know, they've hired me and I don't know that they want to go back to the whole process again, maybe this is a good thing, I don't know.

You know, the way it worked out but, um, I went in to the HR department, um, that morning and gave them my driver's license. Now when I filled out my application and it's got the little line on it that says, Have you ever used another name? I put Stephen



Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

on my application because can't lie on your application because I want to be honest about it. And—but I don't know if they never read or what but I handed her my driver's license and my social security card and she looks at it and I said I'm going to get my name changed in 10 days. And she said, Okay. And it was just, you know, it turns out that she was just—I was—she was just the right person for me, you know, to be the one that—it might have been a—you know, um, somebody else, you know, a different company, it probably wouldn't have worked out that way or might not have worked out that way and a lot of times does not work out that way.

01:56:20

**ALBIN:** Mm-hm.

01:56:21

**MOTT:** For transgender people. But she was just like, Okay. And, I'm like, Cool. And then of course payroll had to know because they—they needed, you know, to do my paychecks. And I'm kind of like, Well, you know we get paid every two weeks and I'm going to get my name changed in ten days and they're like, Okay cool, we'll just, we'll send it to—set it up so it's Stephanie. So it was Stephanie from the get-go in my payroll and in my file it just says Stephanie. There's no—there's no—everything was done under Stephanie, all the paperwork was done under Stephanie. And it's like, I can't hardly believe this is happening and I think that, you know, you could have gone to a hundred different places and maybe that would have happened eight times or nine times or something like that. But it happened, you know, it just did. And then I—then of course the next one was my supervisor and, um, I went in to the office after orientation and I told her I needed to have an hour off, day off, a week from Thursday so I could go upstairs to walk in the courthouse and get my name changed. And—and she's like, Okay. And then came back a little bit later wanting to know why. And so I told her what was going on. And she was like, Okay. You know.

01:57:46

**ALBIN:** So did that surprise you, that—because, you know—

01:57:50

**MOTT:** Yeah.

01:57:51

**ALBIN:** We're in Kansas and people are always making comments about Kansas and, you know.

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

01:57:56

**MOTT:** It still surprises me.

01:57:58

**ALBIN:** Yeah.

01:57:59

**MOTT:** You know. And I know that these people today are just very nice people. And, you know, and they weren't worried about that. And of course, I'm the office assistant in the Shawnee County Commission office. And I work for the heads of the government in Shawnee County and—and, um, I'm not exactly sure who told them, but I'm aware that they got told pretty quickly that I was transgender. And none of them had anything to say about it, none of them ever treated me with anything except kindness. And, um, I'm—I didn't know this when I applied for that job but at the time they were two democrats and an independent in the Commission offices. And it could have, you know, it could have worked in—could have walked into almost any other Commission office in Kansas and found a different attitude about LGBT than what I found in this particular one.

But—it was just never an issue for them. It was just never an issue for them. And then, I don't think anybody knew, I don't think anybody else knew for a long time. Um. The treasurer—I was downstairs standing in a line trying to get my tags renewed and he saw me in the line and he was like, Here just give this to me and I'll take care of it for you. And, um, I said, Well it's a little more complicated than that because I was getting my registration updated from changing my name. And my—'cos my last name ends with, or starts with M, it was August, and it was August anyway so I waited 'til after I got my name changed to get my tag renewed. So I had just a few day window there that I needed to get it done. And—and I said, I don't think you're going to—it's a little more complicated than that. And he said, Here, let me see. So I showed him the copy of my name change order and my stuff and he hands it back to me and goes, Okay. You know, I needed to go through the process. And he has never been—he's been very kind to me and just never had an issue with it at all. But I think for the most part people didn't know. You know. And I wasn't real poli—really politically active yet. And—although I was doing presentations already by then. And was still pretty young in that—in that aspect, in 2009. I had a presentation—I started on August 17th and I had a presentation on the 18th, where I was going to Manhattan to talk to the PFLAG. And I was telling my boss about this during that conversation where I came out to her and I started to say I'm going to go to give a talk in Manhattan to the PFLAG and then I

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

started to say, Parents and Friends—and she finished it, Of Lesbians and Gays. And I think to myself, She knows what PFLAG stands for, this is—this is a very good sign.

02:01:09

**ALBIN:** Yeah.

02:01:10

**MOTT::** Now I don't know why, you know, and—it turns out that she had a family member who was questioning for a while and she apparently did what she should have done, which is learn more about it at the time. And so she's never—she's become one of my, one of my best advocates, you know, in the last almost three years since that I started working there. And, um, people got to know me as Stephanie and almost nobody knew that I was Trans. And it was just never was a—an issue. But then in December of 2010, I'd gone to the Topeka Capital-Journal and asked them to write a feature story about me and they did, and so I'm—huge article, all about me.

02:02:03

**ALBIN:** Mm-hm, I remember.

02:02:04

**MOTT::** And all of these people, the thousand people who work for the County, you know not all of them—not all of them read the newspaper but in a heartbeat all these people went from not knowing I was trans to knowing I was trans. And I was just amazed by the support that I was given by these people that—almost across the board, you know. And from the people who come in my office who do business with me, nobody's ever treated me with anything but respect and kindness and you know, quite frankly, they're more worried about what kind of an office assistant I am than, than whether or not I'm transgender. One of the guys that headed the Expo Center, he came in and he said, Well you're still the same person who's been kind to me. And that was what he said, that's all he had to say, you know. And some of them have, you know, actually started talking to me and one of them, the director of emergency management was like, Yeah I used to work with somebody who was Trans. You know, so he's become part of my journey with me. And the head of the Department of Corrections and—all came in and said, You know, would you think about coming and talking in the jail because we've got people who are, you know, transgender in here and our staff doesn't know very much about that. And I'm like, Yeah.

02:03:33

**ALBIN:** Yeah.

02:03:34

**MOTT:** You know. And these are the kinds of things that started unfolding because of this. And—I have to know how atypical this is for transgender people in Kansas. Because it is—I hear story after story after story after story about how people run into this problem and that problem and this problem and that problem and—but for me, it—you know, I’ve got people who avert their eyes when they see me, I’ve got people who will go from smiling to frowning instantly upon, you know, capturing—connecting our eyes. But I never, you know, I’ve never been treated disrespectfully. And, um, you know, at the same time the employment policy where I work continues to include sexual orientation but not gender identity. And it’s something that I’ve been working to change for about a year now, and I’m getting pretty tired of it not being changed. And I’m going to—I’ve made my New Year’s resolution for 2012 was that I would not work at a company that didn’t include me in its equal employment protections. And I will hold true to that, I will hold true to that one way or the other, and we’ll have to see how that unfolds. But I’ll continue to try to get that changed. Um. It’s been quite a—

02:05:11

**ALBIN:** Well and—yeah I think I met you, was that in 2008 or 2009? And since then we were at the Pride Prom—

02:05:19

**MOTT:** We were at the Pride Prom in Manhattan.

02:05:20

**ALBIN:** In Manhattan.

02:05:21

**MOTT:** With Kristi Parker.

02:05:23

**ALBIN:** Yep, yep.

02:05:24

**MOTT:** And, um, you know I was trying to remember that myself. And it would have been—had to have been 2008 I think. Because—

02:05:38

**ALBIN:** That probably sounds about right.

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

02:05:42

**MOTT:** Might have been. I don't know. I don't know, it could have been 2009. Well, because—well because I didn't get real active at first.

02:05:50

**ALBIN:** Right, right.

02:05:51

**MOTT:** At first, you know, I took some time for me to do that. And you know I was—the first time I told my story was at the Gay Straight Alliance at Washburn Royal High School. And one of the ladies at our church is also the sponsor for the GSA at the high school. And she said, Won't you come out and talk? And I said, Okay, I will. And I talked for about five minutes and I was real nervous and it was real scattered and it was horrifying for me. I thought it was just—you know, it was, I was—I didn't enjoy—I knew it was—I wanted to and it was important I thought, but—but then after I got done talking one of those kids came up to me, a transgender girl and—seventeen, or something like that—and hugged me and said, Oh my God, you changed my life. And I'm thinking to myself, Oh my God you changed my life. Because I had no idea the importance of me sharing my story. I had no idea that I could impact somebody else's life that way. And, um, and then, you know, not too awful long after that I was hanging out with some friends, that were friend of a friend really, and some guys that were, most of them seventy-year-old farmers and some old farmers' wives and some other people.

And you know, it was people we spend some time with and this was when I was coming out finally and—and I was telling my friend that I'm gonna—I have to have to come out to these people because I'm going to stop presenting anywhere as Stephen. And so I have to do this, and I'm worried about what it's going to be like afterwards. But, um, I—I came out to those folks and—and they didn't care. You know, like I said, they're seventy-year-old farmers, but they—they knew I was doing what I needed to do to be okay and that was really all that was important to them. And they don't understand, they still don't understand. They still think that I'm a confused fellow, but that's okay. But they continue to be kind to me. But a couple of weeks after that I came out to this particular group of friends, um, one of them, one of those seventy-year-old farmers came up to me and told me that they had a child who was transgender. And again, it just totally changed my perception of the importance of me being open about who I am. And realizing that here is this man, he's seventy years old and—or so and, you know, he's probably never spoken those words out loud before. Maybe not even to his wife, you know, I don't know what, you know. But he—I'd given him a term for it. You know.

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

And I was able to say, Well this is a good book you should read. And, you know. And, um, and that's what set me out about—I didn't set out to become a transgender educator, I just—you know, I got led into it by—because life started saying, Guess what? You know, you have something that's of value here to other people.

