

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

DR. T.J. BYRON

Interviewer: Aviva Silverman

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Aviva Silverman: Hello, my name is Aviva Silverman, and I will be having a conversation with Dr. T.J. Byron for the New York City Trans Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. It is September 20th, and it is being recorded on Zoom remotely.

Dr. T.J. Byron: My name is Dr. T.J. Byron, B-y-r-o-n, like the poet.

Silverman: Do you have any other relationship to the poet?

Byron: Well, we think so. My dad looked just like him. He was quite the— if you know anything about Lord Byron, he was a scoundrel in his day, but he and Shelley, and Percy Booth, and oh, you know, all the poets that hung out, they were all crazy together, and he was supposedly— he supposedly swam across the Venice Canal. It's a garbage pit, and he had a club foot! And I'm a foot surgeon.

Silverman: Wow.

Byron: So, we kind of, it was like, *what? Ok. Yikes.*

Silverman: And how did you get into surgery in that realm, for feet?

Byron: Well, when I was about eight or nine, I had a thing called apophysitis in my heels because I was too active, and young kids tend to— where they have a stress point and a growth center, they can get pain because they put that stress point under too much activity. So, I got in trouble and got in pain, I was crying. My dad took me to the foot doctor, and the rest is history. So, when I was nine, I said: *that's it, that's what I'm going to do.* And I went through Ohio State in two years, and I graduated from high school at 17, applied to medical school, and got in at 19—

Silverman: Wow.

Byron: [laughter] —and then finished at 23, went into the Army, and was a commission captain, which, you know, that's...

Silverman: How did you... Okay, so maybe we'll slow down so that I understand how all these things came to be. So where did you grow up?

Byron: Oh, Columbus, Ohio, in the heart of the Midwest at the time, because in the 60s, I was born in— I was born in '47, but I always say this body is 76 in October next month, because that was the whoopie date. The whoopie date is when mom and dad decided to have whoopie, and nine months later, I came along. But they had a little girl that was stillborn before me, and then she got pregnant like six months later. So, I think I was supposed to be the girl. [laughter] I had brothers on two different— the bookends, I had a brother five years older, and a brother three years younger. So, the two of them didn't ever knew each other— eight years is too far. And my brother, who was five years older, he was always trying to ditch me. So, I never really knew him until he was an adult. But we grew up in Columbus, and when I was a kid, I was on stage as a musician. I was like a dog and pony

show. They would roll us out on the stage, and we would perform. We performed in-between movies in those days, in the '50s. They had a big, huge RKO Palace Theater, and we would— it's when I learned a lot about a lot of things. Backstage, you have people who are making a living, and they're in the union. So, I was starting to put my drums on this pallet that he was going to roll out and be on stage, and I was starting to do that. And he said: *kid, no, you don't touch the drums back here. When you get out there, you can do anything you want, but this is my job right now.* So, I learned real early, like eight years old, which is what any kid that's in show business finds out about all the makeup artists, and— oh, we had costume changes, and all that stuff. So, I got interested in medicine when I was real young because I was a patient, and I got fixed. So, I thought, *oh, well, this is fabulous.* And what's better than helping somebody walk that can't walk?

Silverman: Yeah.

Byron: I always told my patients, I said: *you— I'm the Triple-A of feet. You only call me when you get a flat!*

Silverman: [laughter] That's a really good slogan.

Byron: Yeah, and our motto in my practice was: "Limp in, leap out."

Silverman: You got that one—yeah, that sounds right.

Byron: Yeah. So, I'd come up with these little slogans. I got my master's in education because I wanted to understand how to educate people, and I was teaching medical students and residents in my practice for 50 years. I taught residents how to do surgery, and they only learn if it's specific and precise and repetitive.

Silverman: Right. Right. So—

Byron: It's like a journeyman.

Silverman: Would you say that— so when you were performing music, interstitially between movies, was that like your first job? Were you compensated for that?

Byron: Yep. Oh, gosh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, I bought my first bike. We entered a lot of contests. We always won because it was an amazing little group, and we performed in like 10,000 people at the fair.

Silverman: Wow. And did you have a persona that you performed as, or was there a theme, or what was the thing?

Byron: Yeah. It was called the Novel Heirs, and the one guy who I still have relation with, I mean, I call him. Now I'm talking to his granddaughter, and her role is, she's the Ohio State guard, the number one guard on the basketball team. So, I watch her on TV, and I text her and say, *hey, great game.* But that's, I mean, Donny Simons, he's right down the street in California. He's a PhD in harpsichord.

