

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

EVAN

Interviewer: Ric Tennenbaum

Date of Interview: July 29, 2017

Location of Interview: Evan's apartment, Brooklyn, New York

Transcribed by Colette Arrand

NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #067

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Ric Tennenbaum: Hello, my name is Ric Tennenbaum, and I'll be having a conversation with Evan for the New York City Trans Oral History Project, in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. It is July 29, 2017, and this is being recorded in Evan's apartment in Brooklyn, New York. Evan.

Evan: Hello.

Tennenbaum: Uh, could you please introduce yourself, and then also talk to me about where you were born and then where you grew up and what that was like?

Evan: Okay. Um, well, I'm Evan. And I identify as trans, I identify as male, TBD on those words, just because you know, these things waiver every now and then, as far as how I like, relate to the world around me. A bit more on that later. And what was the other question? Childhood?

Tennenbaum: Yeah, uh, where you were born and where you grew up.

Evan: Where I was born. Well, I was born in Chicago, but grew up primarily in Lake Forest, Illinois, which is a suburb about 30 to 40 minutes north of Chicago. Uh, the town is practically a snow globe. It was like Main Street USA uh we were the Jews. And, so I mean, it was a really nice childhood. It was really like, it was safe, it was, you know, you could run across the street and do whatever you wanted to do and then come back for dinner kind of thing, and suburbs in the 80s you know, kind of in the Midwest. Um, but it was also really challenging because well I actually didn't like it very much. Um, for a lot of the time. Um, just because I didn't really fit in very well. And I didn't really, like I had friends that were boys and friends that were girls, and I was basically fine until like we got to the age where the boys didn't want to play with the girls anymore, you know, and so you know I had some friends in the neighborhood who were girls. I would hang out with them, but it was kind of like a third wheel situation a lot of the time. Um, or at least it felt that way. And I just didn't really want to—I was better one on one with people, so I really enjoyed like playing by myself also. And, [Laughter]. For those of you listening, there is a cat approaching Ric. Um, so uh but you know, I like to like delve into my own little fantasy world and you know, do that kind of stuff. Um but you know, my parents got divorced when I was 10, which was great because that needed to end, and, so there was definitely some turmoil and some trauma and you know, I have some other things going on, so we ended up like—it just ended up being like just dramatic? I was very angry, I was very afraid, I was just—had a lot of feelings, and my sisters were very, like were—I wouldn't say we were opposites, but we led very different lives. Um, so you know, it was, you know, and I got into drugs and drinking and you know, super drama. So it was just, it was tumultuous for sure. Um but like in the uh in terms of like identity and like, trying to like, figure that stuff out, like it never, nothing ever really like occurred to me at any point. Like I just felt what I felt, and like I didn't understand why, but it wasn't—it didn't feel like, it just, I don't really remember like, I remember like wanting to be a boy and apparently I told my mom to call me Ryan for like a week, because I had a friend named Ryan. Um and I was like, I was pretty little. Um but like I mean, whatever, I played sports, I played, like everything basically. I just was a kid. Like I wasn't, you know, but I was definitely like a tomboy and yada, yada, yada. It's just,

it's very generic, that part of that story. Um, but [coughs] the most, the thing that like, you know, people were always like oh you know, when did you realize or when did you like, I can't really, I mean, I can pinpoint, but I can't really pinpoint like, we didn't have like labels or terms or anything then or you know, like and it wasn't like, I didn't make any conscious decisions on like growing up about anything, like saying this is you know, like I just, I imagined my adulthood and my future as I wanted it to be, and I imagined it as I knew it would be, which was as a woman. And those things were, I guess there was a bit of a blurred line in that. so I spent a lot of time in my head, and still do. Um, but yeah. All I knew is that I didn't fit in so much and I wasn't really talkative with my peers as much as I was with adults. Um, now I am a chatterbox, but like growing up I was just very like I just didn't know how to relate.

Tennenbaum: Um, how long in Chicago did you stay for?

Evan: Um, well I moved here for college. So I moved, I went, I did my first semester—so I left, the Midwest in 2000, and [coughs] did my first semester in college in Israel, and then I came to New York. Um, to Pratt. And then I've been here ever since, so that was 2001. January 2001.

Tennenbaum: What, why did you decide to come to New York and go to Pratt, like a—were you engaged in arts like, throughout high school or no?

Evan: Oh yeah, no, I loved—I have always loved art, I've always loved creating stuff. I did a lot of writing when I was little and I loved, like I think that was like, I did a lot of writing, I played music, and then I you know, I would draw, but that didn't really stick with me, and I was brought up like, my parents did a really good job of like, surrounding us with culture and theater and dance and the arts and everything like that. Like my mom's an artist as well and she comes from an art background and journalism and stuff like that. so like I've definitely been like raised in like a creative environment. Um, but like when I found the camera, I was hooked. And that was in high school, or it was like 8th grade or freshman year of high school. I took a photo class, like outside of school, and I just fell in love with it. And like I knew that, see, that's the thing. It's like I don't remember knowing what I—like, I wanted to be a psychologist. I also wanted to be like, an archeologist and like a baseball player and like all these things. Like I have a lot of interests, but [coughs] something about photography really stuck with me, and it was just I think a lot of it has to come, has to do with not being forgotten. Um, like being able to like have control over this moment in time, and like not allowing it to go away completely. And also like there was this moment when my mom and I were driving in the highway and there was a woman in the car next to us, and like she just had, her facial expression was just, I mean, I see it every day, like it was just like she was having a miserable day, and I just remember looking over and I was pretty young, and I look over and like, really just was just for some reason just very interested in like what was going on in her head, and it wasn't like an abnormal facial expression whatsoever, it's an expression that we in our day to day, like now you wouldn't even notice it kind of thing. But for some reason like in that moment, I like was struck with this like incredible sense of empathy for her and just wanted to know more. And that's—and I related that to I was taking pictures at that time. So I was like, I related those two things together, and knew that like I really wanted to explore people through art and sort of dive into that. Because I've always been very interested

in like why people do what they do and how their brains function and you know, what's going on behind it, because I never related to the outside as much, and so I was not a good student. Um, like I'm smart and I can do it, but I had like no motivation. And so, and I'm like an epic procrastinator, so I wasn't—my grades weren't that great in high school, and like my options were pretty slim I was finding, and I like fell in love with Sarah Lawrence and I wanted to go there so bad, and like a moron like I applied early and like, I think of course I didn't get in because you know, I applied to be a psych major, and I was like devastated. And I don't know why I thought I would be able to go to like, a real school, you know? But like, just because my grades were poo, you know? And so and so I kind of like pooped out, I knew I had to go to college but like I just didn't really know where and there was like a brochure, like in my room I remember seeing for like, Ben-Gurion University, in Beersheba, Israel. And I was in such a state of like—can I curse?

Tennenbaum: Yeah.

Evan: Okay, [Laughter]. Yeah. I was in—I have a pottymouth, I can't believe I haven't done that already. I was in such a state of like the fuck-its that I was like whatever, I'm just going to go to Israel. Like it just felt destructive to me, and uh somehow my mother was like okay, I think she just wanted me to be okay and like, just know that I was doing something. Like, you know? And, so uh, so I applied and I got in to that. It was a year program, but we came back after a semester because things were getting crazy there and people were going home, and like I missed my girlfriend and then I was just like screw it. So I applied there and but I'd also applied to Pratt, and I got into both, and which was like really exciting. But for some reason I—Pratt doesn't do like deferred acceptances or whatever, and so for some reason I was like, I'm going to do the Israel thing, and they were like okay, like you can come, but like, you need to have better grades kind of thing. And it was like okay. Um, so I did that and I tried to defer my acceptance to Pratt but they weren't having it. Um, so I don't remember having a plan after this. Like I don't know. Um, but because I was coming home early I e-mailed, I reached out to Pratt and I asked them like look, I got into your photo program, this thing is ending early, can I just come in January? And they said okay. So I came back and I went to Pratt. And it was incredible. Yeah, I fell in love. Um, yeah. And it was New York. Like I knew, I have roots in New York. My mom grew up in the area and my grandparents are here and I have cousins here, so I've been coming here my whole life, and I don't know if—I don't ever remember like sitting in my room and like dreaming of living in New York, but I just knew. Like I don't have recollections of like having conscious like being pulled in certain directions, like having this all like this is what I'm going to do and then do it. Like it just sort of like, I mean, I do have that [inaudible] just like floating around you know the universe right now but like, as far as like how I got here, like I don't remember. Just because people are like, oh, I've always wanted to live in New York, you know? And I just, I probably had that thought. I don't remember it. Um, but I knew that this is where I needed to come to not be where I was, and to do what I needed to do, because New York is, I grew up knowing that New York is the place you go when you're an artist. And so that was the plan.

Tennenbaum: Seems like it stuck.

Evan: Oh yeah. I keep trying to leave like every year, but it just keeps pulling mbe back in.