And, um, and I will tell you that I know this as well as anybody can possibly know it, that when the world discriminates against somebody who's transgender or somebody who's gay, bi, transgender or what, it doesn't matter, that it's not only that person who suffers but it's everybody who cares about that person who suffers. And my family suffered horribly because of the way that I thought that I would be accepted as a transgender person. And there were quite honestly very valid reasons for me to think that, and those reasons continue to be true. But it was—it was—it was discovering that all of a sudden I had this gift to—that was given to me for the purpose of sharing it with other people so that other people might not have to suffer and—so I started looking for places to talk. And letting people know I was interested in talking. And then one day, um—I started writing—well, I started writing for Liberty Press. And that was in April of 2008, I can tell you that. So it probably would have been—it probably would have been 2009 when we were at the Pride Prom. But it was April 2008 and I started writing Liberty Press and the pastor at our church had said to me that he wanted me to write a little article about what it's like to be transgender for the church's newsletter. And I started writing and the next thing I know I had eight separate big articles about my life up to that point. And he said, Well let's—let me talk to the editor of Liberty Press and find out whether or not she wants to run these. And he did and, um you know—I didn't know much about the Liberty Press. I didn't even really know that it was the Kansas state-wide, you know, newspaper for lesbian and gay, bi and transgender issues and events. But—I'm kind of like, Okay. And, um, I was kind of like doing that, finally going wherever it seemed like that God was leading me and he said, Let's do that. And Kristi wanted to run them. So they appeared, the first one appeared in April 2008 and there were eight separate articles that appeared before it got done. And she was—she was, um—she was asking me if I wanted to continue to write and do a transgender column for them. And been doing it ever since. Over four years now that I've been writing for Liberty Press. Which is kind of cool.

02:11:54

**ALBIN:** Yeah.

02:11:55

**MOTT:** That, um—anyway, I started delivering because I found out that there were a lot of the papers that weren't supposed to—that were supposed to be delivered in Topeka

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

weren't being delivered consistently. So, um, Topeka Ace Project delivered half of them and those were being taken care of. And then I'm not sure who was supposed to be delivering the other half but they weren't getting taken care of, so I said, I'll do that. And I started staking these out. And so I was working downtown and I started going into this—The Break Room and the Metro Eatery and the Field of Greens that are both family-owned and they, um, I started going in there and having lunch because it was across the street from where I worked and delivering the Liberty Presses there because I was doing that, and I was getting to know the girl behind the counter at The Break Room and—and, um, then, you know, she got to know my story and was reading my stories and stuff like that. And we started getting to be friends. And then one day I walk in there and she's like, This girl is in town and she is from Kansas City Anti-Violence Project. And she, um, is here in town to do a presentation about transgender and—domestic violence and transgender and I think you should meet her. And I said, Yeah sure, I'd love to meet her. And I gave her one of my cards. And then that girl gave her one of her cards. And so then I ended up contacting the girl and actually asked her if she would come and do a presentation in our church about LGBT domestic violence, 'cos I was the outreach ministry coordinator by then. And she said she would and she said—but she wanted to bring in this girl from the YWMCA here, or there in Topeka. And I said, Okay, yeah that's fine. And so I met Laura from the Center for Safety and Empowerment, was called the Batter Women Taskforce at the same time, at that time, and I met her and then a little bit later one of Laura's friends who's an instructor up at Washburn was looking for somebody to come in and talk to their women's studies class.

02:14:09

**ALBIN:** Mm-hm.

02:14:10

**MOTT:** And Laura's like, Oh you should have Stephanie come in and talk. And so I got asked to come in and talk at that class. And I met Sharon Sullivan and Sharon also was putting on the Vagina Monologues.

02:14:27

**ALBIN:** Mm-hm.

02:14:28

**MOTT:** And so then I got asked to do the transgender piece in the Vagina Monologues. And the next, you know, I'm—you know, being in the Vagina Monologues just changed everything for me. Because it—the fear, it took away the fear of being able to talk publicly about who I am. Because I opened myself up so much in doing that and doing

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

that piece and connecting to the—to the piece itself, which is the interview that Eve Ensler did with a number of different transgender women in order to write that piece, and the feelings that were part of my journey in sharing that and it was, it was just—and then all of a sudden people knew who I was. And that one made a huge difference. And then of course the Liberty Press started making a difference.

02:15:13

**ALBIN:** Yep.

02:15:13

**MOTT:** And I started getting an occasional e-mail from somebody from somewhere in Kansas saying, I've read your article and I want you to know that I've never known anybody else who was—or thanks for sharing it—or I wrote a piece about male privilege one time and I got articles from heterosexual married women who were like, Way to go, way to talk about this, you know. Because I watched my own male privilege be taken away from me—

02:15:43

**ALBIN:** Right.

02:15:43

**MOTT:** —as I transitioned, which was new—that's an incredible part of my journey. And I just started to be known. And—you know, and I don't even know—I got to know Matthew because I was looking for something to write about, Matthew Blankers. And Matthew knew people in Lawrence and, you know, it just started going like, expanding and expanding, my network of people that I knew. And I started getting asked to come to KU and speak, and—and I was working on trying to do some stuff on my own. And, um, and then I guess, you know, in August of 2010 is when—well, before that when we were in Lawrence, we were trying to get the gender identity added to the anti-discrimination ordinance at that time.

02:16:38

**ALBIN:** Right.

02:16:39

**MOTT:** And speaking in front of the Human Relations Commission and not in front of the City Commission. But the Human Relations Commission, this was my first delve into political activism. I spoke at the library in Topeka because they were trying to ban some gay books, and that was the first time I spoke publicly. But then I spoke shortly



Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

after that here in Lawrence about—in front of the Human Relations Commission about that. And it—it occurred to me that I'm not being—I'm being seen as an outsider, not as a Lawrencian. Because even though I spent most of my life in Lawrence, I live in Topeka now. And the Human Relations—I was getting comments from people that they're seeing you as an outsider, you know, and so they're not giving your testimony the same kind of weight. And I'm, Well, I have to change that. That means the only place in Kansas I'm going to be able to speak about this is going to be Topeka and that's not acceptable to me.

02:17:37

**ALBIN:** Yep.

02:17:38

**MOTT:** And so I prayed about it and thought about it and talked to some folks about it and decided that—that I wanted to start a statewide education organization. And that's where—that's the impetus, was the failure at that time of the Lawrence gender identity ordinance to—for me to form this group, because I wanted to have standing to be able to speak anywhere in Kansas. And, um, in August of 2010 I'd made those connections with—using the Liberty Press as a means by which to do that, and those connections that I made, that got the word out and we had thirteen people come from across the state and gather in Salina and uh decided to start this organization. And it's called Kansas Statewide Transgender Education Project, it's K-STEP for short.

And I actually had the acronym before I named the—I liked K-STEP, I knew I wanted transgender and education in there and the rest of it just kind of fell together and—and um, we decided that we would start that organization. And I had borrowed some by-laws from another organization and adapted them to fit the K-STEP. And we sat there on that day, you know, in August of 2010 and hammered out our by-laws and decided to incorporate it, and a few days later we incorporated it as a non-profit organization and we've been doing transgender education across the state ever since. And all of a sudden I had standing. I had standing anywhere I want to go in Kansas and—and I am the executive director, we elected me, they elected me, the board elected me as the executive director of the—it's a non-paid position and it'll probably always be but—but you know, since August of 2010 we've done 150 educational events—

02:19:32

**ALBIN:** Wow.

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

02:19:33

**MOTT:** –Across the state of Kansas. And not just in university classes, which are extraordinarily important, I love the classes because these—you know, they're—these are people who are going to take out into the world and share it with everybody they meet, you know, whatever they learn about this stuff and I love that stuff. But we did a presentation in the Shawnee County Jail for all the supervisors and we did a presentation in Pawnee Mental Health Center in Junction City and in Concordia and Manhattan and we did the health agency here and a health agency way out in the northwest corner of the state in Elkhart, Kansas, for the local—

02:20:15

**ALBIN:** Wow.

02:20:15

**MOTT:** –health agency. And we've done presentations in numerous churches across the state. And so—we don't—more of this on the east side of the state than it is on the west side of the state, but we're working on it, trying to get more out into that area. But—and then every time I did a presentation it seemed like it opened up another door and, you know, somebody else went and I'm—quickly I'm learning and it's like, okay at the end I always close it the same way that if you know anybody, if you're part of an organization, it doesn't matter what kind of an organization, that you think would benefit from having this kind of a presentation then please let us know. And pass out my cards and pass out the brochures and let people know about that stuff. And—and um—sooner or later I get somebody who contacts me, and says, I want you to come to this church or I want you to come, you know—in Salina they asked me to come and speak at the UU, and I came and I spoke at the UU in Salina. And, um, and—there were people there from the Social Justice Committee, and they were trying to become an open and affirming church in the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. And I went out there and I spoke and there was a couple of people from the Human Relations Commission there. And when I got done speaking they were talking about, We need to change our ordinance.

02:21:45

**ALBIN:** In Salina?

02:21:46

**MOTT:** In Salina. And—

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

02:21:48

**ALBIN:** Did you think that was— (laughs)

02:21:50

**MOTT:** I'm like, Let me know if I can help. And of course they had me back a few times to do public presentations in the course of that. But yeah, um, when—I was in Thailand when they passed the ordinance, at the second reading. I was—I was, um, in my hotel room watching it, because they have a live feed on the website in Salina. I watched it happen from Thailand. The day that they approved that ordinance. And of course that ordinance is being threatened by some folks that—are very confused. And I—they believe what they believe with all their heart, and I don't think they're bad people but—but they're doing some very bad things. And I don't think they actually have any idea—have any idea how far away from the truth that they are. But, um, every time that somebody has a discussion it changes a little bit. And every time that somebody talks about it, it changes a little bit.

And every time that I go speak somewhere it changes a little bit, and you know a couple of weeks ago I went to lola, and this is just me scheduling a presentation in the local library. And I do that you know and last—yesterday I was in Seneca and in a couple of weeks I'm going to Coffeyville to do the same thing. And—and if one person comes it changes, it changes—it changes the world. I did a presentation in Johnson County one day at the library. Just invited myself and set up the room and got out some press as best I could. And one person came, but that person was a counselor in a high school who had some students that—she needed to hear what we had to say. You know. And so I never know how it's going to get used or what's going to happen. But I did that presentation in Pawnee Mental Health Center and I had a hard time getting that one nailed down. It took almost a year for me to get in there, get her to agree to let me come in there and do presentations there. And a couple of other members, Paul and Luke, went up to Concordia and to Junction City but I did the one in Manhattan.

