

City of Savannah Municipal Archives

Proud Savannah History Project

Interview: Trent Allen

Interviewed by Kelly Zacovic, April 18, 2022, City Hall, Savannah, Georgia

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Note: All interviews are unedited and may contain language and content that some may find offensive or difficult to view. Interviews reflect the time period they were recorded and the views of the interviewee.

Start of interview.

Kelly Zacovic: Today is April 18th, 2022. It's 10 AM, and this is Kelly Zacovic, archivist with the City of Savannah Municipal Archives. I'm interviewing Trent Allen for the Savannah Proud History Project. We're conducting this interview at City Hall. So, thank you for joining us today. So, let's just start with a little bit of biographical information. Can you tell us your full name?

Trent Allen: My name is Trent Asher Allen.

KZ: Alright. And when and where were you born?

TA: I was born and raised in Georgia, but I mostly grew up around the east side of Atlanta.

KZ: Okay. And—so, what brought you to Savannah? And when?

TA: I originally came here for college in 2012, and then I just ended up staying after I graduated.

KZ: And excuse me, how do you self-identify?

TA: I self-identify as a queer trans man.

KZ: Okay. So, now we're going to go into a little bit of Savannah LGBTQ history. So, can you describe your involvement with the Savannah LGBTQ history—I mean community?

TA: Yeah. So, I originally—when I first came here, I ended up getting involved with the Armstrong Gay-Straight Alliance. I was vice president after a while, and then I ended up serving as president for a bit. On top of that, I ended up assisting with a therapy group as kind of like a community liaison for youth LGBT, particularly trans individuals. And not only would I help assist with the youth in that group, I would help talk to the parents to give them a better idea of what to expect with transitioning, how to accept their children's changes—transition, and all of that.

KZ: And what organization was that through?

TA: It was through an independent therapy clinic. She kind of changed names a couple of times, but it was located in a Union Mission in Rincon originally.

KZ: So, can you tell us a little bit more about the Armstrong Gay-Straight Alliance?

TA: Yeah, it was honestly—it was always a very small organization. It was—we would get a lot of people coming in when the first meetings first started as a way people would kind of use it as a social club to find the other LGBT kids on campus. But it was always a very, very small organization. We wanted to try and grow that when I was there, and particularly when I was in the executive offices around like 2014 in particular. That was when we tried to like grow with larger events. We did the promenade, which ended up becoming a popular event on cam—campus. We helped advocate for transgender, like with the ID cards and stuff like that. Being able to have your chosen name on the identification card. And that was honestly very, very important to a lot of people that were still coming out. We started to do more informational talks and kind of like lectures around campus. So, they were open to the general public. So, the one that I particularly led was like the ins and outs of like transgender individuals. But we did them about safe sex practices, LGBT rights history, all of that. So, our focus was education and information. And then we started partnering with the SCAD's Queers and Allies group as well.

KZ: Can you tell me a little bit more about the promenade?

TA: Yeah, so, it was basically—it is a prom hosted by Armstrong's Gay-Straight Alliance. It was open to everyone on campus. We usually didn't like to charge ticket fees, so we usually would do like a canned food donation drive or something similar and you—that would be your ticket in. Is that you would just bring some sort of food item, and that would be your ticket in. But we had food, dancing, DJs. And that was our big, big event. Most of our funding, and stuff like that, and donations that we would get throughout the year would go towards the promenade. And it was hosted on campus. And again, it was open to everyone. It was supposed to be kind of like—the original meaning behind it was that there were so many LGBT kids that could not feel comfortable, especially in the South, being able to go to their high school prom. So, this was kind of an opportunity to redo that in a way where they were in a safe environment, they could be with their partners, they could express how they wanted to, you know, identity wise, and be in a nice, safe space while being with all of their friends. So, it was always a very, very popular event. And may not have been quite as big as, like, a high school prom would it be with a huge budget, but it was always usually very packed. And was always very, very fun to work with.

KZ: That's great that's so important. What years were you involved there?

TA: I believe it was like 2013 through 2015 as, like, an executive. But I was in the Gay-Straight Alliance pretty much my entire time on campus, since I went there on 2012.

KZ: Okay. And it's still going strong today?