Tennenbaum: Do you know, are there any particular parts of New York specifically in the arts scene that you really gravitate to?

Evan: Nope. Um, what do you mean by arts scene?

Tennenbaum: Um, you were saying that like New York seemed to be a place to be an artist.

Evan: Okay.

Tennenbaum: Um, so there's—

Evan: Well, I mean, it's definitely changed over time. The longer I live here—also, New York is very different than what it was when I got here, you know? Like I used to love—like when you're in college, well, at least for my friends and I, we were here, you get to New York, it's new, you're a teenager, it's like you're no parents, you know, like if you're coming from a small suburb of Illinois like the frickin' world is your oyster and like everything is exciting and new and like, it being disgusting is okay, you know? And like, you don't have to worry about anything and just like, it was my experience. So I mean, we used to go to places, we use to go to the East Village a lot, we used to go to the West Village a lot. Um, like just—we used to hang out in the East Village a lot actually. Um, because it was grungy and like punk rock and weird. And now it's very paved. So it's just very different. Um, the West Village is still my favorite neighborhood in the whole city. I just find it just so beautiful and charming and, I mean, it's also different, you know? It's very sheshe, but like, which I'm okay with. Like I like that also. I can be a bit of a fancypants. But but just like the layout and the structure of it and the way like the cobblestone streets and the old houses, and anywhere that, anywhere I can go where I can really feel like the history of the city is like, my number—that's what fuels me, you know? And like we're you know, but now I have to be in like a special place to like appreciate the crazy, you know? Like on a day to day basis I'm like, get the fuck out of my way, you know? I hate you all. But sometimes I'm just like, this is really amazing. Like look at this energy, you know? So anywhere I could go, at the time particularly where I could feel that energy, you know, and like the novelty of like going to a coffee shop when you could smoke at the time anywhere, so like just sitting there for hours and just like people watching and drinking coffee and smoking and like, just, it was just freedom. Like it's so basic, but it was just freedom. And so like that's—the thing that fueled me the most was having a community of peers now, and like likeminded people that like were also excited to be here, you know? And, being part of a group and like socializing and staying out late and just like being your own person. Finding out who that was, but you're not doing that alone. It was really just, it was just total freedom. And then that coupled with the teenage feeling of invincibility. Like I've always been a very scared person, you know, but like there was definitely like a, you can't fight brain development, you know? Like teenagers are crazy and they're total morons and you know, I was just in that group, you know? Um but I was also sober. So I was not like taking the kind of risks that I would have taken if I wasn't sober, or that I would have taken if I wasn't sober, but the feeling of like, it was of just everything being new and New Yorkish and exciting was, you know, and that's the kind of thing. I love museums, I love galleries, but I also don't because it's just

there's so much out there that never gets seen, and those things are dictated by like a market that isn't even real, you know? So it's just like, ugh. But being exposed to these things like everywhere you go like seeing like world renown architecture and seeing world renown artists show their work at the show, like the things you would read about if you lived anywhere else, but you could go witness that you know and seeing, and things that you hear and things that you smell and taste, it just like was you know, it was like really a feast for the senses, and it was very inspiring. That's what, you know, and it helped me develop because of all of that, like everything was exciting, you know? And that's what [inaudible] did and like now I have to like work at that. [Laughter]. I have to like consciously make an effort for things to you know, but it's just different because I've lived here for so long now that just, I'm older, so. Um, but you know, I would go to, did a lot of galleries. We you know, I didn't go to a ton of shows or anything, like music shows I don't think here. I did that more at home, but I don't know, just going to galleries and just like sitting in restaurants and cafes and walking around the neighborhoods, that's pretty much, you know, and then like hanging out on campus.

Tennenbaum: When you first moved here in the early 2000s, were there any specific places or things you saw that really helped you feel like you were coming into a sense of identity?

Evan: Um, well, I had a girlfriend and was already coming into like that identity of being gay. But I didn't understand it. It wasn't a conscious thing for me. Um, when I got to Pratt, like I'm in recovery, and so I was at a meeting and—

Tennenbaum: From uh substance use?

Evan: Yeah. And so, like real young. And I was at a meeting and I was talking to someone, I just moved here, and I told them that I went to Pratt, and if they knew any young people that were sober or anyone, you know, whatever. And this person pointed me towards someone that went to my school who is still a dear friend of mine, but like, go find this person. And I was looking for her and looking for her, and it turns out she lived in my building like on the first floor, so I left her a note and uh at the time she was queer, and she came to my room and brought a trans guy, who was also sober. I didn't know anything about anything. I didn't even know about myself. Like I just like, and this is like one of those like, an example of like, like defining moments that like are not defined at all, because I have like, I was not a labeled person because I didn't get it and I was terrified. And it didn't feel that way either. Like, he asked me if I was trans. And I was like barely out as gay to myself. Like, out as a lesbian to myself. And I said, what? No! Like, I guess knowing enough to say no. I don't remember this at all, but like, this is what I was told. And I mean, I remember it a little bit but I don't remember knowing what that was, and I was like, I don't do labels. You know? I was like, this was like maybe a year or two after telling my mother that I was bi because I was too scared to like, go the distance if you will. And it was like, yeah, big surprise. Um, so uh there's that. So we hung out a bunch, and so I started like, and like it's art school, so everyone is gay and or like is for the moment, or just like a little kooky, you know? And so we just uh I don't know, I met people like in recovery here, young people, you know, and like started like everything shaped my identity, you know? It's not so much like it wasn't a gender thing for me as much as it was like a human thing, just becoming like just getting to know who I was and being

able to be who I was and that being okay. Um, because the gender thing and the sexuality thing didn't come into play until a little later because I just didn't understand. I just was not conscious if it, and it didn't feel like it was anything that needed to be addressed yet, I guess, because I was like oh I guess I'm just gay, but the thing is that like, I mean, and then of course like Pride was just like awesome, you know? I was like oh my God. You know? And just like meeting people that uh I don't remember, where the fuck did we even go? I don't even know, like, I didn't go to Meow Mix until way later, and then that closed. I went to Henrietta Hudson's a couple of times. Wasn't really my thing. Oh my God, yes! I remember. Okay, so I was in Brooklyn, so I went to Ginger's. I don't drink, but I went to Ginger's because you just go where the people are, and then a lot—and then, but there was this one bar on the corner of 5th Avenue and I think it was Sackett, and I can never remember the name of it, which is so sad because it really, that really shaped things. I would sit there and drink tea like a jackass, but it was like super cozy and they had open mics. And there was a bartender named Sheila, who is probably in her 40s at the time, or like late 30s, and I hope she never hears this because she'd probably be appalled that I think that she's much older than she probably was, but like, I had the biggest crush on Sheila. And she knew it, you know? But it was more of like a, there there, you know? [Laughter]. Okay, step away. Um, but she played music and I played music, so we played together and we played together with her friend Anna who played the cello, because they played together. And I didn't bring anyone there with me, I would just go and like, it wasn't a very hopping place. So I would do their open mics a lot and I would just sort of sit there and like be around Sheila and be like in a place where like that's okay. And it was so much fun. I mean, because there was just, there was nothing happening, but like there was so much happening, you know? It was like, it was part of just understanding what was happening around me, and with me, and you know, I was like, butch and she was butch, and like it was just like one of these like things. But I didn't understand that either. I didn't know that about myself. I knew it because that's what people told me. And that's what it felt like. And like I did take pride in that. Like for—there was definitely a period of time where I was very proud to be a woman. Um, not just because I hated men at the time, because I was envious, you know? But because I did—it was also like a father thing, you know? Yada, yada. But like, yeah, I had a lot of pride in it, and it felt empowering, it felt strong, it felt like that's why I was strong, you know? And like my mom and I were really close and like, my sister and my mom and I like, after I got sober, like, we like, I like thought of us as this like trifecta, you know? And, that fueled a lot. And so I went with that, and there was a time, I used to go to this café called Café Esperanto, which was on McDougal in the Village. I don't know when it went away, but it was owned by Israelis, and it was a great people watching place. You could smoke in there, and there was like those nasty, comfy, like vintage chairs that like, now as an adult I'm like, I would never sit on one of those things anywhere because I'm like, what has happened on this upholstery. Um, but you could just sit there and I would write like, I liked to write poems because I need to be as embarrassing as possible, and I would just sit there and write and just observe, and just be like my own little beatnik New York world person. And there was this woman that worked there who was gay, and she sat down at the table with me one day, because I was in there like all the time. I don't remember her name. It might have been Mejal, I'm not entirely sure. But I was wearing this, [Laughter], I was wearing this brown sweatervest with like a lime green-colored shirt underneath, because you know, that's awesome, and because it was stereotypically masculine to have that like, the weight of the sweatervest on my chest under a