But as I was setting up this thing, and it was hard—and I don't know, she wasn't really resistant to it, it's just seemed like we never could quite get it worked out and—and we did that about a year ago and a couple of weeks ago I got an e-mail from this woman saying that her daughter's daughter just came out as trans. And so I never know. I never know what's going, you know, what's going to come from this thing. Because—I throw it out there and I see what happens. And it's—sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't work. And sometimes I get to see it and sometimes I don't get to see it. But—once a—three times a month probably, three or four times a month I get an e-mail or a Facebook message or something from somebody who's transgender or who knows

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

somebody who's transgender who is like, How do I change my name? You know, or what do I, you know—I'm struggling here. You know, Thank you for presenting, I got—even though that nobody came to the presentation in lola except for the reporter from the newspaper.

02:25:17

**ALBIN:** And you got a full page—

02:25:18

**MOTT:** We got a nice article.

02:25:19

**ALBIN:** Yeah, that was a good article.

02:25:20

**MOTT:** Nice article in there, because she said, Well, can I talk to you anyway? And I'm like, Yeah. (laughs) Please.

02:25:26

**ALBIN:** Yeah.

02:25:27

**MOTT:** And maybe, you know. And—and um I got an e-mail from somebody in lola and then I got a couple of Facebook friend requests from some folks in the area that read that article.

02:25:38

**ALBIN:** Right.

02:25:39

**MOTT:** You know. And it just continues—it just continues to do that same thing, it just keeps getting bigger and bigger, and I'm like, I don't know how this is happening, but I just keep stepping out.

02:25:48

**ALBIN:** Yeah.

02:25:49

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

**MOTT:** You know. For me it's a faith journey, you know. And I went up to Seneca, you know, last—yesterday and, um, and I went to Seneca because that was the home of pastor Curtis Knapp, who preached a hour-long sermon about how that—that being gay is an abomination before the Lord. But, I went—I listened to the sermon and he said that the government should kill people who are gay.

02:26:19

**ALBIN:** Yeah.

02:26:20

**MOTT:** Should execute people who are gay. And I'm in Thailand and so I'm sending a—I send a Facebook message to my friend Chris who's on the board with K-STEP and said, I'm open these dates in July, see if you can find me a slot in the library schedule in Seneca.

02:26:37

**ALBIN:** Yeah.

02:26:38

**MOTT::** And I did that, and then it was like—it was like, um, I sent out a press release and I sent it to the Seneca paper and the Topeka Capital-Journal and a couple of other papers that were in the Seneca area, and—and I got a—I don't know why, my timing was bad—but I sent it—but I was getting ready to come back, and so I sent it back and I then got an e-mail from a reporter at the Capital-Journal and an e-mail from the Courier Tribune at Seneca both about wanting to talk to me about an article that we're writing and I never did get hooked up with the reporter from the Capital-Journal but he got a hold of some other people.

But—I called, using Skype on my computer, on my laptop, I called the reporter from the Seneca paper from the Tokyo airport and talked to her, and she's like, Well are you coming up here because of, you know, the sermon? And I'm like, You know what—and this is true, I had planned on going to Seneca some time, it was already on my list, and that's what I do, is to pick out little towns and—'cos I've been to most of the bigger towns at this point, and just go and offer the opportunity for that—and I said, Yeah it was on my list but this has kind of hastened it, made me decide that it was important for me to come up there right now. And that I wanted to come up there because I have a different message than the message that was in the sermon and that my message is a message of hope. And that's exactly what they put in the paper. And I never mentioned Curtis Knapp in the press release, I didn't say anything about him.

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

02:28:15

**ALBIN:** Yeah.

02:28:16

**MOTT:** 'Cos it's just now why I was going up there, I was going up there to share my faith journey. And I talked about God a lot yesterday, you know, and we only had three people there. But all three of them were from the same Sunday school class at the local UCC and I'll be a bit surprised if I don't get to go back up there and talk to that Sunday school class. And I don't know what'll happen from that one, you know, but it's—it's exciting. It's exciting to watch it happen. And, you know, oh my God, so much has changed in such a very short period of time. Because, if you think about it you know in—six and a half years ago, six years and eight months ago I was homeless. And, um, only really within the last three years that I started getting really active in education and, and activism but.

02:29:10

**ALBIN:** Well it seems that everybody knows you. Like it's just—you know, you're—I think you're becoming a very well-known name across Kansas. And I think a good example of that is last year, you did a four-day tour across Kansas, right?

02:29:27

**MOTT:** (Sighs) Yeah, I did. I did. Well I had three day vacation for Fourth of July, and—and it wasn't as hot as it was this year, but it was—I had a three day vacation and I'm just thinking, you know what am I going to do for three days? And I—I was thinking about an article—I wanted to write an article about talking to people. I'd even thought about coming to Lawrence and hanging out downtown and just talking to people on the street and seeing what they had to say about—or going to Wescoe Beach up at the university which is known for being a place where the slant—you know, people say harmful things about people who are gay, who happen to be walking by.

And um, and I thought about going to some place like that, and even talked to some people about it, and just talking to some people on the street and seeing what they had and, you know, making that an article for the Liberty Press. That's where it came—that's where it came from. And at the same time I've got this three day weekend coming up and I'm thinking to myself, You know I could probably do that but do it in—in a lot of different locations. And I thought about it for a little bit and I'm kind of, I can do this. I can do this. And then I talked to my boss and see if I could get an extra day because I needed—and started laying out the map and looking at different things and we—next

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

thing you know I had a sixteen-hundred mile, thirty city trip across the state of Kansas. Stopping in a lot of different cities and just talking to people—as a general rule just talking to people in a parking lot somewhere about who—you know, and I would walk up to them and I would introduce myself as a journalist who was doing a story about people who are transgender and would it be okay if I asked you a few questions about what you know and what you think about people who are transgender. Almost everybody said yes, a few people said I'm busy, I'm on my way to lunch, I'm on my way somewhere. One guy said, You don't want to know what I have to say about that. And I'm like, No really I do. He's like, No you don't. I'm like, Okay that's enough, I'm not going to push that any further. And one girl said, That's very personal and scurried away. I'm kind of like, No honey I didn't ask you if you were, I asked you what you thought about it, but it was okay.

You know. But, um, we called a few places and got permission to be there, and um it turned out to be a horribly difficult process to get people to agree to let us be there because they weren't understanding—all I want to do is stop for a few minutes, talk to a few people and be on my way. You know, it's really not invasive. And—but uh—then I finally just gave up and just said, I'm just going to pick out a place and go, and just talk to a few people and see how—and see how that worked. And you know um, I really discovered two different things neither of which surprised me. People didn't know very much about what is transgender is about and people didn't care very much about somebody, whether somebody was transgender or not. You know, the two most common responses that I got were one, some variation of To each his own, and the other one was, That's like gay, right? And I was like, No, not exactly.

And what I would do is I would walk up to them and I would say, I'm a re—I'm a journalist, I'm writing a story, do you mind if I ask you some questions. And if they said yes I would say, Do you know, tell me what you know about transgender, and they would answer. And then I would say, Do you know anybody who's transgender and they would tell me yes or no, and sometimes elaborate on that. And I would say, What do you think about all of that and they would tell me that. And then if I felt like that it was reasonable for me to do so I would identify myself as a transsexual woman. And the responses were—you know like I said, a lot of people were—were just like, Oh that's just gay. You know. And one guy in um, Yates Center I think it was that said, Oh we've got somebody like that here. You know, and—They're okay I guess, it's to each his own but it's kind of weird. You know, that's what he said. And um—and then there was a guy in Coffeyville that said—and this is why I'm going back to some of these small towns and doing these library presentations this year—there was a guy in Coffeyville that said he

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

didn't know anybody who was transgender but then after I confided in him that I was, he told me about—he had a transgender friend. He wasn't going to tell me—

02:34:06

**ALBIN:** Right.

02:34:06

**MOTT:** —because he wasn't sure it was safe to tell me.

02:34:08

**ALBIN:** Sure.

02:34:09

**MOTT:** That he had a friend who was transgender. And each of the people that I talked to that said they had a transgender person in their lives said they were struggling because of not accepted. You know, with their family, with their friends, with their employment. There was always—it was common, every single one of them it was, they're struggling with not being accepted. You know. And that's why Coffeyville's on my list and something that came out of that was why Seneca was on my list for going up there this year. Because I've become aware that there was somebody up there who probably needed somebody like me to go up there and say something. You know. And—it was just—it was quite an amazing trip.

I went to Oakley and I walked into the Casey's and there were six guys sitting at a little cafeteria table that they had inside the Casey's, and big farmer-looking guys and talking about you know, gun racks in their trucks and stuff. And then I'm, I'm not going to talk about who I am here. I'm not going to talk about who I am. And—and then of course recognized that I had just discriminated against them at the same time. And that was one of the things that I didn't expect to take out of the—it was just, you know, it would have been really easy for me to just walk up to women and talk to them about what they thought but I wasn't getting a true sample of the population so I had to—I had to force myself to pick out guys. You know, and I didn't walk up to anybody who looked like they were having a bad day, you know I just didn't do that. But I, you know—this thing in Oakley, and it turned out to be one of the most powerful things that I took out of the whole trip.

Because I remember going to a church here in Lawrence one day I was in town and spent the night, went to church on Sunday and it was Fourth of July Weekend and it was—and it was uh—the songs that they were singing were the religious, patriotic songs



Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

which I love. And I—I couldn't help it but I just started singing, you know, along with them and my singing voice is not the same as my speaking voice which passes, but my singing voice is just slightly lower than tenor and it doesn't pass at all. And I watched when I started singing and I could see the women in the pews that were next to me pulling their kids in close to them, you know. And I—and I remembered that moment at the same time I was walking out of the Casey's in Oakley, thinking to myself that, you know—women shouldn't have to feel like they have to pull their kids in close to them just because it's a transgender in a pew. And I shouldn't have to feel like I can't come out to these farmer-looking dudes that are at the Casey's in Oakley. And somehow, some way, some day that has to change. And that was really the whole reason for why I did what I did. Was to give that—to give that an opportunity, you know—I don't know, one of them big farmer guys might have had a friend who was transgender or a child who was transgender and maybe I missed an opportunity to do God's work there. And I don't know, I will never know that.