Silverman: Wow! Ok.

Byron: Yeah. Yeah. With the three of us, the three boys— and then we had a girl who played saxophone, and they tap danced. The one guy who— he played every instrument. When he picked up an instrument, we knew what song we were going to play.

Silverman: Wow. And did—

Byron: And I still have those lists of songs. They were amazed that I still have those. It's been 65 years.

Silverman: A very long time, yeah. And did playing in public shape your young identity? Did you— how did it help inform your identity at that time?

Byron: As you can imagine, being on stage in front of thousands of people, and the lights, and the makeup, and the camera, and whatever was going on, we got a lot of notoriety. Newspaper articles, pictures, you know, pictures were taken in a lot, a lot, a lot of places. Newspaper— you know, like I'm doing now, I was being interviewed at 9 to tell somebody how I got into playing music. I was the drummer.

Silverman: Wow.

Byron: Yeah. So, my dad and I had to carry all this stuff every time we went out. We had an old 1954 Chrysler, and mom and dad would get in the car. I think the brothers at some of the points would get in the car, and we'd all go on the road. And all these cities, we played in all, all— every place.

Silverman: Wow. And was there, in your family life, was there like a religious background at all, or?

Byron: I mean, the mom and dad were into a congregational kind of place, was Methodist at the end. Yeah, we had that kind of upbringing. But when you go to medical school, you find out from the— and I lived with Jewish guys, and you find out that not everybody thinks the same way that you were kind of led— led to believe. I was asked to speak as a representative of the college kids. There was a high school kid, you know, junior high school kid, and I was asked to speak on— on the college level. And I got up in the pulpit, and I said: *guess what?*

I've been exposed to Judaism. Whoops. I thought the pillars were going to crack, you know, and the roof was going to fall in. But not everybody thinks like you guys do. And you're trying to shove things down people's throat that they're not going to— they're not going to buy it. So—

Silverman: Right.

Byron: Yeah. The music industry is— there are a lot of Jewish folks. So, I started learning Yiddish [laughter] and speaking in Yiddish. And my mom and dad go: *what are you talking about?* [laughter] You know. I was part of the *mishpokhe*. I don't know if you know what that means.

Silverman: No.

Byron: It's 'the family'.

Silverman: Yeah!

Byron: So— and I still talk to those people. I, my, my roommate from 1968 is in Toronto, and I called him yesterday.

Silverman: Amazing. Yeah.

Byron: We probably talked for an hour. So that's, that was the medicine side. So, I had a medicine side. When I graduated, I went in the army, I had an army side because I spent 25 years in army.

Silverman: Wow.

Byron: But I was, I was five active, five, five active years and then reserve years. So, I retired in 1996. And I'm right over here at the hospital in, in, in Tacoma.

Silverman: Wow. And what led you to joining the army?

Byron: Well, I was gonna go to West Point. You know, I thought I would go to West Point and get my education. But I got accepted to medical school when I was 19. So, I didn't have to do that.

Silverman: Yeah.

Byron: But I wanted to go in the army. And of course, the army wanted me when I was, oh— in that age group, to go to Vietnam, they wanted me to shoot a rifle. And I said, *well, just give me another couple of years and I'll, I'll come back as a doctor. I'll, I'll, I'll be good. It'll be good. You'll, you'll appreciate having me. Oh, yeah, sure. Everybody says that, you know, and I said, No, I really am. I'm serious.* So, I got my commission at 23.

Silverman: Wow. What year was that?

Byron: '71.

Silverman: Okay. And when you say you were active for five years, what— what were you doing in that time?

Byron: '71 to '76. I was with the infantry as their foot surgeon. The only one.

Silverman: Wow.

Byron: In orthopedics. I was in orthopedics.

Silverman: And were you abroad? Or where were you living?

Byron: No, no, I— my specialty never— we went to Okinawa. That was as far as anybody got. But we didn't go what we call in-country. We didn't, we didn't go into and step on the Vietnamese land. But nowadays they do. They go on ships and they get off with the Marines. I was with the Marines. I was with the Navy part time, you know, if they if they wanted me for my services. And I was always in orthopedics. So, I did all kinds, you know, back— we did hands, shoulders, elbows, whatever. I saw a lot of war, war wounds. 25 years.

Silverman: And how did that, how did that shape your young life to be both in the army seeing wounds?