collared shirt, that's what I pay attention to in, like I love like period pieces, I love like, like the 50s and the 60s and the 40s and the 30s and all that shit, you know? Like the romanticized, you know, the nostalgia for a time I never existed in, and god knows how I would exist in that time actually, but—I probably wouldn't. But so like that's you know, that stuff dictated you know, what I wore. And so she sat down at the table with me, and she like called me out as gay. I don't remember how she did it. It wasn't accusatory at all, but it was just like I remember her mentioning something about me being gay and butch. And we were like, you know, butches like us, or dykes like us, or whatever it was, and I was just like, what? Like, how does she know? And then I asked her, I'm like, how do you know that I'm butch? Like why do you think I'm butch? And she was like, are you kidding me? Like have you seen yourself? And I was just like, completely perplexed. And that's a very clear moment for me because it was such a disconnect from how I thought of myself. Truly thought of myself. Because I don't really think I thought of myself as anything. And so some time later like it finally occurred to me, I'm like, I didn't identify as a frickin' lesbian, like, I was a man. So like, that's why that never clicked for me. It was just like, oh, I guess this is what I am. Um, even though I had like pride in being a woman, some of that pride was just fear, you know? Not the type of sort of thing you know obviously like, but for my story as someone who doesn't identify as a woman, like that was—part of that was there was fear wrapped up in that. Um, so that was kind of a turning point for me that stuck out just because that was the first time I figured out or found out that a stranger, someone that I never like, that I didn't have a relationship with in my daily life like could like clock me. Um, so that was weird. Um, but yeah, I mostly, what was the question? [Laughter]. Who cares. Um, so [coughs] so places like that were freeing for me, and it wasn't just because of like—I didn't go places all the time because it was queer. I went because it was young and fun. And like, dirty. At that time. Like, as I came into my own, I started going to places that were queer. You know. And or like just hanging out with the gays. So but yeah, I mean, as someone who doesn't drink, I did not, like a lot of this stuff takes place in bars. Um, which is fine, obviously. Um, but I don't remember like at that time I don't remember like really taking part in that so much. I was more of a coffee shop person. Just so that I wouldn't have to like, do nothing, you know. Because I didn't really want to hang out in bars unless we were like going dancing or something, or it happens, but yeah. When I wanted to be, I liked to explore alone also. So when I wanted to like ruminate on things like I would be in a coffee shop, most likely Esperanto's.

Tennenbaum: Was Esperanto like a queer coffee shop, or just kind of [inaudible]—

Evan: No, just Village, yeah. There was a mix for sure. Just cozy, and you could smoke. Yeah.

Tennenbaum: You mentioned that Pride was really fun. Is there a specific Pride you remember, and anything that made it special?

Evan: I remember a Dyke March where I took my shirt off and was walking around with my shirt off. And I didn't want—I was conscious of the fact that I didn't want to show my breasts, but I also was conscious of the fact more so, it was more important to me to be walking around without a shirt on in public. It was like super freeing. I mean, and also everyone around you is doing it so like I wasn't like drawing attention to myself so much. And of course I ran into someone I knew

that like, this was actually, this might have been when I came out as trans, like after I came out as trans. Um—

Tennenbaum: What year was this?

Evan: Yes, it was. I think it was 2003. It was vec I ran into someone I knew from before, and I wasn't transitioned or anything, but I had a new name and I told her what it was and she was like, Heather? Heaven? And I was like no, because it's loud and everyone, that's happened before. But like, that was memorable. I remember, I mean, I just remember like the hubbub. I remember, I don't remember which Pride it was kind of thing. Like I remember moments. Like, funny moments or like, pictures I've taken, you know? I also remember it being way too crowded and hot, so I don't go anymore. I just can't deal with New York parades in the summer, or New York parades in general. But, unfortunately. So sorry. Um, but yeah, that was a moment. And I also remember when I was rocking with some friends and I turn around and all of the sudden one of my friends is missing and she's on the ground because she stepped in a pothole. So like, moments like that, you know? Like it was just like, I remember like laughing hysterically, and [Laughter], moron. Actually this was the friend from Pratt who came and found me. Um, [Laughter]. It was classic. Oh, dumb-dumb. So I mean, I just remember it being freeing, I remember looking around and just like seeing all these gorgeous people and feeling like, I was single, so like feeling like, all the opportunity was there kind of thing. I remember being somewhere near the Pier Dance at some point and realizing that this is not my scene. I remember taking this fricking awesome picture of this drag queen fanning herself on a curb. It was a Polaroid, and it's one of my favorite pictures today, which is like, probably 15 years ago. I don't know. I just remember just being exciting. Everything was exciting.

Tennenbaum: Were there any like specific parts of queer culture that you would observe and be especially fascinated about or want to know like what the inner workings were?

Evan: Hmm. I don't remember. I think everything sort of, I don't think anything stood out. Well, yes. The, for me, because of who I am, the masculinity of being in a lesbian bar and it being like, even though it's a lesbian bar like having the gender roles be more clear. Not gender roles, but I like, like butch and femme. Like the butch and femme culture was something I could really get behind because it allowed me to be as masculine as I wanted. Yeah. And it also played into this like fantasy of for me like being a man, but also like the bar culture, because I don't drink, and it was like, it looked like that was—that was actually a big problem for me when I transitioned because I, so much of this culture, and also like so much of like stereotypical like manhood like you know is like having a beer at the bar kind of thing, and like that was very challenging. I felt like I couldn't be a full man without doing that. I didn't do it, but it was a struggle for awhile. Um, but just the ability to be as masculine, like to present as masculine as I wanted and have that be attractive to somebody was a first. Because of course like growing up, like none of the boys wanted to date me, and I liked boys at the time, you know? I liked girls too. Um, but that was like sort of faux pas. So being able to be attractive to people was a new joy. Um, so that gave me a kind of confidence that I hadn't experienced ever. Um ah well, the later years of my high school I experienced that kind of confidence as well because I started dating a girl and like, I had gotten

sober and I was happy and caring way less about what people thought of me, and that was freedom also. But it was still in my town, it was still new to me and scary and undefined, and just felt right. But I didn't know what that was. But yeah, I would say like the butch/femme thing, that I could get behind. Because it just also like, what's the word? Well it felt like uh like roleplay in real life, and, in a way that doesn't go away. Like this is like a thing, and so it also like, I can't think of the word, but uh, yes, it validated my masculinity for sure. And like, the femme, the relationship with the femme validated my masculinity and like, their identity, like we like played into that with each other kind of thing. So it's what I always wanted.

Tennenbaum: Do you want to talk at all about when you started identifying with trans, if you did at the time? Um, you said it was after you came out as trans in 2003, or we can just move on to talk about your art and Pratt.

Evan: Well, I mean, they kind of go, well I mean I can talk about the trans thing because they kind of go hand in hand. So like basically like the bar I was just thinking of, I think it was called Sisters. It was in Portland, Maine. I had friends in Maine so we would go there and hang out, and I [coughs]—alright. So I always think this is so stupid, it just sounds like so trite, but like we were there for New Year's, me and my friend from college, we were there for New Year's, and you know, with some lesbians, our friends, and we went to this lesbian bar and we were going to like do New Year's there and me and my friend Nikki decided to buy suits at the Salvation Army for it, and I have never—it was my first suit. It was a navy pinstripe three-piece suit, it fit like a glove, and I had never felt so happy. I was like, this is like, I can't believe I can actually do this. I was so happy that I called my mother to tell her how excited I was about it and she fucking lost it. Uh, so that was a rough one. Uh like we got into a big fight over the phone on New Year's Eve. Um, because I think her denial was crashing down as well. And I can't remember—actually hold on. There is, okay, let me back up for a minute. So prior to that New Year's, at Thanksgiving, I started reading Stone Butch Blues. And, I started, I was taking the train, the G train, to whatever fucking airport that takes you to, I think LaGuardia or something. It was like in the morning. And I have—I'm not a stranger to being called out in public at the time for like what I look like because I was living in-between, well, not consciously, but whatever. So this like drunk guy on the train, it was like 9:00 in the morning, so uh and he was like wasted and he is very loud and he's like boisterous and all over the place, and then he looks at me and he's like wait, I've got to figure—are you a man or a woman? I've got to figure this out. And he comes and sits right next to me and like reeks and like, he like tries to put his hand on my leg and I'm like, don't touch me. And he's like, okay. And he like, verbally is trying to figure me out. And so that's a train ride. And then I get to the airport and I start reading Stone Butch Blues, and I like that changed everything for me, because it completely, I completely identify with all of it. And it completely explained like, my sex life. And it completely explained like what I could not possibly articulate, uh, I was so—my mother and I are like, best friends. So like whenever I get excited about something like in like I mean now I'm married so it's like I don't go run and tell my mom you know like every time, but like I still tell her like a lot of stuff, but like, we used to talk all the time and like, or I mean more than we do now, and just because you know, I have a wife and I tell her that stuff first. So mostly. Um anyhow, [Laughter]. I like dropped my [inaudible], I just fell asleep in my brain. It was just like, mouth moving, brain done. Let's just see where this goes. Yada, yada, yada. Okay, so I'm in the car, she