But I—you know, at the same time I have to respect that—that every time I publicly reveal to anybody that I'm a transgender woman that I increase the likelihood I'll meet with violence. And um—but I also believe that every time that I reveal to people that—publicly that I'm a transgender woman, that it decreases the likelihood somebody else will meet with violence. And for me that's a pretty simple decisions to make. And—and I just believe that God's got me and everything. But yeah, that got me some—Associated Press picked that up. Associated Press picked up the story in December of 2010 too, that the Capital-Journal did about who I am. But Associated Press picked that up and it went out, you know, nationwide and Transgender News picked it up so it went out to all the transgender mailing lists. And—oh my. And then you know, that was coupled together too with my—I decided that I was going to become a nationally known speaker on transgender issues. And—and I was sitting and talking to this lesbian friend of mine that—about this and she was telling me that her and her partner you know, having great support for me and she was telling me that um, Well you know what you need to do, is you need to go home, and you've got a computer? And I said, Yeah. And she said, On the wall next to your computer put up a sign that says, Stephanie Mott, Nationally Known Transgender Speaker. And every time you sit down at the computer it'll remind you that this is what you're doing. And then about that time I had gone back to—I had gone to the University of Phoenix and I was studying human services management and I had to do a project on goal setting. And so I picked being the—a nationally known transgender speaker as my—so I outlined all the different things that I needed to do in order to—in order to be able to get there.

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

And—and then a friend of mine that had heard my somewhere sent me an e-mail that—it was—it was a psychologist in Manhattan, Dr Joyce Woodfood, who said—sent me an e-mail and said that she had, um, been to this conference called the International Foundation for Gender Education and thought I might be interested and there was a—there was a call for papers. And—and I got on the website and looked at it and—and I sent in a thing to come in and do a story about my—my journey into faith, and they had me come talk. And, you know, I had to spend my own money to go there but they had me come talk. And then the next—that was in April and then um, must have been 2010, and then in 2011 I went and did three presentations for a first event in Boston. And I did another presentation that year for the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce Creating Change conference in Minneapolis. And then I did another presentation that year for the Colorado Gold Rush for their Gender Identity Center of Colorado puts on every year. And now I guess I can really claim for being a nationally renowned speaker.

02:40:48

**ALBIN:** Yeah, I think so.

02:40:52

**MOTT:** You know, and Transgender News picks up stuff about—I don't know if—Transgender News is a yahoo news group, it goes out to people who are interested in that all over the country, and there's an international version as well. And 28 times now, 'cos I keep track of where I'm listed—but 28 times now that something I'm doing has made its way into that—into that e-mail list. And so I get e-mails—when I—when I got ready to set out on the trans tour I had e-mails coming in from all over the country from people who were wishing me well on my trip. And so.

02:41:33

**ALBIN:** That's amazing.

02:41:34

**MOTT:** Yeah. This gentleman in New York who started up a—a website called LGBTSR for LGBT seniors, people who are fifty—LGBT people fifty and older, or anybody and—but the focus is a lot on issues that affect people who are over fifty. And um, he saw the article about my—about my trans tour and he posted something on his site about it and I picked that up when I was doing a google search on my own name to see who was—because I like to know how my—how my press releases work and I like to know what people are saying about me. And so I saw that and so I sent him a thank you note and—for posting something nice about me being on a tour. And then he sent me back a

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

Facebook message that says, Do you write or anything, we'd love to have a transgender writer for our website. And I'm like, Well yeah, a little bit.

02:42:31

**ALBIN:** Yeah.

02:42:32

**MOTT:** And so now, I've today—it was actually uh—yesterday was actually the one year anniversary of the first article that appeared on that pebble cushion, which goes out. And um, I'm working on I hope, being able to write a column—and it's the same monthly column that goes in the Liberty Press for the most part, but—but for a publication that goes out of Texas called 'This Week in Texas.' It's a weekly publication that has—because of somebody I know knows them, and has seen my work in Liberty Press and so I've submitted articles to them to see whether they might be interested in having me write. And then because of the work that I did in the—in the—with the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Salina, the UU Interweave newsletter is—which goes out to eleven hundred UUs across the country.

02:43:29

**ALBIN:** Wow.

02:43:30

**MOTT:** And they've asked me to start writing some articles for them. And so every once in a while I write something for them, and so it just keeps getting—

02:43:37

**ALBIN:** Yeah.

02:43:37

**MOTT:** It just keeps getting bigger and I'm not sure what's going to happen you know, next.

02:43:42

**ALBIN:** Cos you're also involved with um, with the Kansas Equality Coalition, correct?

02:43:47

**MOTT:** Yeah, I am.

02:43:50

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

**ALBIN:** And so how did you get involved in that? Actually let me change the tape before we get into that.

02:43:58

(Tape change chatting)

02:44:47

**ALBIN:** So yes, how did you get involved in the Kansas Equality Coalition?

02:44:54

**MOTT:** I guess that my first exposure to Kansas Equality Coalition came um, in that battle to add gender identity to the Lawrence ordinance, the earlier one. And then, I saw an article in the Topeka Capital-Journal about how KEC had been working to add anti-discrimination protections at the state level and how Senator Dennis Pyle had questioned whether or not—in the legislative hearings about—that questioned whether or not that was opening the door to bestiality.

02:45:36

**ALBIN:** Right.

02:45:37

**MOTT:** And um—and I was shocked. And—and I became aware of the existence of the chapter in Topeka and went to a couple of meetings and was starting to learn a little bit about that. And um—and then KEC was trying to get a chapter going again in the southwest part of the state and—and um, they had a girl that—who had read about me on Liberty Press and was transgender and wanting to get involved and she contacted me and I helped her figure out how to change her names and some stuff like that. And um, then she wanted to get involved in KEC and so they were wanting to start a chapter down there. And she set it up for me to—'cos they had a KEC meeting—state meeting down there, and she set it up for me to come down and do a presentation for KEC.

And um—I did that I guess in November of 2010, and that was the first time that I'd been exposed to KEC at the state level. And I was talking to Tom Witt, the—at the time the chair of Kansas Equality Coalition, he's now the executive director, um, that I wanted to be—that I wanted to testify in the Kansas legislature. And—and actually did testify a few times in 2011. Didn't this year which kind of disappointed me a little bit. But—but I just kept getting a little bit more involved with KEC and a little bit more involved with KEC and then um, I guess in October of last year I became the Topeka chapter chair. And um, decided that I would start going to the state meetings and get involved at that level.

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

And—and then in January of this year when Tom Witt was hired as the executive director of Kansas Equality Coalition, that opened up the position for state chair and—and I was nominated for it and accepted, and so in January I became the state chair of Kansas Equality Coalition.

Um. So I mean, I've been in a number of different places across the state in trying to help—in support of ordinances that—to add protections for lesbian, gay, bi and transgender Kansans. Um. It's—to my knowledge and there's—I'm probably the first transgender person to be the chair of a state wide civil rights organization. I don't know that for sure. I think to my knowledge I was probably also the first transgender church board member in the state of Kansas. But I don't—they don't keep records, so it's hard to say—it's hard to say that for sure. But—but not everybody knows everybody who's trans. But you know um—it's an honor to be involved in the civil rights movement in any fashion. Um. And I didn't set out to—to become, you know, to do some of the things that I'm doing today. And um, but—I want to make sure that when I look back on my life that I spent so much time in silence and so much time in pain unnecessarily and that I want to make sure that I'm doing what I can to change that for other people, and KEC has been an avenue for me to do that.

And we tried to get a—a domestic partnership registry in Topeka last November, and we came within one vote of being able to do that. Whereas, you know, the press kind of said that it failed, I'm kind of thinking, no, it went a long ways towards helping me know who it is that—that we need to not have on the city council a year from now on. And um, so we know who we need to replace. And we have a plan in place to – that will hopefully lead to a City Council that will allow for us to make some changes in Topeka, the same kind of changes that have happened in Lawrence and in Selina and even in Hutch. And our—we're working on, you know, KEC's working on the same kind of changes in Pittsburg and Wichita as well. And um, and you'll see more of that. And you'll see something in Topeka I think, probably towards the end of the year that we'll be moving on something in Topeka. Um. I'm not exactly sure what's that going to be yet, but our focus is to push both on the county government and the city government for them to start including same-sex partner benefits for—for their employees. And I think it's a do-able—I think it's do-able in both places. But it's not easy.

And my position being the office assistant in the County Office complicates it, which I hate. You know. Because I have to—I have to be respectful of my position and that I don't represent the county but at the time, you know—but like I said my tolerance for—that I continue to work for an organization that doesn't include me in their anti-discrimination policies is growing thin and continues to—and is basically gone and at

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

some point in time, you know, it's—it's going to hit the fan. And—because I just can't—I can't exist that way anymore.

You know. I can't work for you if you don't respect me as a human being. And for me that's what it's about. It's about—it's about human dignity. It's not about sexual orientation and it's not about gender identity, it's about human dignity. You know, and what does that have to do with whether or not you treat somebody as a human, with equal rights. You know. And what does that got to do with whether or not you hire somebody or whether or not you allow somebody to rent your apartment or sell it to somebody or, you know. It has nothing to do with those things. And I—so I don't know what's going to happen, it's going to be an interesting next few months, we'll see you know, how all that unfolds, but um I'm certain that—that there's going to be, you know, I have to—either the county has to change its position on this or I can't work there. I can't continue to work there. It's just, I can't. And it's—and I tried to explain that to one of the commissioners not too long ago as, I'm chair of a statewide civil rights organization and the organization I work for doesn't include me in their policies. I just can't—I can't silently deal with that, I have to speak up against it. And so I guess we'll see what happens. But something else changed in the meantime.