Byron: Well, it was it was like three different people. You know, I got dressed up on the weekends and walked around. This was in the '60s. I was out walking around as a— what we called cross dressers in those days. Now it's gender non-binary.

Silverman: Yeah. And gender non-conforming. Yeah. So, when you switch between those different states, did you have nerves? Were you nervous about being caught or being seen or— how did you?

Byron: Yeah. The stress because, oh, in those days you could be jailed. You know, I could be put in jail and my reputation would be shot. The wife didn't know, at the time. This wife, this wife knows the number two wife, but and actually, we have a business where we, we actually teach the artistry of this. She's a makeup artist trained in— in California at the Westmore Institute.

Silverman: Wow. And this is your, your current wife you're talking about?

Byron: Right.

Silverman: Wow.

Byron: The first was a nurse. She didn't know that I, she was a pretty, pretty good size. She and I were about the same size, so it was real easy and she worked nights so I could get dressed up and go out.

Silverman: And when you got dressed up, where would you go? What were some of the places that you would go?

Byron: Just walk around and— you know, local stuff. I didn't do any bars or anything like that. I just walked around, maybe got the mail or, you know, went to get gas is the typical things that people that do what I do. That's what they— that's how they start.

Silverman: And where were you living at that time?

Byron: Cleveland.

Silverman: In Cleveland, okay. And did you have other friends at that time that were also trans or—?

Byron: Nobody. I didn't know anybody. Yeah. And I think that's the problem with this, that in, in the— these, these days we get together. Thursday night we have a social group down in Tacoma and everybody meets and we— and then we have another group that's a lunch. So, we, we have different— and then, oh, the 1st of October, I'm going up to a place called Sequim in the Straits of Juan de Fuca up, up, up north. And I'm going to be going to a big function. I have— I've never been, I think it's called the Emerald City Club or something. It's a big, big event.

Silverman: Wow. And so, when you were dressing up and exploring your identity, did you feel very isolated in that there was no one else that could relate to you? Did you have an idea that there might be other people? What was your sense at that time?

Byron: No, everybody thinks they're diseased. They are pathological and there's a tremendous amount of guilt associated with that. You think you're the only one on the world— in the world that does this. And every time you bought an item, you felt guilty, you know, because you had to get clothes that would be appropriate with the day.

Silverman: Yeah. And were there stars or people in the media that you were emulating or people that you looked up to that you felt— you just kind of were self-guided in your exploration of how to get dressed and how you wanted to look?

Byron: Yeah. I mean, all of us watch a sister or a brother— I mean, a mother. Mostly the moms, you know, you would sneak in and get, you know, the girdle on and the stockings. And I grew out, unfortunately, I grew out of my mom's four and a half, five size pumps, probably at 10, you know, when I got to be a six and she was a five or four and a half. So yeah, I didn't have very much in the way of foot gear to judge by, but I had to buy, I would go to Goodwill. And if I bought stockings, it would be like going and use in those days, it was on every corner. The stocking store was a main draw, and today, you know, no big deal. Starbucks is on the corner now. But—

Silverman: Do you feel a sense of loss around not having a community at that time or a connection to, you know, your exploration in gender and understanding yourself? Because now, you know, there's social media and there's so many ways to connect with people.

Byron: Definitely. We're not stigmatized as much now. There are shows on TV, for instance, Pose is all transgender actors. And there's almost a gay couple or gay influence and almost every sitcom that's on television. And just, you know, it started creeping in and I started saying, *oh, gee, well, I guess I may be not the only one*. But let's see, when did I meet my first person? No, I mean, I went to a therapist because, you know, my wife and I, when she found out and she came home and found me getting dressed one day when she wasn't supposed

to come home. [laughter] So that's how that happened. And so, she was very upset. She always— she's always said, *well, I lost my husband that day because now I see that you're somebody else part time* because I don't live like this full time. A lot of the people do. But I don't.

Silverman: Even today, you're saying you switch between different styles of dress.

Byron: Yeah. We call it vanilla or drab, and we— I'm— I'm a grandpa. I'm, you know, a father. My three kids know. But the son-in-laws aren't real happy about... But the one guy said, *hey, you do you whatever*. And I was surprised when we when we exposed them to this. They were a little bit— accepting. So. But they don't want to hear about it.