picked me up from the airport, I'm in the car in Chicago, and I'm like, I start telling her about this book like immediately. I can't stop, like I can't help myself, like you won't even believe this book that I've been reading. It's amazing. It's so fucking good. I totally relate. And of course this poor woman is like huh, alright. And so I'm reading it in my room at night and she comes in to say goodnight or whatever, and she looks at the cover—no, I show her the cover, I show her the book, and I show her the back cover like this is the person that wrote it, and she looks at the picture, and she asks me if this is how I identify. I was like no, no, no, no, no, no—like, actually. She's like, is this what you want to look like? Not in like, an accusatory way at all, like just generally curious, like asking me flat out is this what you want to look like? I was like no, of course not, no, no, no, no, no. But you know, blah, blah, blah. I'm explaining the whole book to her. And she's you know, humoring me and everything like that, and she's always been like my champion. She's very supportive, like I'm super fucking blessed. Um, but there's, you know, it's scary, and it's you know, weird, you know, for a parent who is not used to this or exposed to it to like, see something going on that you don't understand, you know, but you kind of knew it, like you get to fight this like, she knew from day one but like, she had to fight this thing. And also like we didn't really have—it was different then. Like we just didn't—it's not that long ago, but like it was things now are very different than they were before and we didn't have uh the resources that we do now. And, so uh, and it's just also like one more thing, like it's scary, I can't imagine how scary it is for a parent to like know that your child, who your child is also like makes them a target. And like leads a potential, like a life of uncertainty and danger. Um, that being said, we all live a life of uncertainty and danger, but it's just like, quite blatant, you know, when you're different. Um, so [coughs] so I read that book. And then the New Year's thing happened, I was wearing the suit, whatever, and I started getting these panic attacks [clears throat] because I'd never had one before. I felt very sick, and I didn't know what was happening. And, sorry. Um, that went on for like a couple of months, and I came home from that trip, oh yeah, I was dating this butch woman in Portland because why date someone in your own city? At the time, and I didn't know anything really about, trans was not on my radar. I just knew that like, this whole thing felt right, and I didn't know why I was having panic attacks. And so I was talking to her on the phone. This was [sighs] I think this was in February, because I was in Lake Forest, and I was on the phone with her, everyone in the house was asleep, I was downstairs watching TV by myself, and we're talking on the phone and we were talking about this, and she's like, do you think you're trans? Or like started talking about it in a certain way, and I was like, I don't remember what I said, but she's like let me tell you—she wanted to tell me about a couple of friends she has in Portland. And she described these two people, they were trans guys, and everything she was saying to me I was like, yes, like that's me. That's me, that's me. Like, yeah, I completely got it and I completely identify with that, and I was so mad, I was so fucking pissed that like, really, like this? One more fucking thing that I have to like, it has to be some sort of hurdle, like this fucking thing? I was like, first of all I was like, I don't like men, why would I want to be one? And I was just angry. But it completely made sense. And so she like told me how to get in touch with them. She was like, if you want [clears throat] you know, they're on Livejournal. Livejournal plays a big part in my transition because it was a place where you could like go basically online and do your Livejournaling, but there's like you know communities and so I'd join these communities and that's how I met people who were also queer and trans. And without, so she gave me their like Livejournal thing, or their e-mail addresses, actually. And I wrote to both of them, like these like

long e-mails, and I heard back from—the person I actually heard back from is not the person I'm friends with today. I'm friends with the other one. And that person pointed me towards like a community on Livejournal, and that night just like fucking changed my life. And like, so side note, like I have a thing with the constellation Orion, and, like whatever. I did this project in 6th grade on the constellations in like glitter, glue, and like black poster board and it was all pretty and whatever. But so like, I don't remember all the constellations. Orion was like, one that I could always find in the sky, aside from the Dippers, you know, that I knew where it was. So like I made a thing, like after I did that project, I made a thing where every night before I go to bed I'd look out my window and find Orion and I could go to sleep. It became a little bit of a ritual for me. As my life started to unravel with like the drugs and all that crap, like I eventually stopped looking for Orion. Like that wasn't my thing anymore, like wasn't a priority. Like I would like go outside in my pajamas if I couldn't find it out my window. Like it was that—it became like a habit or a twitch almost, it was just like I had to do this thing. And so as my life started to like, fall apart a little bit, and you know, junior high age and whatever and into high school, I just stopped looking for Orion, and I hadn't seen Orion in a long time. And when I got sober really young, I was three months sober, and I was hanging out with my sober buddies, and we were walking in some field because it's Illinois, and I looked up at the sky, and there was Orion, and I've been able to find Orion ever since. And so he's kind of like my like higher power. He's part of that equation of like the universe for me. And and so I went out that night that I talked to my girlfriend at the time and I was like, really just damnit, you know? I went outside and I looked up and I saw Orion, but I had never seen Orion in like the full constellation, like with the bow, or is it the lion? I've seen different drawings. But like, the entire thing. And like, I felt this like incredible hug, and like it just felt like I could breathe, and like it was going to be okay. And that's when I went downstairs and I wrote the e-mail, e-mails, and that kind of started this thing. Like I hooked up with people or connected with them on Livejournal, and someone was like, we meet at the Boiler Room on 2nd and B? No, I don't remember, where is it? 7th and B or 7th and A, or 2nd and frickin', I don't know what the fuck, uh, that place was disgusting, but it was perfect. Like we'd meet at the Boiler Room every Wednesday night, and, you should come, and I did, and that's what started. I wasn't—I didn't have a new name yet, I didn't know how to identify yet, I wasn't doing anything yet. It was very new. Uh, I met someone there who identified as you know with male pronouns and a male name but wasn't interested in physically transitioning, and that was something I could get behind because what the fuck does that mean, and that was scary, like I wasn't ready because it was like day two, and I didn't want to hear about like this is your path. Like now you have to become a man physically, you know? Like I wasn't ready to hear that yet. And so—that would have scared me away. So this person really fucking helped me with that. That person was super important to my development because it allowed me to not be boxed into something. And that was their whole thing, like, why would I want to be boxed into a gender if I'm not, you know, if I don't relate to the one that I was born into, like why would I want to like become another one kind of thing. So that made sense to me, at the time. So we would play pool and like get hit on by all the dirty old gay men and you know, whatever, and also called out a lot, like, just, it was not a totally safe place—it was safe, but it wasn't like, it wasn't totally safe. Um—

Tennenbaum: Did the bartenders ever intervene?

Evan: No, it never got physical, but it was like outside, like smoking outside, because that's when the smoking ban happened I think. And so clearly, unfortunately cigarettes are a huge part of my life. [Laughter]. Um, but it's also like part of this like culture of being young and like, you know, don't tell me what to do. But we would go outside and smoke. Actually no, you could smoke in there. It was fucking nasty as hell. But we were outside, and we would stand guard at the bathrooms because you know, bar bathrooms are really gross and also like, don't always have locking doors. Um and like sometimes we would get like, heckled a little bit. Um, but we were a group, and that was actually a really good intro to what life was going to be like for the next couple of years. Um, but I didn't care because I was happy, and like I like was home again at some point and I decided to tell my childhood friends, we were out for coffee and you know she was like, cool, that makes sense, you know, whatever, of course. And that's when I started like, trying on a name for myself. And it didn't stick. Like I had her call me it and I just didn't relate to it. It was like a week—I was Jack for a week. And, it didn't make any sense to me. And the first time that I, like when I started like going by Evan, it like, it took me a little bit to get used to, I went out for these trans friends, we went ice skating in Prospect Park, and there was a girl there that—I introduced myself to this, there was a girl there that I introduced myself to because I didn't know her, I thought. I said hi—okay, so in my calendar, I, like, in my little planner or whatever, like I wrote like down for our plans I said like, I wrote it down as Evan at 7:00, because at 7:00 I was going to be Evan. Because the rest of the day I was not. And so we go ice skating and I say—I introduce myself, I say hi, I'm, and then tell her my original name, my born name, and I said no, no, I mean Evan. And from telling her my born name, she recognized me from my first job in Illinois at Borders. We worked together. Apparently. And she looked very different. She had lost a ton of weight, she cut her hair short and it was like fire engine red. I was like, I couldn't pick her out of a line-up, I don't know. But like, she remembered me. And it was like, of course. Of fucking course, you know these people, I just like, accidentally came out to you like twice, just in once sentence kind of thing. And you know me, and I mean, it was hilarious. She was going to NYU or something, as everyone does apparently. And so that was just super fucking weird, but that's kind of like, that was my life, like Evan at 7:00 was kind of like how that went for a little while. Um and so like it was, everything was gradual but also very quick. I turned the corner real quick. Um, uh, like I started you know trying to do the male pronouns thing and that was—I was very self-conscious about that and it felt kind of weird because I felt like I was like embarrassed a little bit. Not with them, but with everyone else. And that was a hard transition for some people because I'm a dramatic person. So like some people thought I was just being dramatic again, you know? Um and uh I took a break from those people. We're best friends today, but I took a break from those people at the time because I needed to be taken seriously. And but I also had like a large community at this point of queers and trans people and people that like I just, that understood. And so like I just, even like aside from like that, I just, and I hung out with them the most. Like that's the thing, like I sort of like, spent most of my time doing that. And still in college, I think this was like sophomore year of college or something, and I don't know, no, it was junior year. Um, uh, lost my train of thought.