August of—excuse me, on April 23rd of this year the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ruled that gender identity is included in the umbrella of sex if you can show sex stereotyping led to some kind of an act that's protected against. Doesn't protect gender identity per se, but based on sex stereotyping which is that, it falls in that category, and instantly it's now illegal to discriminate anybody in employment, but you have to show that sex stereotyping. And it makes it a little bit complicated but and it's—the battle's going to get played out over the next few months. But I think—I think you're going to see that stand and I think it's probably the most significant change for gender identity in—in years, in ever maybe. People don't recognize it because not a lot of people know about it and stuff. But—you know, on April the 23rd this is when this happened, on April 26th I got to do a presentation in front of sixty human resources managers from across the state for the state term—

02:55:05

**ALBIN:** Wow.

02:55:06

**MOTT:** —diversity conference, and I got to tell them about what happened only three days before that.

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

02:55:11

**ALBIN:** Wow.

02:55:12

**MOTT:** You know, and I think for the future of K-STEP, I think that—you know, because I can go to these—to any employer in the state and I can say, I want you to understand this, this is going to cost you money if you don't—if you don't learn how to deal with this right. You know. And this is going to—this is what can happen to you now, and this is a protected class now. Even though technically that's not a true statement, but you have to have an understanding about this stuff, I'm going to save you some headaches if you let me come in and do some training. And I want to do that, I want to be able to do that. Um, I don't know where I'm going to find the time.

02:55:50

**ALBIN:** Yeah, I was kind of wondering that but— (laughs)

02:55:54

**MOTT:** Where I'm going to find the time, but.

02:55:55

**ALBIN:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

02:55:57

**MOTT:** But now, you know, I'm going to school still and—

02:56:03

**ALBIN:** So are you still at the University of Phoenix?

02:56:05

**MOTT:** No, I got my associate degree in human services management um, gosh. I don't know when it was. May of 2010 or something like that. And then that fall I went to Washburn in social work, the bachelor of social work program. It'll be May of 2014 when I—when I graduate from Washburn. But um—but I'm taking twelve hours this next semester which, they're all online classes. And—and they're all classes that I feel comfortable with. One is social work and spirituality and one is social work research and one is social work policy and one is English composition. And—'cos I have to take an English comp class to be a social worker, an advanced English comp class. And so those are my twelve hours and they're all online and they're all kind of in my—you know, in my wheel box so to speak. But—but it's going to be tough. Because I'm going to have

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

to be more disciplined than I typically am in order to be able to accomplish that and stay up with my work.

But, you know, my transcript at the University of Kansas read like the progression of my alcoholism. It started off kind of okay, you know, three fives in that neighborhood and after I started drinking it started going like this and then it just went, you know, and at the end I wasn't—I was not even bothering to drop out of classes, I was just taking my F and stuff, it was messed up. But—but since I went back to school at the University of Phoenix and thirty credit hours with them, and now twenty-four credit hours with Washburn University and I've got a 4.0.

02:57:56

**ALBIN:** Wow.

02:57:56

**MOTT:** And I want to keep that. I want to keep that, that's meaningful—

02:57:59

**ALBIN:** Yeah.

02:57:59

**MOTT:** —to me. And I want to be able to put that with my résumé when I go apply for a job somewhere and say—and, you know, but we'll see, you know. I've been convinced in each of the last semester that I would be lucky to get a C out of a class but I got an A.

02:58:16

**ALBIN:** Wow.

02:58:16

**MOTT:** In the end but it's hard, it's hard to do that. And—and I'm serious amount running for homecoming queen this year, I'm going to do it. It's—I've already talked to the student group at Washburn that is the LGBT plus plus group that, um—and they've said that they would nominate me.

02:58:46

**ALBIN:** Great.



Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

02:58:46

**MOTT:** You have to be nominated by a student organization. You have to have twenty-four credit hours at the University and I just got that.

02:58:53

**ALBIN:** Right.

02:58:54

**MOTT::** And you have to have a certain overall GPA and my GPA overall now is up to 2.93 from—in spite of the whatever it was, 2.3 something that I took away from KU. And my overall GPA is up to a 2.93 and—which, and—we'll see what happens.

02:59:15

**ALBIN:** Wow.

02:59:16

**MOTT:** But you know, it's—it's not about me thinking that I ought to be homecoming queen, it's about wanting to get exposure for transgender.

02:59:23

**ALBIN:** Right.

02:59:23

**MOTT:** You know, and it's going to get exposure for transgender. It's going to get international exposure, national for sure. You know, exposure for transgender people and – and who knows.

02:59:36

**ALBIN:** I think that just happened in Canada.

02:59:38

**MOTT:** Stranger things can happen.

02:59:39

**ALBIN:** Yeah, yeah. But I think that just happened in Canada with a transgender woman prom queen.

02:59:46

**MOTT:** Yeah, it's happened.

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

02:59:47

**ALBIN:** Yeah.

02:59:47

**MOTT:** It's not unheard of. But this is Kansas.

02:59:50

**ALBIN:** Yes. Yes.

02:59:51

**MOTT:** Which makes it even more interesting I think. And—and um, you know it doesn't make any difference to me whether I win or not. This is—it's about about creating conversation, it's about getting people to talk, it's about what happened with Chaz Bono. You know and—I don't know that he's the best spokesperson by any means for the transgender community but people are talking about it—

03:00:13

**ALBIN:** Yep.

03:00:14

**MOTT:** —in a way that they never talked about it before. And not only that but the people who espouse help laid it out there for the whole world to see in their reaction to him being— accepting him on Dancing with the Stars. You know, it was so clearly hate that I don't think that any right-minded person could deny that that was just totally hate.

03:00:40

**ALBIN:** Yep.

03:00:41

**MOTT:** You know. And so that even in and of itself is good. You know, it's like—well yesterday, when I went to, to Seneca and the people from Westboro Baptist Church followed me up there and protested.

03:00:55

**ALBIN:** I saw the pictures on Facebook!

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

03:00:56

**MOTT:** Protested me! I'm like, Oh my God it's finally happened! You know, they finally see me as enough of a what, threat? I don't know what, force maybe. That I'm—that it's necessary for them to—which is really strange because we all live in Topeka. You know. And they've protested the church.

03:01:20

**ALBIN:** Sure.

03:01:20

**MOTT:** And they've protested a lot of other places before, but that wasn't just—this was me. This was about me, and that was cool. And I've had—I did a letter to the editor one time and that—Marge Phelps, Fred Phelps' wife, actually wrote a letter to the editor after mine about my letter. And which that—she said that I was confused because I was telling people that God loves everybody. But I thought, Wow, okay. You know. But—so I mean, they've known who I am for a long time. But this was—this was kind of—I don't know, I just wasn't expecting them to trek up there, it's not like they can't protest me in Topeka. You know. But I don't know—I don't know. People were like, Well you need to be careful when you go up there. And—and you know, I have a bumper sticker on my car that says Transgender and Christian. And like I said, I—I think that this is what I'm supposed to do. And my faith is at a place where I think I'm doing the work that God wants me to do. And I'm going to sit here and say that I think Fred Phelps probably thinks that he's doing the work that God wants him to do, so that doesn't, you know—but I believe with all my heart that if I'm doing what I'm—what God wants me to do that I don't have to worry about anything, you know. I'll be okay, or if I'm not okay then that's what's supposed to happen. And it's not—I don't want to martyr myself, 'cos I don't think that's, you know—but I—I don't know.

I'm just—I'm not going to live in fear anymore. I lived in that horrible place for so long that—and today I actually get to not live there and—and—but I know, I know that what I'm doing is making a difference in the lives of some other transgender people in the state, maybe beyond the state. And um, there's no trade-off there for me, you know. I guess I wrote one time that—that courage is not the—is not the fear of doing a thing but the—for me, it's about, about having to deal with the consequences of not doing it. You know. And I wouldn't sit here knowing that I've been given an opportunity to, to maybe make a difference in the lives of transgender people, but if I don't do that then I have to live with that. I have to live with knowing that I've been given this opportunity and I—and I turned my back on it. But for me it's a lot about faith too, because for me that would be like turning my back on God. And saying, Yes God, you know I know you gave me this, you

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

brought me through this and blah, blah, blah and—there’s great faith for you, “God and blah, blah, blah”—and it’s—and you know in the twenty-seventh Psalm, verses one and two says that you are my light and my salvation whom shall I fear, you are the stronghold of my life of whom should I be afraid? And that’s, you know, what it was.

When I—when I went to work that first day as Stephanie all those—you know, a long time ago now, I was—you know, I had people telling me, You better be prayed up. You know, one of the girls that I knew was a girlfriend of a guy that worked there, and she was like, You better be prayed up. And the prayer I was saying was a scripture, it was from Deuteronomy. And the same Deuteronomy that also contains some very tough scriptures about LGBT but to be strong and of good courage, fear not nor be afraid of them for the Lord thy God it is, doth go with thee, God will not fail thee nor forsake thee. And that was my prayer, that was my prayer on the way to the thing—out of Deuteronomy which I think you know, is kind of cool, ’cos then I can reach into there and find that and—and so I just believe that God will take care of me, that I’ll be where I’m supposed to be and that it’ll be okay.

03:05:48

**ALBIN:** Mm-hm.

03:05:51

**MOTT:** I don’t know.

03:05:53

**ALBIN:** So, um, when you decided to go to Thailand for surgery, did you share with them at work that you were going to have surgery or did you just say I’m taking six weeks off of work?

03:06:07

**MOTT:** Well, I wanted it to be covered by my family medical leave. And—which was actually kind of a—um, quite a story by itself. Can we take a little break? ’Cos I kind of need to use the bathroom.

03:06:28

**ALBIN:** Okay, so we were just about to start talking about you going to Thailand.

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

03:06:33

**MOTT:** Right. So, um. Wow. I guess I want to start off by talking about the um—you know, I'd been saving up for a long time in order to go have my surgery. In the United States it costs minimum eighteen thousand six hundred for the sexual reassignment surgery. \$18,600.

03:06:59

**ALBIN:** Wow.

03:07:01

**MOTT:** And actually that's just the surgery. There's hotel fees and—because you have to stay in the neighborhood for a couple of weeks and some other things that are involved too, but easily more than \$20,000.

03:07:13

**ALBIN:** Wow.

03:07:14

**MOTT:** I'd been saving up for a really long time. I knew I wanted to go to New Hope, Pennsylvania, and have Doctor Christine McGinn do my surgery. She's a Trans woman herself and—and it just seemed like that's who I wanted. And a post-op friend of mine had gone to her and I'd done my research and knew that she was a very good surgeon. And um—and then my car broke down. And I had to buy another car and I—I can't afford to take on a car payment so I had to pay cash for a car so I took \$6,000 out of my surgery fund in order to have a vehicle to get around in. And—and I was thinking, you know, wow that's going to be another two or three years.