TA: [nods] I still follow them on Instagram, and every now and then I get little notifications. They're still housing meetings, and they're still participating in events.

KZ: Thanks. And can you—do you want to tell me a little bit more about you—or you mentioned, I know, the fight to get trans chosen names on identity cards and things like that. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

TA: Yeah. So, that was an interesting process because getting your name legally changed in Georgia can be quite a hassle. And it can also be an expensive process. And there's not a lot of straightforward information, particularly here in Chatham County. I ended up running into a lot of obstacles just trying to legally change my name. So, while I was still on campus, I had my dead name, which was my name given to me at birth. It was on all of my ID cards. But I had been going by Trent for a while at that point. So, a lot of it was just going up to the student cards and the organizations that like ran making the ID cards. When it was actually—Armstrong it was actually very straightforward. They were very open to it. They were very receptive. And we couldn't just not have the legal name on there, unfortunately. They did still have to have that. But with it being a photo ID that had the legal name and—they decided, “Okay, well, we can just do a second line that has your chosen name on it.” So, we compromised on that. That ended up working out, not just a lot for me, but for other like non-binary and trans presenting individuals.

But that worked out really, really well. And it was great even off campus because once I had started hormone replacements, my dead name made it very, very difficult to do certain things that required an ID. But I had that student ID that had a picture of my face and both of my names on there, so it was like an easy way to be like, “Hi, I’m transgender. Like this is what's going on.” Like, I would have my driver's license and then this is like my student ID. And that would help.

The time that we ran into issues was when it was the consolidation began. Georgia Southern was not receptive to it. They absolutely were—I actually—because you’re able—my last year there was, like, I was part of the last graduating class of Armstrong before the consolidation actually took place. And you were able to go ahead and get a Georgia southern ID about, like, within the last year right before the consolidation because they were slowly trying to change. And I remember I was making constant calls. I was talking to multiple people with Student Affairs and stuff like that, and they were like, “No, we absolutely can't.” I was like, “Well, how we did it with Armstrong was we would have the legal name because we understand that, you know, for legal purposes you have to have the legal name attached. But we would have the chosen name on the second—on the secondary line.” And they, they fought that tremendously.

I don't know in recent times if that has changed at all, but Georgia Southern was not receptive to it. Which was one of the, one of the other reasons why I was kind of upset about the consolidation. Georgia South—or Georgia Southern versus Armstrong. Armstrong had a more approachable smaller university feel. So, it was a little easier to feel like you could get stuff done.

KZ: Do you have a sense of what it's like in other Georgia universities? UGA or any of—?

TA: Usually the larger the universities and the larger the LGBT+ community, community is, they usually have a larger representation involved. And because of that, they have a lot more. But you usually run into a lot of issues where although they may do very well in representing the lesbian, bisexual, gay communities in regard to sexuality, trans individuals get left out a lot. There's usually a lot of issues when it comes to obtaining hormones, housing placements, even just the student ID issue. And even for me, who was somebody who was on testosterone, and I present very, very masculine. So, I have what's called passing privilege. So, I was—I'm more I would say "digestible" for a lot of people getting introduced to the trans community because it's like, I went from female to male, and I present extremely male. But there are a lot of people that identify a little bit more in between, and they don't—they shouldn't feel the need to have to present extreme on one end or the other in order to feel accepted. And because of those issues [falls in chair]—and I accidentally just, like, knocked myself down. But because of those issues and all of that, it makes it difficult in smaller universities. Usually from what I hear from other trans individuals is the larger the university, the better the acceptance is. But it's usually a very consistent issue, particularly in the South and very conservative states in general.

KZ: Okay. So, in terms of some of those rights that you mentioned (housing, access to care), can you describe any other experience with that at Armstrong? Or—?

TA: So, Armstrong particularly was very considerate for the most part. When I was a freshman, I was in a semi-private dorm room. And that was when I was—I'd come out as transgender. My roommate ended up leaving at the end of the first semester. And they wanted to give me another roommate. And I was just like, "Hi, because this is a semi-private and I am a transgender individual"—I kind of like, made an appeal to not have the other half of the room filled. And they were fine with that.