Tennenbaum: What kind of art were you making at that point in time?

Evan: Great transition. So, that semester that I came out, I have never done so well in school in my life. Like I just threw myself into art. I mean, I was in art school, but like I threw myself into myself in a way that like, it was therapy for me. So I was doing, ugh, I hate talking about this because it sounds so fucking cliché, but I was like doing like a lot of gender crap with my camera, and, a lot of self-portraits because I was gearing up for my senior thesis that—was this [mumbling]—I was just working a lot. I was making a lot of art. And then so I my senior thesis was like a timeline. It was called, well, okay. So later in the year I decided that I wanted to get surgery, and I had already lived for a year I think—no, that can't be true. No, I hadn't lived for a year yet as a male, but it was October and I decided that I wanted to get surgery. Of course I told my mother and she like cried for like six months and like, we did like a bunch of fundraisers in the city. Like people weren't really doing that yet, so like I feel like we paved the way for the fundraising. We had like four fundraisers, events, like Books for Boobies and uh what was it? There was this one main event at The Center called Take My Breasts Away. [Singing] Take my breasts away. And there was like a play and there was like auctions and yada, yada, and people showed up that I didn't know, and it was really moving. It was amazing, and like there was a house boy auction at the Slipper Room, and [Laughter] my friend [inaudible] dance. I don't think anybody cashed in on their winnings, but we made a lot of mm that night, and that's what paid for my surgery. And but the point is like that started like in the fall, and I had surgery the following march. And I was working on my thesis at the time because my thesis was going to be about re-living puberty again, and my thing is that I think it's because I'm hungry that I'm not like super funny today and also because I'm like talking about this, but like, I'm a funny person, and I have found that it is crucial to keep a sense of humor during this, otherwise you may kill yourself. Like it just, you have to find it funny. Like this has to be hilarious in some form. And so of course puberty is the worst time of anyone's life, at least it was for me, and I had to repeat it by coming out, and uh I looked like a 12 year old boy, and I acted like a 12 year old boy, and uh, then of course when I physically transitioned like, I felt like a 12 year old boy, and my body was behaving that way also. And so I did this series called Reclaiming Puberty, and it was a, like the first several shots were just like blown up snapshots from my childhood from like toddler to like prom. And then there's a couple shots in-between and then like I re-do the whole thing as now. And so I actually don't like those photographs anymore because I just don't like them, but they were really good for where I was at that point in time, and I wanted to end, I wanted there to be a photograph of me in the bathtub like as a little kid. And I timed the surgery that way so I could finish my thesis having had surgery so I could take the photograph. So I mean, obviously I would have done it anyway, but I kind of SpEd myself along and was like, my friends were like definitely egging me on, you know? This was not a solo mission. Um, but I did it, and I mean, it was super freeing. I've never been happier, and my mother stopped crying after I came out of surgery, you know? Uh that was sort of like okay, this is a thing. I mean, Jesus Christ, how fucking scary is it that your 20 year old kid, like the parents that like, like the kids—kids today—um, they're like coming out so young and they're like transitioning, like I cannot imagine, even as a trans person, like being that parent. Like what is going through their head? Like, I don't know what I would do. Even as someone who is trans and who is like, all for like being yourself and doing what you have to do to survive and like be happy. Like, fuck, it is so scary, and especially when your kid is dramatic already, and when your kid is like, a teenager in their brain, you know? Like you're making a life-altering decision forever. Well, they can always put them back, but you are making very serious

decisions, serious and expensive decisions. Medical decisions. And like, holy shit, and you don't know what you're walking into. You don't know what you are unraveling. And how like—you just don't know anything. And, I just can't imagine what was going through her head, but I think a lot of it was relief, because she knew already. And it was really important to me like, you know, as a Jewish boy I seek my mother's approval quite a bit, and like, it was really important to me for like us to be okay. My dad and I were not okay. We're okay today. It took him a very long time. Um, he definitely treated me like the son he never had, and then once I became that it was not okay. Um, so that was confusing. Um, but actually my sister really stood up for me in that way. I used to treat her like crap, but she's always been my champion, and, again, we're okay now, but you know, she said like you know, there was a time where you wanted to take all of him away from us. Like, now he's only taking a part away, you know? And that [clears throat] shut him up. So that was pretty amazing. Um, so I did the surgery, I knew I was going to talk about that, but that's what I did, whatever. And uh, I came out of there, I did my, I finished my show, I ended up getting a solo show from that thesis at a gallery, like I sent out the postcards they tell you to send out, and I sent the—the picture I sent out had a fucking like, I had a cock on, you know? Like I had a dildo on and like, was topless and it's much prettier than what it sounds like, right? Better than what it sounds like. Like I don't like—here's the thing. I did not want to have—I didn't want to do another series, no offence to anybody what so ever, I didn't want to do another series where it's like dramatic and like painful and like, melodramatic, like [sobbing noises] like look at me like giving myself a shot of hormones, whatever, like I couldn't do that because it's already been done, and it's not what I was feeling, and I just didn't like it. Like I didn't want to be like another like painful, sad voice in this experience. Like, I have to like, survival is like, survival is hilarious. So like, it has to be something else. And so we—damn! I'm a yapper. Um, so I did it that way. So I sent out the postcards and they gave me a show and I got a New York Times review and like it was awesome, and I hadn't graduated college yet, you know, so that's kind of—that was a blessing and a curse because I was like, oh, this is how it's going to be, fantastic! I'll just ride that wave for a little too long. I definitely—one of my only regrets in life is not finishing another series on identity as well, but not gender-wise, and because it was also timed perfectly. Because this also happened to coincide when these things started to come out a little bit in the art world, and so it was perfectly timed by accident. And my other series would have also been perfectly timed by accident, and I just didn't finish it and I feel like, you know, maybe I could have done something. Whatever, I digress. Um so from that, so I was out. Like that was a thing. Like I got a lot of press, and so like, it was public now. Um and so that started to sort of define me a little bit. And not that I was like being recognized in the street or anything like that, but like my body was out there, and my identity was out there, and pictures that I don't want to look at ever again were out there, you know? And so uh, but it was fine. It was so fucking exciting. And from that show, I got like a couple years later like one of my professors from Pratt who wasn't even actually my professor there, but she teaches photo and she was friends from this like curator in Italy and he was doing a show on, uh, it was called Otrofamilia. It was Other Families. Just like identity and like, all this stuff, and she recommended my work to him. And so I met him at Leslie Loman's apartment, and which was like, wall to wall incredible fucking Robert Maplethorpe photographs and like all this shit, and it was amazing. And I showed him my work, his name was Peter Vermar, and he loved it and he put me in, he put the whole series in this group show in Torino, Italy at the Palazzo Cavour, and I was, my show was in the room next door to Nan Golden's show, and I was

like, fuck me. Like this was like, [Laughter] what the fuck? Like on the same banner as her and everything. And she's definitely like, a huge, you know, inspiration obviously. And so that was incredible. And so, and that got press and so this started to take a life of its own a little bit. Um, but to be perfectly, like, this was always just about being honest. Like, my work started to become more honest, and like that became the thing that I had to stick to. Like, the thing that makes, because everything has been done, and like, at this point gender and identity is all over the place, which is wonderful, but also very challenging because like it's really hard to like have your voice heard, it's hard to have your voice heard when no one is talking about it because no one wants to hear it or needs to hear it or whatever, but it's also very hard to have your voice heard when it's like drowned out by all these other voices. Um, so that's just me being selfish and like wanting to like be noticed for my art like fucking everyone else does. Um, so uh and I hadn't yet come across the point where I was like, oh man that person already did that. Like that wasn't a thing yet. Um at least to my knowledge. So I know that I have to do things differently and take a different approach and for me that meant like a certain level of like honesty and reflection and you know, that I'm sure other people bring to their work also, but it's just, everyone's work is different. Like just because like one person's work might seem cliché to another person, but it's that person's truth, you know? So like, that's beautiful. And my work probably seems cliché to other people, you know, but this is my truth. So it was just about living in my truth and really just finding out like, and just, but everything is very exposing. And so I took a break from me for the first time in my life and never again, and decided to—oh yeah! So that's—you know, I have to take a break actually. [Laughter]. Oh yeah! Stay tuned.

Tennenbaum: Boop.