Because I really had thought that I was going to be pretty close to being able to do that by May of 2012. That was the date that I'd set for myself. And—and about the same time I was thinking about that and you know, realizing that I didn't have any choice, there wasn't anything I could do about it. But—but I was watching one of my Facebook friends, who's a Trans woman from California, and she was—she was having her surgery in Thailand. And she was talking about it on her Facebook post. And I'm thinking to myself, I should check this out. I should find out, you know. You know and I already knew that it was way less expensive and I'd already talked to people about it but I'd never really done the research on it before so—so I started checking out the cost of airfare, that was my first Facebook post, I'm checking out the cost of airfare to Bangkok, Thailand. And people who were in the know knew what that meant. And then, you know, I—googling surgeons and then doing research on them and different websites,

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

finding out what people had to say about their experiences with them and comparing their costs and different things.

But the surgeon that I had, Doctor Pichet Rodchareon, is actually Chinese by birth. But he's—um, he was \$6,500 for the surgery. And um, \$1,500 you know, for the airfare and the hotel was \$25 a night and I had enough money to be able to go. And I guess I—it was February when I realized that I was going to be able to do it this year. And so I started making my preparations and of course my boss was really thrilled for me and the people in HR, they had become not my co-workers but my friends as well and—over time. And, um, they were really thrilled, you know, and then I said something to one of the girls in HR about—about family medical leave and she says, Well I'm not sure that that would be covered because this is elective. And I let it go because she was one of my friends, but planted a seed in my mind that you know, I'm going to have I have this—this thing that I have to do.

So one day I walk in and have my meeting with the guy who's the head of HR. And said I want to—I'm going to have my surgery, I want to go on family medical leave. And he said, I'm not sure it's going to be covered because this is elective. And I said, No this is not elective. This is medically necessary treatment for gender identity disorder with which I have been diagnosed. And he says, Well, we'll have to see. So I set about a crusade of loading up my family medical leave file with as much possible documentation as I could find about why this was medically necessary. Including a hundred and twenty-four page ruling in a court case where the IRS was trying to say that it wasn't deductible because it wasn't medically necessary. And the woman had taken them to court over it and won. And the hundred and twenty-four page court—Federal Court of Appeals ruling that said that this was medically necessary. And along with the opinions from the American Medical Association and American Psychological Association and lah-di-da-di-da—and becoming studied on what that meant. You know, what the family medical leave said, what that Act said. And what one of the things that that Act says is that you cannot do anything to anybody for trying to secure their right.

So I knew I had protections for doing what I was doing, for trying to secure my rights. And it also says, and it's not enumerated, that you can't discriminate against anybody when it comes to the Family Medical Leave Act. And it's not enumerated, it doesn't have those—that means everything except LGBT clauses that are—that is in there. So I'm thinking to myself that this probably means that if they disc—if I don't get this because I'm transgender—so I felt—I felt like I was on solid ground. You know, and I didn't present this as, You do this or I'm going to sue you. But the way that our structure is that—that the legal office is the one that makes the decision when it's not cut

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

and dried, although I think this is cut and dried. But the legal office is the one that had to do that, and of course clearly the legal office knew—because they could see that I was positioning myself to have a legal case against them if they didn't grant my FMLA. Now I didn't ever say I was going to file you know, a lawsuit but I had a conversation with my friend who is an attorney who—about whether or not that he would help me if I needed help and he said he would. You know. Um. And then they decided that it was covered.

03:12:58

**ALBIN:** Wow.

03:13:00

**MOTT:** It was you know—I don't know, they might have decided that it was covered if I hadn't have gone through all of that stuff. But I was thinking to myself at the same time, you know this is Kansas and this is not going to be the only time anybody ever fights this battle and so at the same time I was putting together this body of work for me, I recognize that I was—it's also a body of work that's there now, it's present, it's ready and then one day I can hand it to somebody else if somebody else feels like that they need this. But clearly there are still some disagreement about whether or not—horrible misunderstanding about whether or not this surgery is elective. Which it's not—it's—it's you know—it's elective in the sense that I'm not going to die, you know, if I don't have the surgery. It's not elective in the sense that I will never be okay, not really.

You know, given—I've wanted this since I was a kid. I didn't know what I wanted but I knew what I wanted as far as being a woman physically and—you know, for them to take—for me not to have that, for me not to have that opportunity when I had everything else in place, you know, would have been, you know, it would be—it would shatter me. It would shatter me. I'm not sure I could—I'm not sure I could recover. Maybe I'm—you know, but it—it would be—it would shatter me. Because. You know, and there are a lot of trans women who never get there. They never get there because they can't afford it. You know. And they never get there because their insurance never covers it. Because even though the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association—not the psychiatric but the Psychological Association—have both come forward and said that this is a medically necessary procedure, the insurance is about money and it's not about healthcare and it's —

03:15:00

**ALBIN:** Yeah.

03:15:02

**MOTT:** –and so their thing is as well, it’s–you know, so, here we are. Um. I found out not too long ago that the–my psychologist, clinical psychologist evaluation that was required for my surgery wasn’t covered by my insurance. And I’m–I’m going to fight it. Had a conversation with an attorney already and I’m going to see if he’ll–if he thinks that we have a leg to stand on. But–because there’s a clause in my health insurance that says it won’t pay for a sex change operation. The state of Kansas says that I can’t change my birth certificate unless I have the sex change operation. Okay, so clearly the state of Kansas has defined in this–in this horrible rule that has defined that the sex change is an–the operation. It’s not anything else, it’s just the operation. And so this clinical evaluation was not the operation. It’s only something that I may have had done anyway. You know. Or was necessary for me to be able to–but the sex change is only the operation. And so that’s my argument. Is that well your exclusion does not count on this because this is not what the state of Kansas considers to be the sex change, only the operation is.

03:16:32

**ALBIN:** Right.

03:16:33

**MOTT:** So we’ll see how that plays out. But–and you know, otherwise it’s six hundred dollars that I have to come up with and I was expecting it to be twenty nine, so that’s quite a big difference. You know, and we’ll see how that happens. But there sort of wasn’t any–I had to be open about where I was going to be going–besides people ask questions and want to know where you’re at and besides I’d be posting on Facebook about it anyway, so I just like–it’s like, I had to talk to people about it. And–you know, of all the different things that I’m going to remember most about the experience of going to Bangkok and having my surgery besides the surgery itself, there are three things that stand out to me.

And one of those is this woman, this incredible woman who went with me. You know, an amazing friend of mine. And one of those is the–the prevalence of the spirit of service to humankind within the people of Bangkok that I met. You know, that was–it’s not that it doesn’t exist in the United States but it doesn’t exist like that in the United States. And it’s just a widespread prevalence of spirit of human service. You know. Um. And then the third thing is the love and support that I had from the people in–that are in my world. And um, the people at work most assuredly are included in that group. And you know–and I would call–I would call Jane on the day before, we had–the night



Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

before—it was daytime in my, in Thailand and it was her evening in Topeka. And I would call my boss and tell her all about what was going on the night before the next commission meeting so that during the commission—you know, not during the commission meeting but when people came in for the commission meetings you could talk to 'em. Made her the center of attention for being able to talk about how I was doing. And you know. And she said that—and she posted it on my Facebook, she said, I love how you are loved. You know. And that was—you know, it's the feeling that I got. And it's not that I didn't know that, it's not that I haven't known that for a lo—but it was such a clear representation that there are a lot of people who I'm important to. And—and I don't want that like I think I'm all that, but—but there are a lot of people who I'm important to. And it kind of amazes me because I don't think I'm doing anything all that special, I'm just, just tired. Really if it comes down to it I'm just tired, tired of things being the way they are and I'm not going to be silent about it anymore. And I'm going to do what I can to make a difference. And whatever that happens to be I hope it makes a difference.

But my—when I was in the Vagina Monologues last time the um, the girls from the cast got together—got me a button that says, Proud owner of a vagina. And I—which was just too cool. But—so I held onto it until after my surgery and then I had my—after my surgery Jamie, who went with me, she—I had her pin it on my sheet and take a picture of me and post it on Facebook for after the surgery. And there were two hundred and sixty-six likes on that picture. And I'm—it just astonished me. You know. It just—I don't know. It's just to know that there were that many people who were paying attention to how I was doing on this journey, it's—I don't know. You know. I don't exactly know how to describe it but I just know that I appreciate it so much and to—and how much that meant to me while I was in Thailand. And—because not everything was peachy keen, you know most of it was pretty cool but there was some pretty serious pain stuff going on. But—but even if Jamie hadn't have been there I would have never been alone. You know. Because of all the people who were rooting for me and—from mostly in the Lawrence Topeka area but even across the state and across the country. But it's just very—I mean, it's heartwarming to me to know that there were that many people who were paying attention to whether or not I was okay. You know. And, I don't know. I just think it's—I don't understand it because I don't think—I don't think I'm anything particular, you know—I just, I guess. You know, people tell me I'm courageous sometimes and I think to myself I'm not courageous, it's not courage, it's faith. You know. And it's—it's again, it's that I don't want to have to look back at my life and think to myself, I could have done something that could have made a difference and didn't do it. But, I don't know.

03:22:19

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

**ALBIN:** Was there ever a time in your life where you thought it might be better or maybe easier to move to a different location?

03:22:32

**MOTT:** Yeah. I'm a—I analyze everything. And—and I certainly gave some thought to whether or not that I could—you know when I first got to Topeka I was absolutely certain I was going to leave Topeka as soon as I possibly could and get back to Lawrence. Because this is—Lawrence has always been—it's my home. But Topeka's my home now too. And I think the connections that I found there, the friendships and the family, the church, that it just kind of—you know, I don't want to—I don't want to lose those things. But of all the different things that—and there are many, many, many, many of them—but of all the different gifts that have been given to me on this journey, one of the ones that stands out the—by far the most to me is that my mom died in 1989 and um, when I had my first hip surgery I stayed with one of the ladies from the church for a few days after I got out of the hospital. I planned on staying with her again for the second surgery and um, then a few days before the surgery she was like, I have to go out of town, I can't—you know, you could come over there but I won't be there.