Silverman: Yeah. Do you— what pronouns do you ask people to use for you since you switch between different—

Byron: Well, my wife will slip up and call me Tim. But you know, if we have like we have guests here at the house for dinner who are husband and wife, but they're both, you know, both— the wife is dressed as a woman. And my friend Terry is Keith, you know, to her. So, everybody has, you know, their Keith and then there's Terry. So, Terry and Cindy come and sit at the table. We all— and we go to their house and, you know, we have other friends who are totally trans. I have one friend that— we're going to overnight up at this place called Sequim next, the first of October. And she's— she was trans back in the '70s, which is extremely rare. And she got beat up. I mean, big time.

Silverman: Yeah.

Byron: You know, that. And she was— she was Catholic. So, there's a lot of guilt. You think the Jewish people have guilt, you know, they talk about Jewish guilt. The Catholics have more guilt. And the Catholics beat themselves up and beat up people for being strange and not conforming. So, I— I'm always sympathetic to everybody. You get more sympathetic because you're— you have to ask for some sympathy. So, you're more sympathetic to others.

Silverman: Right. And at what period of your life did you live in New York?

Byron: My wife lived in New York. I never did.

Silverman: Oh, ok.

Byron: She was in White Plains and they were in the city for a while. Her husband at that time, you know, jobs with New York firms. And she's Black. My wife is Black.

Silverman: Your first wife or your second wife?

Byron: No, second wife.

Silverman: Okay. And where did you meet?

Byron: Well, she came in, to the office in Irvine, California —I had three offices— and she had a bunion. And I said: *yeah, that'd be real easy. We can fix that, no problem. Let's get you scheduled.* That was in 1979. Well, in of all the women that I've met in my life, I didn't want to date any of them except this woman. I said, *well, if you ever—* I didn't tell her at the time, but I said to myself, *if she ever becomes available, I'm going to— I'm going to strike!* [laughter] So, it just so happened that she was breaking up, and I was breaking up at the same time in 1981. And so, we got together in '82. And I've been together ever since.

Silverman: Wow. And then you had three children?

Byron: Well, I have two with my ex-wife and she has the boy from her ex. So, they were raised together. I think they were five, six and ten. Yeah. So, they came up. They came up together. They were— they were like people at our wedding, you know, the ring boy and the flower girl and that sort of thing.

Silverman: And have you— have any of your children been more interested in your identity formation or the ways that you relate to—?

Byron: No, they don't want to hear anything about it. But you know, like I said, I had so many personas. I had the musician thing and then the army thing. And I was big in athletics. I was playing every sport. And that's a common thread in people who do this. We try to get macho jobs or hobbies. We get into, you know, *I'm an auto mechanic* or, you know, but a lot of a lot of ladies are auto mechanics today. They weren't in the '50s, but Rosie the Riveter, you know, that kind of attitude. But yeah, there's— there's every profession coming and going. I have counselled people on the phone, you know, by text, in other states, well, and countries, other countries, and they're anesthesiologists and OBGYNs and plastic surgeons and oh, gee, I've been amazed at the amount of the higher-educated folks. It's not a disease. So, we're all told you're— and, you know, pray away gay, that whole conversion therapy. Well, that would kind of go toward this, too. They want to get you— you.
We'll talk you out of that. You won't be like that when we get done with you. And you kind of will.

Silverman: Yeah. And how do you how do you see yourself now in this moment of trans visibility, where obviously so much has shifted since the time that you— you've grown up?

Byron: Freedom. In a word. I mean, I go out, I used to go out every week. I'm a little more disabled now at 76. I have six screws in my back. I get neck surgery. I've got— I've had eye surgery, nose surgery. I've had surgery up and down the body. So, I'm kind of, you know, stumbling and bumbling. But I still walk in heels. Always have. And people say, *what? I can't believe what? No, you're not. What?* Yes, it's— it's really— it's really me. Yeah. But, you know, if you've been doing it your whole life, 60 years, it's no big deal. So, yeah, the— the— effect of this has bled over, if you will, to other areas of my life. I probably was a little bit more compassionate with my patients. Just because of, you know, me and I, I saw a lot of gay people in in Laguna where I practice, in Laguna area, in California and Orange County. And they were fabulous patients, just super fabulous.

Silverman: What made them fabulous?