Evan: And we're back. So, so the project that I didn't finish that I regret not finishing, it was about vices. And it was about, I was trying to recreate sorry, the cat is smelling your bag. I apologize. He is going to explore. Um, he's fine. Um so I was recreating you know like Renaissance masterpiece paintings with people like immersed in their vices. And at the time there happened to be like, a little bit—around the time where I could have finished it, there was this explosion of recreations of masterpiece paintings in the galleries. So I—it still hurts. Um, but also that goes to show how fickle the art market is, because it's like, I'm not creating things because of like themes or whatever. It's like whatever people are looking at at the time, that's what's dictating who's being seen, you know? So it's whatever. Uh but that's also helped me a lot too, so it is what it is. Anyway, so I put, [Laughter], this is ridiculous, but I put out a Craigslist posting for some, like for a subject, for you know, for people to be in this project. Like a crazy person, because Craigslist is horrific, and so when it comes to like looking for people. Um, for anything. You know, there's so many creeps. But this woman reached out to me, I don't know, I don't remember if she was trans. I think she was. But she was, or I don't remember how she identified specifically, but she identified herself as a woman, she was, I guess a trans woman or she was a crossdresser, and she, I was going to do, like, uh, I don't want to name the painting because I think I might get it wrong and that would be embarrassing because I went to art school. Um, but I was going to recreate this painting uh with her. So I met up with her, and she had me, we met at this bar, [Laughter], Katie. Good job buddy. We met at this bar in Midtown, and then she took me to this garden apartment, I think it was 40th or 41st, and on the West Side, and—where her stuff was or

where we could—oh, because she was taking me to a place where we could maybe take the picture. And the door opens, and it is an apartment full of crossdressers. And I was like, [Laughter], fuck yes, like jackpot. Um, [Laughter]. It was one of those like New York moments that you see in the movies, and I was like what the fuck is this? This is phenomenal. Um, this woman named well, I think she was going by Madeline at the—Marilyn at the time. Was it Madeline? I think she's Cleo now. Anyhoo, she opens the door. Everyone there is sweet as pie, middle aged to older people, not a party scene, just hanging. Just hanging out, crossdressing. And I went there, I didn't have a camera with me, I went there and we hung out for awhile, and I never ended up photographing her. Um, but I went back to the apartment because I asked if I could come back with my camera, and I told them I was trans and you know, I'm not just some like creep like whatever. And they were like kind of like fawning on me because I'm like young and a guy and they're all like woah, you know? But super, [Laughter], some were just like super filthy you know but like adorable. Just amazing. Amazing people. So I went back, and this was, they met on Wednesday nights, again, I don't know what it is about Wednesday but another Wednesday night situation. Every Wednesday night after dinner I would go there and photograph them and hang out. And we would go, there was a bar down the street that we would go to for them to play pool and hang out and you could throw your peanut shells on the ground which is fun. And the fucking courage these people have just like blew my mind, because it's really, really hard to pass, uh, male to female. And it was definitely a window into my privilege. I do pass, like people don't know. And I, which is all I ever wanted. Um, oh, sorry, backtrack again. Side note that after the surgery, I was like, I'm never going to take hormones. I had the surgery, I did not have a man's chest. I just was minus some boobs. So, that didn't sit well with me so much, so I went on them like for like just like six months or whatever. So like it's been 13 years, you know? Um, so it started to work out for me, and then I finished, for the show that I had at the gallery, the Schroeder Romero Gallery, in Williamsburg at the time, uh, the show continued into like, prom. It finished with prom. Um, so I was physically transitioned at this point. And so these people are not trans. A couple, maybe, like one of them I think—a couple of them were. Um, but gay, straight, married, not married, just ladies on the town. And so we would walk to this bar, and it's like, I mean, the West Side of Midtown is not the way it used to be, but it's not great. And we would just—it was night time, we were walking down the street, they're like in their fur and heels and shit, and like you know, so confident. And I was, I was afraid, because also like, I'm in the group now, you know? And I'm not afraid for myself. I just became very conscious of other people. And I became very conscious again for the first time in awhile which is my privilege of being looked at in a way of confusion and disgust and like just, you know, whatever. But not from everybody. But it didn't matter. I noticed everything. We go to this bar and play pool, and I was just with them and I had my camera, and I didn't want it to be like a whole like, we're not shooting anything, you know, whatever. So I tried to be as ambiguous as possible. One night we walk into this bar and I see a girl from my high school. Like, and I'm Evan, and we're not in touch. We weren't really friends. Some rando bar on the West Side of Midtown, I see a girl from my fucking high school in Lake Forest, Illinois, and she looks at me and then she looks at them—or she looks at them and then she looks at me and she's like, hmm. Like, I know you guys can't see my face, but she was sort of like, trying to have a moment with me of like, ugh. Um, or like, an ugh and like, what? And that's when I noticed who she was and I was like, oh my God. And it was almost—but it was kind of a triumph moment for me also. I was sad for them, and I don't think, like I'm just projecting, like

they could care less, but like, well I don't know. But they didn't notice, but I was like, if you fucking knew who I was—and that's like, those are the kinds of moments that I've had for my, forever since I transitioned. Like since I've started passing, like I've been privy to disgusting conversations with guys like, moments of like, moments that I used to have, seeing that happen with other people, and like if you fucking knew who I was, this would be a completely different moment for you. And just sort of being like fly on the wall situation, you know? Um because then there's that conundrum of like having to protect myself. And that was, that sort of segues into like the other thing that I really want to talk about that I will in a minute, but so I was photographing them a lot, and I wasn't photographing them getting dressed, I wasn't photographing them putting their makeup on, I wasn't photographing them like [sighs] putting their wigs on, you know, whatever. Like I was just photographing them being in this apartment and like being like, just existing as themselves, and like, yes, there is tons of irony in the photographs, and there is one picture where this, one of the women, Brittany, is pulling up like her stockings and, but it's awesome, and she's got these like bulging biceps and I'm like yeah, haha, it's not a haha moment, it's just like it's very authentic, and portraits, and like yes, I do play with what they have, but I also don't. Like these are like, these are just like classy old New York ladies, you know? And like they're beautiful people. They're fucking beautiful. And sometimes someone would come in, like one of them had, this woman Amy has a wife who is incredibly supportive, and they like, shop together, they share makeup, you know, like whatever, it's incredible. And so her wife came in and like did like a make-up lesson with them. And, so that would happen every now and then, and they'd have like an annual like Halloween dance, or dinner, we'd go out to a restaurant and like they had like little events, and it was just like—it was such a treat. Um, my other regret is I sort of fell out. Like I did my series and I kept shooting them a little bit, but then like over the years I've sort of fallen off, you know? And for my birthday they gave me a camera bag, because they—I'd always bring my camera in like something else, or not, you know, because I didn't want to schlep. I just had like my camera and my flash. And it was just like, it was so sweet. And I, the series became a show, and uh at several places, and they would come and I made a book, like to self-publish it, whatever. Like I gave them one, and they were really, okay, they were really—the most important thing for me was to represent them properly. Um, because there's nothing like being like, again, the word escapes me but I think someone knows what I'm talking about. Um, so yeah, and they loved it. They loved the photographs. Of course they were very critical of their own portraits and whatnot, but like there's a Polaroid over there of Billie Mae, this one over there, these are framed terribly, unfortunately. They're wobbly, but and then Ashley next to the bigger one there, and they're just like people. And so the show was called—the series is pretentiously called Women Et Homme, which is great when you're reading it, but it's like Women at Home, and then like Women and Men. Because they don't necessarily identify as men—or women—all the time, you know? It was like hanging out with like, 30 Jewish grandmas. It was great. Um, because they would just dote on you and they were like very—and they're not grandmas, they're not that old, but like, you know, but they're sweet as pie. And I actually ran into one of them who did transition, I hadn't seen her in many years, and I ran into her at Bryn's memorial. And I cannot find her contact information for the life of me, which is very sad. But so I did that, and that like, I was in a group show at Fredrica Taylor Gallery, which was really fucking amazing and like, in a group show at [inaudible] Gallery, and, like in a bunch of group shows at like Leslie Loman and had a solo show at a gallery in Brooklyn at the time that was Pep, and that's the one they came to, and [sighs] I