However, when I went to go move into another camp-like dorm room the next year, it was—I had to room with a woman. I didn't have any say, and there is no way to like in the housing questions to say—you know, to make sure that your roommate's going to be comfortable with a transgender individual. However, thankfully, my roommate the second year—super, super cool individual. They are actually a huge ally. I actually still talk to her occasionally. So, that just happened to work out.

But that housing is a huge nerve-wracking issue for students that live on campus. And you have to live on campus if you're not local. So, a lot of transgender individuals, unless you find somebody specifically and then make a petition basically to get housed together, you're pretty much kind of forced to go with the biological sex aspect of it. And there are certain reasons why they see why that's necessary, especially if it's a random generated thing. But there's not really a lot of protections when it comes to making sure that your roommate's not going to have issues. And that again makes it a very nerve-wracking thing.

As far as care on campus medically, I never had any issues being transgender. I had issues with medical care outside of campus. A lot of them, unfortunately. But always on campus, the medical team—like whether it was like nurses' office, therapist office, or counseling center, anything like that—they were always super great. And as far as I'm aware, they are—they have

still continued that, just from what I've heard through the grapevine from people that still attend the university.

KZ: That's great. Before I move on to the other questions, anything else to add about life as a trans individual at the university or LGBTQ in general?

TA: Not necessarily. I would say at the university, I had like one particular incident where it was, like, hate crime-ish, where somebody like threw a bunch of rocks at me. But there was not anything that could have been done. It wasn't like the campus police didn't take it seriously or anything like that. They were always very nice. It was just in a weird area there were no cameras. But I didn't run into too many obstacles in that regard, thankfully.

KZ: Okay. So, you mentioned a liaison with SCAD. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

TA: Yeah. So, we ended up partnering with SCAD's Queers and Allies, which is their version of Gay-Straight Alliance. So, our exec boards had gotten together, and we wanted to occasionally get together. And because we had two very different groups—ours is a bit more educational; theirs was almost more therapeutic. But we liked to get together. And sometimes it would be, like, we would just show up to each other's meetings as a show of support. Sometimes we would go and get dinners together. And then sometimes we would just go, and we would do like game nights and stuff like that. And we would house them at different events. And it was usually just some small stuff. We did a couple of, like, small events. I know there was one time we did an interview with the exec boards from both of them. And that was, like, downtown. It was a—for some sort of, like, small paper or something like that—I can't quite remember; it was so long ago. But I do remember I was with the other executive officer—officers with the SCAD Queers and Allies. And I was chosen. I was the only exec member available for the Armstrong GSA at the time, so I was the only one that went. So—but most of it was just touching base. But we had a very good relationship with them. I don't know if they're still interconnected. But it was very fun. And I'm actually still friends with several of the executive officers at that time. One of whom is now a published and successful author. Has been featured on Netflix. He's a cool guy. He's just, like, out traveling all over the United States, so he's a fun guy to follow.

KZ: Who is that?

TA: Alexander Cheves. Yeah, yeah. You should definitely hit him up [laughs].

KZ: C-h-e-v?

TA: C-h-e-v-e-s.

KZ: S, okay.

TA: And he was the president of the SCAD's Queers and Allies at the time I was president of the Armstrong GSA.

KZ: Before I move on to that question, do you know of any affiliated groups at, like, Savannah State or any of the other local universities?

TA: I know only when I was at Armstrong, there was a group at Georgia Southern before the consolidation, and we had talked to them briefly, but we never did anything. Not really aware if there was anything going on with Savannah State. Savannah State usually just kept to themselves. I think that there may have been one, but if there was, it was very, very, very small and only a couple of members. To the point where it was just like we couldn't really do it—do much because even though we had a small group, they were, like, I think, it was, like, three or four people, or something like that. But that was back then. I don't know if they have something more established now or not.

KZ: Okay. So, you mentioned Alexander Cheves. Were there any other leaders at Armstrong, or SCAD, or any other of these youth groups or student groups?