Byron: They were so pedantic. And they— they wanted to heal. You didn't see gay people in bread lines for— [laughter] you didn't see them in the welfare line. You didn't. You know, they were they were go-getters. They were energetic. They were creative, super creative. So, my wife being in the businesses that she was in, she was trained as the makeup artist and she was Max Factor's representative all over Southern California. She was Westmore trained. Like I said, the Westmores of Hollywood are— you walk into their office and all you see is Oscars lined up because it goes back to grandpa and the son and the fellow that we knew from the Westmores, Marvin, he just died last year. And I saw it on television. I saw it on the Oscars where they have the memoriam. I said, *oh, my God, I didn't know Marvin died*. I yelled at Vernita, *come in here. Marvin died. Oh, my God*. We didn't. We didn't. His wife was in MASH for 10 years and we, you know, we kind of we had a lot of directors and producers and casting directors and all those kinds of creative people. And they were a lot of gay people in that industry, because that's where they could work and be comfortable. You know, I mean, there's gay people, there's gay lawyers, there's— you know, gay doctors get— and you don't really put on as much of a persona sometimes to— to kind of hide the fact that, you know, you're not the traditional— Now you can, I mean, look at Anderson Cooper— boom. Look at, you know, Andy Cohen. I mean, everybody's, you know, my husband, they say *my husband, my husband and I have two little babies*. Oh, well, no, nobody thinks anything of it. But in the 50s and 60s, oh, my God, you wouldn't— you would never have said that. So, freedom. Oh, my God. You can be who you want to be. We got a flag you can wave. You got parades.

I mean, so that means there's hundreds of thousands of millions of you, period, out there.

Silverman: Right, right. And do you feel— or I keep hearing you say *gay people*, I was wondering how you identify in your sexuality, how you would speak of it?

Byron: Yeah, I'm not homosexual. I'm not bisexual, I don't think. I mean, I've never had an opportunity to be with— and if I was going to be with a man, I would be like *this*. And they say that and I have one acquaintance that does some little risqué activity. And so, I'm not sure what that's all about. I'm going to maybe try to find out a little bit more. But everybody kind of hides their sexual proclivities, I think. But a lot of the wives come to activities with us.

Silverman: So, when you say everyone hides, do you mean in the groups that you meet up with, or your friends in your close circles?

Byron: Well, the people when I— when we get together, we're open and exposing ourselves. But in their professions, I'm sure they're not exposing anything—

Silverman: Right.

Byron: They're hiding that.

Silverman: So, most people you meet up with, yeah, are not out as trans or not dressing in their full array?

Byron: Some are. Yeah, we have— like if we have 15 people at lunch, somebody's had top surgery, they're not going to have bottom surgery, reassignment. I'm not having any. [laughter]

Silverman: Have you thought about it?

Byron: No, no. Well, I can't say I haven't thought about it, because sure, you get into that hormonal rage and you think, *oh, I'm going to have breasts, I'm going to I'm going to go nuts if I—* Yeah, there's a stage. Yeah. But— but you can't act on it because you'd have to completely change. I have to tell you, I was at the VA, the Veterans Affairs Hospitals. I started in 1984 at Long Beach. I was the first guy in my specialty there. And I started seeing people who were transitioning, who were working in the VA. But the VA paid for reassignment surgery. They did it. Yeah. Most people don't know that. If the Republican community knew that they were paying for reassignment surgery in the Department of Defense and the VA, why, they'd probably go crazy. There was a there was a spy who— who transitioned in jail. I don't know if you remember. And he— he— *she*, he came out a she. don't know what she's doing now, but she she's.

Silverman: Oh, are you talking about Chelsea Manning?

Byron: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. There's an example of somebody who was an army— I don't know. She was like an E3 or something and a clerk and did something that she wasn't supposed to in an espionage way. And so, she went into jail and came out a female.

Silverman: Yeah. She medically transitioned. So, when you say that, you don't appear or want to present as— as— a woman in your professional life, is it out of fear or— what is the main impetus for you not to want to present in in how you look now, yeah, professionally?

Byron: I don't perform now. I don't go to work. I retired in 2018.

Silverman: Got you, yeah.

Byron: Yeah. And I— all my friends in this neighborhood just know me as Tim. But we have friends, my wife and I, that we have come in that are either fully trans or non-binary.

Silverman: Right. And when you and your wife help do people's makeup or get them dressed up, what kind of people are you attracting? Are they around your age or how do they find you? I just— how does it— how does it work?