love those photographs. Um, but the thing that became, like I kind of took a break for awhile from making art. And after that, and uh, I recently did a series, I recently had a show at Postmaster's Gallery in October. Um, that also got press, it was written, there was an article on trans art in The Guardian, like I guess last year or whatever it was, and it was in there which was cool. Um, but the point of that show is what I was talking about is what—so as I told you when you got here is that I've been having—I was under the radar for about 10 years, and it started to really grate on me. It's all I ever wanted is what I thought was to just, you know, I transitioned, I blend in, now I can focus on the rest of my life. And the issue that I got to with that was that I don't know how to relate to other men a lot because there are—I constantly feel like I'm putting on a show, even if I'm not saying anything. Like I constantly feel like I'm a fraud. And that's my own brain. That's not anyone else telling me anything. Whether they know or not. It's like, it doesn't—no one cares, you know? And so you know, having relationships with guys that are not trans that are just being themselves, like there's a lot that I don't relate to. And there's a bond that they may have that I don't feel like I have with them. Um, that doesn't always have to do with me being trans, that sometimes has to do with the relationship or how I perceive a relationship, you know? That's the other thing. Like, perception is quite skewed in a lot of ways sometimes, and so, because I'm very self-conscious about these things. Like that self-consciousness did not go away. I think about everything still. Like whenever I go into the bathroom like I think about it. You know? I think about the way my feet are pointing in the stall, I think about like can they hear the toilet paper? Can they, you know, I think about, you know, the fact that I can't talk about like, [Laughter], this is going to sound ridiculous, like at work I can't complain about the bathroom situation at work because there's only so many stalls and they're always taken, so like, I've got to hold it. But I can't like, say that, because they'll be like, why not just go into a urinal, like why are you going to a stall? Like all that shit, and you know, I can't, I have to play along when I like am saying like, you know, my wife and I are trying to get pregnant, you know? Like I can't talk about how expensive it is and how like, it's fucking devastating that we can't do it the way I want to do it, and that like we you know that you know, I don't care that other people have to do it, you know? That like, heterosexual couples also have to do it this way sometimes, you know? Or a lot of people do or whatever, like I don't care. Like it just, it fucking sucks. And so that's where I'm at right now. And so like, that resentment towards men has come back, because of like, trying to get pregnant. And, that like this depression and feeling not a part of kind of came back because I felt like I was, I still couldn't get there. Like I was still, I'm identifying as male for so long, and it became very evident to me that I'm trans. And like, the way that I defined it in my head was like, not quite. Like, in the middle. Like, and where I used to see it as a huge gift, like of being able to have this superiorly unique perspective and experience in life where I was afforded the opportunity to live in two completely different ways is incredible. Like who gets, like, there's not many of us that get to do that. Um, there's a lot of trans people who never get to do that. And because they can't transition, you know? And like, or they don't make it, you know? And like so I was, it's a fucking gift, and it has defined who I am and who uh what I bring to the table and what I bring to like in every circumstance, and it defines like my level of empathy and you know honesty and like the character traits that I forget a lot about myself that are really positive, like this is like it just, it can be a gift, but so often it is such a fucking burden, because we don't live in a society that allows for it, and I don't live in, my brain is not a society that allows for it a lot of the time, because I want so badly to not have to think about it, and I

want so badly to fit in, and I want so badly to connect. And I will allow myself to forget, to miss the connection I already have because I'm worried about the connections that I—over things that I don't have. And that's my personality. But it's, I think, but it's a common experience from what I've heard. At least from people I've spoken to. Um, so that started to really fuck with me, and I felt like I didn't know like, I would say things and it like, I felt like I wasn't allowed to say like, if I would get called out on something but like, but that guy said it, why, you know, like why is your relationship different than my relationship with you? And like everyone's relationships are different, but I was taking it so personally in the way that, in this way, instead of seeing it for what it really is that I give a different, I give a different male relationship to all the guys that are in my life, whether they know it or not, because if we get past small talk, like who I am allows them to be someone that they may not be able to be with other guys. Um, but then I start seeing it as like, well, good for fucking you. Like, where's mine, you know? I'm so glad that you can feel better, but like, I like, it becomes like part of the whole like, I don't want to be a teacher anymore, I don't want to educate my doctors and I don't want to educate anyone in my life anymore about like what's proper to say or what's you know, what the reality is or like how this is harder or how this is like different or whatever it is. Like I don't fucking, I'm tired, you know? And so like that started to come out. Like, there was a trickle, and then there was a deluge. And a couple years ago, like I come from a suicidal background, which is why my sister said what she did to my father about like how I wanted to take the whole thing. And so and that is not necessarily, that like, that part of my life is not fully linked to being trans. It's my brain chemistry and some other things, you know? It's just like the cards I've been dealt with, like I'm not just one kind of person kind of, you know? But, I'm sorry, is that okay that he's laying on your bag?

Tennenbaum: Yeah.

Evan: Okay. He likes bags. He likes accessories. He lays on my shoes every day all day. Um, one time he put his arm through the strap of a purse and just sat there like he was going out. Anyhoo,—

Tennenbaum: We're talking about a cat.

Evan: [Laughter]. Just yes, so everyone is aware, uh, that was a cat situation, that was about a cat. Um, so anyhoo, I was just fucking pooped, and I, so a couple of years ago, I hit like a breaking point, and I—I don't know if it was like a nervous breakdown or anything, but it was, maybe it was worse, I don't know. But I have never been so suicidal in my whole life, and I cried for a month. I cried all day. I cried every day, and I couldn't stop crying, and I didn't know why. And I was so angry and depressed and I was, it was one of those times where I really didn't know if I was going to kill myself or not. Like most of the time that I felt suicidal I recognized the feelings and because of the life that I have today I know it's going to pass. And this wasn't passing, it was getting worse. And I really wasn't sure what to do. And I didn't want to tell my wife about it because I didn't want to freak her out, she does not come from this background, she does not have experience with this. I didn't want to worry her. So I was, you know, I have a therapist or whatever, I wasn't, you know, and she was like, I still felt like I was suffering in silence. I just didn't know how to fix this. And so I finally told my wife, and I had never slept better. I hadn't slept all

year long. I got two good nights of sleep that year, and that was one of them. Unfortunately she did not sleep that night. Um, but didn't really know what to do. And we were driving home from something [sighs] and she said to me, when is the last time you took your shot? And I said, I don't know, like a couple months ago, a few months ago, like at this point like I wasn't really being checked, I had a doctor, we do like our whatever like my levels hadn't been tested in awhile, there were—remember that thing I told you I wasn't going to talk about specifically? So I had a hysterectomy. Um, [Laughter], this is what happens when I start talking, it just all fucking comes out. I like have a plan and then I just diverge. Um, some years ago. And that changes your chemistry quite a bit, and the unfortunate part, one of the unfortunate parts of this is that science hasn't quite caught up to us yet, so like, there's really no research, like we don't know, we're just like, the people who have transitioned at least a decade ago are fucking pioneers because there's no data for trans men on what happens to your body long term and what we need. Um, so you're welcome. Um, so I was essentially like being allowed to like monitor it, or just like take it like no one was—I'm an adult. I should do this. It wasn't exciting for me to take my shot anymore like it was in the beginning. Like I'm not counting the hairs on my body anymore, like, I'm done. So like it just became surprisingly psychologically difficult for me to do it, and I just would put it off. Like I'm still putting it—not as much as I was before at all, but like, you know, I'm a couple of days late. But, and so I mean, this like having said that, like I want to point out that it is a fucking privilege to like have that choice because I do, like living in New York City and like having access to like medical care and some amounts of income, like I am allowed to purchase hormones and have them monitored by a doctor. I have never had to buy them on the black market, which so many people do and it's really fucking dangerous but I completely understand. Um and like so like I have the, if you can call it privilege of like being like, meh, I don't want to take it right now. Um, so I wasn't taking it, and I was basically producing like very little hormones in my body. Like, and apparently like they're pretty powerful things. Um, science is real. So uh, she asked me that question and of course I was like—she was like maybe, she was like you know, my friend who is like in her 40s was taking hormones to get pregnant. And she's like you know, you're acting a little bit like she was acting when she was on them. I was like, that's ridiculous, like this is totally different, lalala. And I was like, mm, so I got home and I took my shot, and the next day I was like walking on sunshine. It was like polar opposite land and I was like fuck. So I called my doctor and I like, told her what was going on, and like I just, I don't go to that place anymore. Because I find out they hadn't monitored my levels like, they did every year, they didn't like—they hadn't done it in awhile. And I was like what the fuck is wrong with you? Like fuck, I don't do my bloodwork there, like you're not even telling me like, am I taking the right amount, like what the fuck, you know? And she had said like you know, we'll cut the dose in half, but like based on what? Like, you're a doctor. I'm paying you to like be an expert here and like, I heard the whole like well we don't really know, you know? And I was like, so I like bitched her out over the phone, and I looked for a new doctor. Yes. I am responsible for myself and my body. Yes, I am responsible to take my shot. She did not know that I hadn't taken it in awhile, but like, I guess had I known that this was going to happen, I probably would have done that. So a friend of mine described this perfectly. He said were you too depressed to kill yourself? Like you were so depressed you were too lazy to kill yourself? And I'm like yes, absolutely. And so I started talking about it, and I—that's when he told me that, and I was like oh my God I'm not alone. And like, the night that I told, it was a Sunday night that I told my wife that I was feeling this way, before I took my shot, I, this was in