03:23:56

**ALBIN:** Yep.

03:23:56

**MOTT:** You know. But, I'm sorry. And I'm like, Don't worry about it, it's going to be okay, God'll take care of me. And I swear to God, less than a minute later this lady walks up to me and says, Do you have some place to stay after your surgery? And this woman was—her partner had—had passed away and um, at a memorial service—it was right after I started going to MCC that they had this memorial service. And they had asked me to play the—some hymns while people came in and were seated and I did. And that's how we first connected, I didn't even know who she was up until that point, and she didn't know who I was up until that point, but that's when we first connected.

And so then she came up to me and asked if I had a place to stay and I said, Well you know I don't. And like I said, less than a minute after I just got through telling this other friend that God would take care of me, and it's been like that for me. But um—so she invited me into her home. And she um—I tell people she fed me and now she can't get rid of me. But we started getting to know each other and um, she's got four kids. The closest one has a house in Kansas City but spends more time in Texas than—she just got a house in Texas and spends more time there. You know. And another one out by

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

Junction City and another one in Nebraska and another one in Denver. And—and so she doesn't have anybody here. And I didn't have a mom.

And we just started getting to know each other and—and you know, of all the different things that when I started my transition and there were things that you look back at and say, You know I'll never get to be the little girl who goes shopping for an Easter dress and all the different things like that. And of those things that was in that I'll never list was, I'll never have a mother/daughter relationship. But I do. And I have this incredible relationship with this woman, and she's my mom. And you know, and I'm her daughter. And it's—it's just (phone rings) one of the—it's just one of the dozens of things that are impossible that happen in my life every day, that seemed impossible to me but happen in my life every day, and it's like, Wow. You know. I don't know, it's one of the most precious gifts that I've been given in this journey by far. By far. I don't know.

03:26:45

**ALBIN:** Mm-hm. And so do you see—you've been talking about kind of like these little steps and these little progressions that have been made in Kansas. So what do you think that the future of Kansas could look like?

03:27:00

**MOTT:** Well. Well a lot of that's going to be decided in the primary um, that's coming up. And there's an effort that is being funded by the Kansas Chamber of Commerce, over a million dollars that they've put into campaigns to remove from office moderate republicans that have been friendly to progressive issues, not just LGBT issues but progressive issues, and targeted across the state. And what would happen if enough of those win is that it would shift the power amongst—in the Republican Party enough that they would—the conservative wing of the republic party would be able to appoint chairs to all the committees in the House and the Senate. And the committee chairs in the House and the Senate are the ones that get to say yes or no whether or not a piece of legislation even comes up for discussion.

And (sighs) when um, Kris Kobach was trying to push up the register—the date for the start of the show me papers please law, and uh, voter identification law and um, the—one of those moderate republicans in the House Elections Com—in the Senate Elections Committee, that kind of drag his feet just enough to make sure that didn't happen. And you know, when they wanted to push the SB2260, the HB2260, the House Bill that was the—that was put forward as the Religious Preservation Act and they wanted to put that forward, but what it was is that we can discriminate against you because you're gay just because we have religion act and it was passed in the House and you know almost—it

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

was going to be really, really close in the Senate but it never came up for a vote. And so a lot of what it's going to be like in the next two years in Kansas depends upon what happens in August in the primaries, if there are—if we—and again in November in the general election, but the primaries are almost more important than the general election this year for that particular reason. Um.

If the conservative members of the House gain control of being able to appoint the committee members in the House and the Senate um—it's going to be really dark. We're going to look back at the last couple of years and think the sun was shining because—because these people will do things like make it illegal for lesbians to go to infertility clinics and they will do things like—they may work very, very, very diligently to even go so far as to make it illegal to be gay. Although there is a Supreme Court ruling to say that's not true, you will see them try to find a way to get around that. And to continue to disenfranchise anybody who, you know, who is already marginalized or disenfranchised they're going to continue to do that. And I think it's—it's horribly frightening. But I also think that there's a chance that that won't happen. I think that there is a continued distaste for anybody who's already in office. And I think Sam Brownback has made a lot of social issue noise but very little jobs issues. And—but he's really got a lot of people up in arms. And I can't believe any woman in the state of Kansas would support any of these policies that are—that are happening. In the right to choice and the access to health insurance and contraception and things that are happening.

And that happened already a lot of them in the—in the Legislature in the last session, and I think it's going to get worse if—if we don't have the switch, you know. But at the same time I think the pendulum swings both directions and—and he's been so plain and obvious about his—his attack on women's rights and LGBT rights that it's going—I think it's—the people in Kansas as a general rule don't believe they should be able to fire somebody for being gay. You know, it's like 63% is the poll that was done around the time of—of when they were passing the law against—that defined marriage as between one man and one woman, a constitutional amendment for that. But—and at that time 63%. You know, and it's better now than it was then.

So I—the people in Kansas are at some point in time going to get enough of this and you'll see—and maybe it'll be this year, maybe we'll pick up some seats in the House and Senate. And—and I don't know if Brownback's going to try to run for the Presidency in four years but um, he'll probably run for Governor in two years. So—and you know, there's a lot of talk about what's going to happen—um can we get somebody to run

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

against him, you know. We have to have a candidate to run against him, just him being bad isn't enough.

03:32:53

**ALBIN:** Yeah.

03:32:54

**MOTT:** You have to have somebody who promises a different way. And I think there's hope. I think there's hope. One of the things that happened—and Kansas Equality Coalition was behind this—during Washington Days, which is the democrat conference that they have in Topeka. And um, all the different caucuses get together and different things. And Kansas Equality Coalition invaded the LGBT caucus of the Democratic Party. And now every single member of the—every single board member on the LGBT caucus is also a member of KEC. And—because the LGBT caucus has just been silent while people turn their backs on things like Representative Jan Pauls and her clear hatred for people who are gay.

And—um, and actually we were able to put enough pressure on Joan Wagnon, who's the chair of the Democrat Party, this year spoke publicly at Washington Days about how Jan Pauls did not represent their position when it came to LGBT rights and—and that's the first time that that's ever happened. And, I find myself getting involved in learning more about different things every single day in all these different areas but—but there's—I think there's some movement in the Democrat Party in Kansas to not just to say in their platform that they are for LGBT rights but to stand up for that. And not just say in their platform that they're for women's rights, but to stand up for those things, and not just cater to labor, which is what they really do. You know. Which is kind of nuts. But to—so I see some strengthening in the Democratic Party, whether it'll be enough in two years to make a difference when it comes to the gubernatorial election I don't know, but there's hope, there's reason to be hopeful about it. The conversations are going on all across the state about gay, you know. Um.

Last night some folks from Abilene were—you know, treated some folks from Salina to a pizza party because of the work that they've done. You know. And Hutchinson, Kansas, has got a law in the books that says you can't fire somebody for being gay. You know. And these are things that a few years ago wouldn't have been possible. And what's going to happen in the next couple of years, I don't know. And what's going to happen in the next eight years is I think you'll see full LGBT equality in Kansas. It may come down from the federal end, but I think you'll see full LGBT equality in Kansas. I think you'll see the overturn of the marriage amendment and I think you'll see all those

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

things go away. Because they're wrong. They're wrong and—and people are becoming more educated, you know.

And clearly, you know, that's the—that's the whole principle behind K-STEP. You know, our mission is to end discrimination against transgender people under families through education. You know. And as I was say when I close out every K-STEP presentation—not everyone but most of them—is I'll talk about, do you have any organization that would benefit from me having this kind of a speech. You know, but I also talk about, and this is kind of my mantra, so to speak, that knowledge and information are the keys to acceptance and understanding. And fear and ignorance are the locks. And when person shares it's like taking the key and putting it in the lock, and when one person listens the key turns and the lock opens and then another person has a bright new shiny key. And together one person at a time we change the world. And that's, you know, it's the—it's what's on the front page of my website and it's what I believe with all my heart is that one person at a time, that one person can make a difference, that one voice is loud enough to be heard. And that's—so, we'll see. I'm—I'm frightened and I'm hopeful. But I also know that in my lifetime that you'll see full LGBT equality in Kansas. I believe that.

03:37:23

**ALBIN:** So is there anything else that you would like to add that I may not have asked about?

03:37:29

**MOTT:** Um, I don't know.

03:37:30

**ALBIN:** (laughs)

03:37:31

**MOTT:** Every time you ask me a question I have like sixteen thousand more words to say. But um, I want to talk a little bit about male privilege.

03:37:41

**ALBIN:** Okay, let me see. Let me just switch the tape for that.

03:37:46

**MOTT:** Because it's such an important part. Of what I've discovered. And I probably should talk a little bit about my march into feminism.

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

03:38:04

**ALBIN:** Sure, okay. Male privilege, you're on.

03:38:08

**MOTT:** Okay. Um, well. What happened, you know, quite frankly was that, you know, I was – I was raised as a boy. And, you know, at the same time my dad was telling my sisters that they didn't need to learn about math, he was teaching me how to have conviction for my beliefs and how to think and be strong. And um, you know that never did make sense to me and I always thought that—that I was one of those guys that believed, you know, that women were equal and should have equal rights and equal voices and everything like that. But it wasn't until—it wasn't until I began my transition that I realized how really I had failed completely at being able to do—to do that. Because as I began my transition I started to—to see that my opinion was less valued the more that I began to be seen as a woman. And the importance of my opinion, which I'd been told from—you know, I was engendered as a male to believe that your opinion is valuable.