Byron: Well, I have cards and I'll hand them to people at these little gatherings or big gatherings. And we have had ads in— oh, there's a Emerald City Club in Seattle. It's too far. You know, we live on the other side of the water, so it's too far to go to anything that has to do with Emerald City. But they all know. And when we get together for lunch and somebody looks so bad that they're kind of embarrassing the rest of the group, like a short skirt or a

hair— you know, it's all crazy. It doesn't make sense. And they'll say to me, *she needs your help*. And they'll tell her to talk to me. So, after the lunch, we'll get together. So, it's just word of mouth right now. I have a couple coming up from way down south in almost close to the Oregon border. And there they came up to visit somebody else and they stopped by to see us. And she was Tanya. His name is Tim. And her name is Judy, the wife. And she has multiple sclerosis so bad that she's in an electric wheelchair. So, I, being a doctor, I've been with multiple sclerosis patients as patients. And so, we had them come over and we sat out back and just had a great time, two hours talk. Matter of fact, Tanya said, *these earrings are killing me. You've got pierced ears. I'm going to get mine pierced*. I said, *yeah*. And they're sitting on the cabinet over here. I'm going to take them to her Thursday night. We see each other the last Thursday of the month. So, Tanya just came in and she's out with her wife. She's driving and they're going up to see somebody else. But she's going to change clothes before she gets to the people they're going to go see. And I said, *do you want to change here?* She said, *no*, because she didn't want me to see Tim.

Silverman: Oh, ok.

Byron: She said, *oh, just fine, I'll just change*. We get to be quick change artists. You need, I don't know if you know this about us. We have what we call the Vanilla Bag.

Silverman: Tell me more.

Byron: You don't leave home without a Vanilla Bag because there might be a phone call: *-Quick, you got to come. Your dog's on the driveway and I think she's dead.*
-Oh, ok, I'll be there right away.

I'm totally decked out and I had to pull over in a parking lot where there was nobody and take as much off as I could not to expose who I was going to become, and then I put my army sweat clothes over and I had, of course, had to take my bra off and, you know, breast forms. And then have a shoe that wasn't going to show my stockings and, you know, all that. So, yeah, you have to have that bag with nail polish remover and makeup— you know, little pads and a pull out. Yeah. You got to be prepared for anything.

Silverman: Wow. It sounds like a big bag. [laughter]

Byron: It's a garbage bag. Yeah. Now, that is where most guys keep their stuff when they're hiding in a garbage bag. How absurd. And you hide this thing way up so nobody else can get to it. And you put it where, you know, it can't be found by anybody. And every now and then you purge. You just say, *I've had it, I'm done. I've got to throw all this stuff away*. Everybody purges, everybody. There isn't one thing we have in common that's more common than purging.

Silverman: And what does that feel like when you purge?

Byron: Terrible! [laughter] *I'm going to quit, I've got to sell, I'm going to throw this away, I can't do this anymore*. You end up going out and buying the same stuff! It's expensive.

Silverman: Yeah.

Byron: Now, I've had shoes that I wear, I just threw a pair of shoes away the other day. It just broke. I mean, I look back on Amazon, I bought them in like, I don't know, '92 or something like that. So, yeah, I'm starting to wear things out.

Silverman: Wow. Yeah. So, I'm just wondering, because you live in so many different worlds, do you feel most seen when you're in groups with other trans and people that have multiple identity states that get to bond together? Is that the most safe place for you to feel your complete self or are there other places where you feel as seen?

Byron: Yeah, I've been— having been on stage at 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and just hearing the applause, it's— you know, I was like a child actor. And when you're in that environment, you get instant gratification for what you just did. So, I got used to that. Athletics kind of do that because you've got a time frame, you're going to be performing this amount of time and you get to either win or lose. But in this activity here— yeah, when you're decked out and you feel fabulous and you go out, you want people to see you. And I can't tell you how many people, women mostly, but a lot of men: *Oh, my God, that is a fabulous— you look amazing.* I can't tell you how many times I get that.

Silverman: That must be informed by people's perception of you.

Yes. And they think I'm a female. And people will say, *which bathroom do you use?* I said, *sister, you don't want me going in the men's bathroom with this, with what I look like here.* No, I always go in the women's bathroom, of course.

Silverman: Yeah.

Byron: And what do you see when you go into women's bathroom? Stalls. There's nothing to see. You go into a stall, right?

Silverman: Have you had any other safety concerns while you navigate your gender in public?

Byron: Not me, but the guy I go out with, Terry, he's 6'3", 6'4", I don't know, huge. And we had a customer that wanted to come up from Oregon, size 16 foot. But I think she looks so good. I told her, I said, *you know, you look fabulous. I don't know, if you want to come up, you're welcome.*

Silverman: Yeah.

Byron: This is for the course, I have a course that I teach that's a syllabus. And my wife does the makeup and color analysis, which most of these people really have not had.