October a couple of years ago and I, a trans friend reached out to me. He had invited me to this group on Facebook that was like, all trans guys. And I looked at it, and it was all these fucking people from Livejournal 10-plus years ago, most of whom I haven't spoken to in a really long time, who were going through the same thing. And, like I like, it was like the universe again, like giving me that big Orion hug. And, it saved my fucking life, because I talked about it and people came out of the woodwork and were saying like, me too, and like some of it wasn't solution-based, it was just like commiserating, but just knowing that I wasn't alone and it wasn't just scientifically but like emotionally and psychologically like, do you feel like a fraud? Yes. Like, are you suicidal? Yes. Like nobody told me that this was going to happen. And that's like, and I quote, like, nobody told us that when you transition things aren't fixed, and I wouldn't choose a different path for myself. I wouldn't not transition knowing this. But nobody told us. Um, so that fucking saved my life again, and so I you know, I started looking for a new Doctor and I started like, planning my next show. Um, my next series. Which I had been thinking about a little bit before. I thought I started, I realized at my sister's wedding, I think a couple years before that, that I was one of the groomsmen, and we were all in tuxes, and I was watching my brother-in-law interact with his college buddies, and he's not like a bro or anything, but like, they're guys. And we were on the roof of this building and I'm watching them interact with each other, and they're like, just watching their body language and watching like and like sort of imagining what their lives might be like, and this like whole, also back to the drinking culture. Like just watching these like guys, like interact with each other. And I was just like fascinated by it, like in a way that like I just hadn't been in awhile, or like, I didn't expect it. I just, none of this I expected. I expected nothing, because I expected to just have this be like wrapped up, done. Um, so I thought about that for awhile, and I wanted to do something around that, but I wasn't sure what yet. So I was planning and planning and planning and going back and forth about like, how to like, put this out there. And based on that experience leading up to the like my like month of crying, I started and based on the conversations I was having with these guys, these trans guys and looking at trolling Facebook for people from my high school and looking at their lives, like the guys, and just sort of like, sort of shaping, which I don't do that so much anymore because that's just like, just get out of this frickin' weird spiral, but like looking at their lives and looking at the pictures of them and like, obviously it's social media, so take that with a grain of salt. But like, all the points of fantasy are there, of like masculinity and like, body language and facial expressions and you can hear them and it just like is this crazy thing. So I started making this series called Best Man, about platonic male relationships and doing uh like some stereotypical things, you know? But like not like in a campy way. Um, so I started reaching out to people . I decided to do them with people that I know already. I was going to do them with some strangers, but then I realized that I don't want to do that because that would be really manufactured, you know? And of course like the way these things work is that you plan an idea for a shoot, and then you get this image that is nothing like what you were picturing doing. Like the event is over, and then the photograph in-between is what is like the beautiful part, you know? And so like that happened a lot, and, I mean, not with all of them, but like that happened a lot. So I started taking these pictures and what started to happen is I started to have those moments with these people. Like that's when I found out that I'm giving these people these moments also. Because not everyone grew up that way. Not everyone grew up doing these things that I thought they grew up doing. Um, not everyone has these moments with other people or at all, you know? Like I was giving them that, and I was also,

we were having that moment together. The first shoot I did was with a friend from college who I hadn't seen in many years, but he was always very supportive of me. And so I felt comfortable with him. And he didn't grow up like having these like bro relationships at all. Like he's kind of like on his own too. And so like he told me that like, you know, this is my first time doing this, he's like I got to do this too, you know? Like it was like it was important to him. And I hadn't even considered that as like a thing, like I was just thinking about it as like me finally having these experiences of like bumming around the railroad tracks and like, this like silence that happens. Like the way that male relationships grow happens very slowly over time, whereas like women like just like [rapid sucking noise] and like [data processing noise] like oh, we're taking a pottery class now, you know? Like it just, like men take a long time because there's less words. And like, there's less intimacy at first. Like that takes awhile to forge, and of course like not coming from that place biologically and psychologically, like I'm not, psychologically I'm not a full man, you know? Like I'm not fully male. So that's where that disconnect was coming from with me. I was like why aren't these people telling me all their intimate details right away? Like because these are guys, and like, they might not ever tell you, you know? Like that shit's real. So so I would talk to people about like what their relationships were like growing up with other guys, and I was like—and their brothers—and like what they would do, and like I would, and just watching my friends like interact, you know? And like, like one of the most beautiful things about this whole project is that I finally realized that I already have what I was looking for like with the guys in my life. It just didn't look like what I thought it would. And it didn't involve a childhood with them. It didn't involve a growing up with them. And so the only thing that separates me from actually having those experiences with them is my brain and the fact that I feel like a fraud. I don't let myself have those experiences with them without reminding myself who I am. And and so I did this series and I knew it was going to be a show. I just was like, this is going to happen, it has to. And so I reached out to a couple, who came to my first show and had blogged about it, and I'd never met them before, and I said hello, remember me? I have this new thing, can I show you? And they said absolutely, so I went over to their apartment and I showed them all the images, and I was there for a couple hours, and they really liked it and they reached out to some people they knew with my work. They were like, send me a PDF of your stuff and they like blasted it for me. And the Gallery came over to my apartment and looked at my work and put it on their walls. And, and so that's where we're at now. Like, so now we're trying to like, get them into institutions and stuff. Um, but like, the moral of the story is that like, it's like the biggest saving grace for me has been through my work, through my art, and also like my community that like I had trouble associating with for a long time because I didn't want to be outed, because the problem is that I realized that like, what I was saying before, was that with the crossdressers was that like I was like, in a selfish way and also like in a protective way, like I didn't want to be outed, because I want control over who knows and when. But after I had my crisis, I realized, especially with everything that's going on right now in these days and also like this big trans movement that's like coming to light and all that stuff, like I knew that I like couldn't look back and like tell my children like I did nothing, like I wasn't a part of that, you know? Um, so I've started to become a little bit more liberal over time about like who I tell and like—or just saying it and being out, and like, you know, like not hiding it as much. And trying to bring like pride to that, because there's absolutely nothing to be ashamed of, and it's really fucking important for people to see trans people living productive, beautiful lives, because that's not what most people are shown. And

you know, like it doesn't look different from anything else, you know? It's a very different experience and the shame is that if you don't get to know us, like you don't get that perspective either, you know? And so I just knew that I couldn't do that. so I've like, the challenge was uh you know, like what do you do? Like almost like sort of phrased it as like like divided we stand, together we fall. Because I by not being a part of it, the numbers are smaller. And like the life experiences are smaller. And I just knew that I couldn't be separate from my people anymore. Um, but it's hard. It's hard. Because once you're in it, even like being associated or like being like, at a rally, like there's plenty of non-trans people at trans rallies, but just the fact that you're there is a possibility, you know? And so that became like a huge fucking conundrum for me, and I'm still working on that. But you know, that's I'm sure another life-long journey, but one of the pictures was a skinny-dipping picture, and that was like my like—it was huge. And—

Tennenbaum: Like size, or—

Evan: In size. [Laughter]. How kind of you to specify. Um—

Tennenbaum: I'm just checking battery levels.

Evan: Okay. Don't worry, I promise to wear the battery out for you for your next one. Um, no, I had to print it big because the point was that like there was three of us jumping off this pier fully nude and that was like in-between these two other guys who are different than I, and like fucking full frontal. And that was a picture that I knew I had to take. It was like, one of the first ones that I thought of, and it took me a long time to shoot it because I was just like, had to psych myself up. Also like, not a water person. Kind of afraid of water. A lake at night naked, that sounds awesome. That sounds great. Let's jump in the water a billion times to try to get the right shot by yourself. Like that's fucked up. It was terrible. Um, totally unenjoyable, and of course we used the first photograph, so that didn't have to happen. [Exasperated sigh]. The things I do for art. Um, but it was incredible. It was a beautiful weekend. And it's a fucking awesome photo and it was huge, it was on the wall, and it was obviously like exposing because I'm naked, and my family came to the show. Like they knew what it was, like I had to like—my mom like wanted me to like, like ease my grandma into it, into the idea of this whole thing, and my grandma was like, alright. My mom was like [heavy breathing], you know? But everyone was like, it was beautiful. Like, they were proud, it was great, like a bunch of family members came actually and like, a bunch of friends came from all walks of my life. Like people I had just met in a school program I just went to, people from college, people from recovery, like, like all different kinds of people came, tons of people I didn't know came, it was a truly beautiful because I'm like, I'm very, very proud of these photos, and I was so proud to be able to do that with the people that are actually in my life to have these moments because it reminded me that like, I'm not a piece of shit, the relationships that I have actually are what I wanted, and like we show up for each other, you know? It's a two-way street. And you know, it was just really like, it felt so good to be part of this again, to be part of like to have like a different voice, because I knew that like, again, like male relationships are complicated because they're too simple. And on the outside, and and it's you know it was something that like in creating those moments for myself and for the people in the photographs with me, it just, it just made my life so much more broad just because it made me realize that I

already have that, and I don't have to like, create it, you know? I can just like be, and it's there. So, I think that's a good place to stop.