And people started taking it away from me as I began to be seen as a woman. And at first I'm kind of like, what is—what's going on? And then I finally put two and two together and I realized that this was about male privilege. Because I wasn't se—you know, all of a sudden now I wasn't capable of giving directions from how to drive from point A to point B. Or if it had something to do with geography or mechanics or anything like that. And this guy who knew me—who knew me and—before and he asked me one day about the turn signal light, had stopped flashing on his car. And he said, Well do you think that's the flasher or do you think that's the bulb. And I had him explain to me what was going on and I said, That's the bulb, there's a bulb burned out. And he says, No I think it's the flasher. And I said, No, this is how it works. And I explained to him how it works and how that when you have a bulb burned out, the way the flasher works is it builds up to a certain amount of voltage and when it gets to that amount then it kicks out a breaker and then the flasher drops off and so the light goes out. And then when the—when the light goes off it closes the circuit and it starts building back up again and so it comes on and off and on and off. And that's the way the flasher works. And when you have a bulb that's burned out it doesn't ever build up that much voltage and so the light comes on but it never flashes, it never goes back off again because it never kicks off the breaker. And he goes, I think it's—I think it's the flasher. I'm like, go ahead. Go change it. And even though I could explain to him scientifically what was happening in his car, he still didn't believe me. And he knew that I—I mean he knew me before I transitioned, it was the strangest thing. You know.

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

And it was just little different things that would happen. And—and one day I walked in—I walked into the—my dad taught me how to fix cars. And the lawnmower wheel broke off, my lawnmower wheel broke off and I walked into the—into the hardware store with my wheel and—after my transition—and walked over to where the different wheels were and looked at the different wheels and mine and picked out the one that I needed. And this guy came up and said, Can I help you ma'am? And I'm kind of like, Okay. And he looks at the wheels and mine and he picks out the same wheel that I did and then he looks at the wheel that I had and he says, Now there's an insert in this old wheel and if he wants it to be in the new wheel he will have to take it out of the old wheel and he can put it in the new wheel. And I'm—in my head I'm like, Well who the hell is he? You know. But it was—but I'm trying not to be—I try to be appropriate as best I can but in my mind I—so I just said, Okay, you know, Thank you. But in my mind I was thinking to myself is like, Well I'll go tell him when I see him. But I haven't seen in for a really long time and I'm pretty sure he's not coming back. You know because the he that he was talking about was me, and he just didn't know—he just didn't know that. But I'd watched it, you know if I'd have walked in there before, he'd have been, Oh you need to do that.

But, you know and it just—it's over and over and over again, it's like that and it's like that and it's like that. And then, you know, of course, I—I am in tune now with what's happening in the Legislature and um, they had a women's—excuse me, a women's rights rally up at the Capitol and they wanted somebody to come and do the LGBT's perspective. And—and they were going to have Tom Witt come talk but then they decided they wanted a woman to come talk so they asked me, which I thought was really cool. You know. And I had kind of got connected with the National Organization for Women in Kansas, NOW and—because I am always looking for different places where there's something failing, and I was looking at their website and um—and I noticed that they don't have anything on there about trans women. You know, and so I went to the Kansas NOW board meeting when it was here in Lawrence and said, You should have something in here about trans women. But then they asked me to come speak at this—at this conference, at this rally, and I went and I spoke. And I—and I sat down and I looked at the—at the issues that are LGBT issues and the issues that are women's issues and you look at them and they're basically, they're different issues but they're the same. Because they are all part of the same concept that men are dominant and women are (phone rings) in servitude. And that—that anything that incurs—that infringes on that, on this—this belief system is wrong. And so that means gay is wrong, that means transgender is wrong, that means women's rights are wrong, that means—all those things are coming from the same misconception of how people are and of how humanity is and should be.



Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

And so naturally, you know, I'm asking because I'm at this board meeting about, Well what's going on with the Topeka Chapter? And they're like, Well there is no Topeka Chapter. And I'm like, What? There has to be a Topeka chapter. And they're like, No they're—they tried to start one but then somebody got a job and then they lost their—you know, and it was—and that kind of stuff happens. And I'm like, Well okay. We're going to start one. And so I set it up. I reserved a room at the library and I got a press release in the paper and—and we had twenty-two people come. We had twenty-two people come to our meeting. And um, I borrowed the by-laws from the Wichita Chapter and we sat there and we made a new—a decision to start a chapter in Topeka and then we um, we went through the by-laws and adapted them for what we wanted. And we added gender identity in the appropriate place. And then uh, we got to that point when it was time to elect officers, and I said, I'm not going to be one. Because I have too many things on my plate already and—and I can't do this and do that. But here it is. And they elected officers and now we have a functioning chapter in Topeka again.

03:45:41

**ALBIN:** That's great.

03:45:42

**MOTT:** And I'm a member. And I might even—you know, I might help, I'm gonna help in when I can, in ways that I can. But—but as I've—in the course of my transition I've—I've come to have a completely different understanding of women's rights and how horrible that women's rights is in our country, in our state. And um, and again I can't be silent. I can't necessarily carry that torch but I can certainly you know, support that. And so that's cool, we're moving forward in that. We need to have that too, because the—we need to work together. The—the women's rights activists and the LGBT activists need to, and they do. Kansas Equality Coalition and Kansas NOW have a very good relationship. But we need to work together to defeat this force that is this—this you have to be this man married to a woman and, you know, everything else is just wrong. And that's just bullshit. And we just have to be there, we just have to be there, definitely. There's one other story I wanted to tell, if that's okay.

03:47:01

**ALBIN:** Go right ahead.

03:47:03

**MOTT:** When I started going to the little Southern Baptist Outreach Church, and I was telling about this nice 80-year-old southern Baptist minister who was the pastor there and um, when I started going to the Mission I started going there and became friends

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

with him. And he didn't politic from the pulpit or anything like that. But he—they replaced him with a—eventually with a permanent pastor. And he was standing up there and talking about the evils of LGBT and I was looking for a church when I found Metropolitan Community Church. And—but he, the interim pastor and I had become friends. And we started meeting once a month at McDonalds on Gage in Topeka and talking about God and the Bible and our lives. And um, about five years and a couple of months ago I guess—'cos I'm coming up on my five year anniversary of living twenty-four seven as Stephanie—about five years and a couple of months ago I told him that I was transgender. And—and he really didn't react to it. But then a month later I told him that that would be the last time that he saw Stephen, that I would be living full-time as Stephanie and that the next time that I got together I would be Stephanie. And he really didn't react to it and so then, just about five years ago we had this meeting and he met Stephanie for the first time and he was all about why that I should not be doing what I was doing and I was all about why I should be and why I needed to be doing what I was doing. And then he said, Call me if something changes. And we didn't set a time for our next meeting which we always did before and—and before the month was up he gave me a call and he said, You know what, I want to keep talking. And I said, You know what, I want to keep talking. And um, for several years after that we met once a month at McDonalds on Gage and talked about God and the Bible and our lives.

And um, he's—because of how busy I am and because of some things that are going on in his world, we're not meeting right now. But um, the last time that we met—the last time we met he told me that he thought that all churches should be more accepting of LGBT people. And he didn't say Homosexuals, he said LGBT people. And I thought to myself that, you know, it is possible to reach anybody. It is possible to reach anybody. And that was, you know, um—I started getting involved in doing some volunteering in um, in Topeka as I, you know, started getting more connected and I joined this group called Safe Streets Coalition. And um, it's just a bunch of people from across the city and county that are working to make Topeka the safest capital city in the country and um, you know, it's civic leaders from all different walks of life and just regular folks like me, and we just had just gotten—getting together and talking about how we'd do this and you know, a lot of it was the teenage drinking programs and different things like that.

And I got hooked up with this program about—called breaking the cycle, which is about providing resources for people when they get out of jail so they land in a different place than the one that they came from. And I was the drug and alcohol resource coordinator for that. I'm no longer associated with them just because I don't have the time to do that, but—but it's an incredible, great, wonderful program and I was involved with this. And the man who is the director of the Safe Streets program at the same—is also the

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

director of the Rescue Mission. So as we got to know each other he didn't remember me from when I lived in the Mission, but as we got to know each other I went to him and I said, I want to have a talk with you about making the Rescue Mission more LGBT-friendly. And he said, Okay, he would talk to me because he knew me from this. And I went in there and I—I went in there and I—and I talked to him about what, I want to learn about what his barriers were, why is it hard? Teach me why this is a problem. I didn't go in there and say, You need to do this and you need to do that, and it was again it's one of those decisions that's worked well for me. And um, and we talked, and we talked. And I—he took me on a tour of the Hope Center, where they had the women and the children and the way that the whole thing was lined up. Because when I had been there I had lived in the men's side but—and I could clearly see that there were obstacles to being able to house transgender people according to their gender identity.

And then some time went by and we met six times I think, and we kept talking and some time went by and the Rescue Mission bought another building because they're going to expand, because the homeless problem is worse now than it's ever been, and they're going to expand. And so I went to him and I said, So when you design the way you're going to build this new building, I want to be involved in that because I want there to be—I want you to be able to house people according to their gender identity. And his first response was, You know, that's not really going to happen, we can't do that. He said, But I'll meet with you anyway. And we sat down and we met and he showed me the plans and I said, Yeah but you could do this and you could do this. And you can make this bathroom space over here so that a transgender person can live in this space and have a private place to change clothes and shower, that's all we need. That's all we need. And he said, We can do that.

03:52:48

**ALBIN:** Mm-hm.

03:52:49

**MOTT:** And so um, as they build this new building, there's going to—it's going to include people who are transgender according to their gender identity.

03:52:58

**ALBIN:** That's wonderful.

03:52:59

**MOTT:** Instead of, you know. So you can change—you can reach people. He's one of the most devout, conservative Christian people I've ever met. You know. But you can—

Stephanie Mott  
July 8, 2012

you know, he also wants anybody who's homeless, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity to have a safe place to go. And, you know, and we were able to find common ground and make that work. That's cool.

03:53:24

**ALBIN:** That's amazing.

03:53:26

**MOTT:** That's cool.

03:53:27

**ALBIN:** That's great. That's great.

03:53:29

**MOTT:** I guess that's all.

03:53:30

**ALBIN:** Okay, well I don't have any other questions right now but I may contact you—

03:53:33

**MOTT:** That's fine.

03:53:34

**ALBIN:** —again later on as other questions kind of pop up. But thank you so much—

03:53:38

**MOTT:** Oh yeah, my honor.

03:53:39

**ALBIN:** —for doing this. I really—

03:53:40

**MOTT:** It really is.

03:53:41

**ALBIN:** I appreciate it so much, this is so great. So, thank you very, very much.

03:53:46

**MOTT:** This is even more than I usually talk. (End tape)