Silverman: What does color analysis mean?

Byron: It's what goes good with your complexion, your hair color, style, and what you're trying to present, whether it's a business look or, you know, whatever.

Silverman: And what else is on the syllabus?

Byron: Oh, gosh, it's about eight pages. Everything from nails, hair, it's a big, you know, you've got to— if you're going to do this, you've got to... And that's what my wife and all almost all the wives, when we start shaving everything, they start thinking we're gay. You're having an affair. Now she found some of my underwear in the bed when she was gone and then came back from a trip. And I had left a pair of black underwear in the bed. Well, what would you think? [laughter] If you found black underwear, women's underwear in your in your— the husband's side of your bed, you'd think, *Uh oh, he's— he's going out on me*. But so—

Silverman: So that's part of your syllabus as well?

Byron: Yeah, don't— don't leave stuff around. Make sure you've cleaned up. Even if you have to have a checklist.

Silverman: Right.

Byron: So, yeah, you want to go— you want to do everything as complete— now, ok, Bruce Jenner, when he— here's a perfect example. When he transitioned to Caitlyn Jenner? When he was talking about going into his mother's drawers, chest of drawers to get clothes out, he did the same thing I and everybody else does. You have to you have to memorize the way that they're folded, the articles, and how they're placed in the drawer, because you don't want to get your mom angry at somebody in the house for messing up her drawer, you know. So, you've got to be so pedantic about everything.

Silverman: Right. Wow. Wow. Well, that's— it's really lovely that you get to help guide people and in a way that helps affirm their own sense of identity as well.

Byron: Oh, yeah. And they don't know any of this. There are 8 pages, and they might know one thing, but they learn so much. We have them— We had the catering company in Nashville when we lived in Nashville for 10 years. And I was a surgeon at the hospital and we had a lot of events at our house. But because the wife is so artistic, the makeup, the way she sets flower arrangements, she does table settings for, you know, big banquets and stuff. And that's art. And so, she's an artist in in that. And then she went to culinary arts school and became a chef. So, so I said, *you taste with your eyes before your tongue*, because what it looks like, is makes you more hungry for it or say *this doesn't look good. I don't want to eat it*. So, she's an artist in every way and fashion.

Silverman: Wow.

Byron: And so, I'm on the other side, I'm fashionable— fashionably functional. I, you know, I would explain to people, *well, if you're going to do that job, your foot gear has to be commensurate with the task at hand*. You can't wear ballet shoes to fight a fire, but every task has a foot gear if you think about it.

Silverman: Yeah. You would know as a foot doctor.

Byron: Yeah. So, we— you know, some people can't wear three inch, four inch heels. So, ok, go to kitten heels, but, you know, make it something that you're feeling your oats, you know, feeling good about. And you can— you can get about. If you— if you can't get up and walk to the bathroom, you're not going to do well. So, you've got to be functional.

Silverman: Right. Is there any advice you would give to people that are around your age that haven't explored their gender, that are curious about it? Is there is there any way that you feel like you've, you know, learned, learned a lot about how to express yourself through this, you know, your whole life, through all these different decades?

Byron: I say everybody go for it. Enjoy being you and get at it as soon as you can, because you don't have that long, you know? My days on this earth are not— they're numbered. And I've— I've pretty much done what I wanted to do with my life, and more. Most people say, *what, how did you do all that?* Well, I just kept— my name is Tim Persistent Byron. The 'persistent' is the key. You've got to stay with the— you've got to stay the course. But a lot of people don't want to get out. They don't they're afraid. So, part of the course, we have them come the one day, stay overnight. And then the next day, we feed them. And they bring three articles, three different outfits from head to toe. And we critique that. And we see them walk and talk and how they hold their hands and everything. And so, then we take them out. The last day, we take them out to a restaurant. Some of them have never been out in public.

Oh, I don't know if I'm ready for that. Trust me. You're ready. Let's go. And even on talking to people just in text, I've coached people out and they've gotten back to me. *Oh, my God. I can't tell you how thankful I am.* I remember this one person. And I was on this— I don't know what it was called. I was tossed off because they thought I was promoting my business. Actually, what I was saying was my wife and I have a good relationship. We didn't at the beginning, 6, 8, 10 years ago. But once she found out and said, *I guess he's going to be doing this for the rest of his life.* Why don't we help other people who need help? And she has a tremendous advantage for people. And of course, I have what I have to do, my dog and pony show. So, we do. We do have them for two, two or three days. And at the end, we have to go out if you haven't been out. But a lot of people that come say, *oh, yeah, I've been out for 10, 15, 20 years.* But yes, the freedom is the main, main, main, main thing. Oh, my gosh. I have more freedom now than I ever had. Now, the wife said, when I found out, I stopped being sexually attractive. So, I had to give up sexual relations. But, it wasn't a big deal at 70, 72, whatever. If I was 30, it would have been a deal-breaker. But so, a lot of the wives are very skittish about having this person, you know, in bed with them and making gestures of affection when they know that they're in their mind, they're seeing how they were dressed last night, you know. So, it gets it gets complicated.

Silverman: Yeah, that sounds very complicated.

Byron: Yeah. But we went to we went to therapy. And for about four, four years, I went for five, six. And she was fabulous— in Nashville. She was Vietnamese. And of course, I was a Vietnam veteran. So, we had a lot to talk about there. And her father and mother, you know, were caught up in all that in those days. And she was, she was fabulous for me, and made

me feel like, well. Ok, so my wife went to another therapist and she told him about me. And so, he wanted to see me with her. So, I went in and sat on the couch and he said a couple of questions and I said my answers. And he got up, and got a book off the shelf and turned to a page where it said that this, what I did, was pathological.

Silverman: Oh, God. ok.

Byron: I know. And I said, *well, ok, you can think that, but there are too many of us in the world that are productive, and it might be your obstetrician. You don't know— whoever.* But so, I told my therapist about what he told me, and she said, *oh, that's terrible. I'm going to speak to him.* I said, *no, don't bother.* It won't. It won't matter. He doesn't want to be he doesn't want to be convinced. He's not he's not a kid. He's 45-50 years old. Yeah. So, he knows. Yeah. So, there are there are a lot of misguided therapy sessions, I'm sure, like the Pray Away Gay. You know, we had a vice president who was from Indiana, the governor of Indiana. And he said, you know, *these gay people have got to be converted.*

Silverman: Right. Yeah. Oh, God. Well, I'm happy that you were able to just leave and understand that these— there's no way to kind of— or it's like an exhaustive effort to try to, like, talk to people that are transphobic, or trying to enforce kind of violent understandings of gender.

Byron: With this group that I go, we call it GLOW, Girls Out To Lunch— GLOW. And when we get up and walk around to the to the restroom or, you know, call for the waiter, people come up to our table and say, *I just want you to know, you folks look fabulous.*

Silverman: That's lovely. I'm so happy at their response.

Byron: I know, because but there are some people who are, —ugh— I want to bring them into my course and teach them. But I don't know. I can't. You know, I have to be real, real careful, hands off.

Silverman: So in in wrapping up a bit, I was wondering, if there's one thing that you could be remembered for, what would it be?

Byron: Well, I think I've been a good human being. That's the main thing, right? I've had when you can take a person who can't walk and make them walk and smile and run. That's tremendous. And I've done that my whole life. And I saw— I won't even get into all that, but there have been articles written about me as a— as a foot surgeon in the Army. My kids are retired Air Force. I have two— husband and wife, and one retired Navy. So, the three of us, they did an article on the three— four of us because it's the husband and wife, and then the son-in-law, and me. And they did a whole big spread on that. So, I've had all these compartments, you know, the music, the military, the sporting activities. And I've done some tremendous, tremendous things. The only thing I wanted to do that I didn't get to— was to be Ringo in the band that plays, you know, like on stage as the Beatle tribute band. But I knew the guys who did that. I knew those guys. And I saw him in Vegas, and I spent some time with them. And they showed up at a couple of our shows, the John Lennon guy. And I said, *oh, man, if I could play Ringo, I'd love it.* But I didn't have the time.

Silverman: [laughter] Is there anything you would like to add before we end?

Byron: Just hopefully, you know— well, I mean, I don't know how many people you interview, but you should have somebody three times a day. Five times a day. There's enough people out there. Do you want me to pass it along to my group or not?

Silverman: Yeah, I would love you to recommend anyone. We can do that through email. But I would— yeah, I would love recommendations.

Byron: Yeah, I've got lots of contacts, lots. Lots more than I had back in the day.

Silverman: Ok, yeah, that sounds perfect.

Byron: I appreciate you so much. Thanks for what you're doing.

Silverman: Thank you so much. This was just such an enriching experience. I love learning about your whole life. There's so many parts of it that are so interesting. And it'll just be such a beautiful addition to our archive.