TA: Lindsay Snowpeck. She was like, like, she was, like, my best friend and the secretary for many, many years for the Armstrong GSA. So, she had seen a lot of events. And she was, she was great. I don't feel comfortable relaying the name of the president at the time I was vice president, mostly because she was not fully out and there could be repercussions for her family. And then I do—I can't remember the last name. Alex might know. It was, I believe, his vice president at the time of SCAD's Queers and Allies. I know Stephanie, and I know I still have her on Facebook. I just I know I'm getting her last name mixed up with somebody else's.

KZ: We can talk about these afterwards too. Alright. So, somebody else had mentioned to us a Queer Power March at Armstrong. Do you know anything about that?

TA: No. That must have happened after I had left the university.

KZ: Okay.

TA: Because I would have definitely been all up in that.

KZ: I'm drawing a blank on what the years were on that. Okay. So, anything else you'd like to add about university life in Savannah?

TA: Oh, well, I was at the university, but me and Lindsay (the secretary at the time), we went to go assist with the Rainbow Fest. Which was supposed to be, at that time, I think, was 2013, 2014. Which was supposed to be, like, the first, like, gay Pride parade on Tybee Island. And it was a big deal. I know I remember that they had a bunch of people. And they had some people out in drag, just, like, trying to get everyone in shape because we had a bunch of volunteers, and so, they didn't know what to do. And they were like, "We got this flag from the Miami Pride, and we're going to like, we're going to, like, really show it off. But, like, this is the first time. We're, like, we got to make a good impression everyone." And they had us hold a banner— me and Lindsay hold a banner in front of the flag. And we're like, "Okay." And so, we're getting ready to go, and we're like, "Okay, so who's getting in front of us?" And they're like, "There's no one in front of you."

KZ: You started the parade?

TA: So, me and Lindsay ended up leading the first gay pride parade on Tybee Island on complete fluke. And we were so confused [laughs], but it was honestly it was fun. And it was probably one of the most memorable things. And it was great because even from the pictures, it looks like we're having a blast. The entire time, we're whispering, or like, "Where did we turn? Where did they say to turn again?" [laughs].

KZ: You said that's about 2013?

TA: 2013, 2014. Some—somewhere like that.

KZ: That's cool. We're gonna come back to that. Okay, so the next question: how you would describe Savannah's current relationship with their attitude towards LGBTQ community or trans individuals in general—or in specifically?

TA: So, unfortunately, we have to divide between the LGB and the T because the general acceptance of the gay population is very high. And I would say it's a very good safe haven for, for the most part for, you know, the sec—like for sexuality. However, when it comes to gender identity, there is a lot of work to be done. I will say just in the time that I've been in Savannah, there has been some improvement. But there is still a lot of issues. There's not a lot of representation. People don't talk about it. And I still run into issues from time to time. And like I said, I thankfully I pass very, very well. But I know others that don't have the same privilege that I do that are still running into issues being accepted. And because of the lack of education and the lack of knowledge about the transgender community, I wouldn't necessarily say that this is the best city to be a transgender individual in.

KZ: So, when it comes to those, is it safety issues? Is it access to care? What kind of—?

TA: A little bit of both. Access to care is definitely a big one. I was—because just a good, a good scenario of this: thankfully, now there is like an informed consent clinic here. And informed consent clinics are places where you can more easily access hormones. You sign your paperwork. They get you set up with blood work. And they're like an LGBT-friendly clinic. They're focused on LGBT health. And it makes a lot easier, particularly for transgender individuals.

But before that clinic opened up, I was going through an informed consent clinic in Atlanta around where I was from. They ended up closing down. So, I had been on hormones for five years at that point. Legal prescription, mind you. And I was just trying to find a way to continue my prescription here in Savannah. And I had just been calling up doctor's office and be like, "Hey, I'm a transgender individual. I have been on a legal prescription for testosterone for five years. I have the paperwork that can back that up." I was like, "I don't mind redoing all the physical exams, all the blood work, everything." I was like, "But would your office even be willing to write a script for testosterone for me to continue my transition?" The amount of offices that told me they would absolutely refuse to see me was astonishing.

I found one that did, but they did not really know what was going on. I had to do a lot of educating on that part because they were like, “Oh, wow, we need to lower your dose.” Like because I was like on .05, which is a very common dose. And I was, like, on that for five years. Like, my dose had never changed. That was, like, once a week. And they were like, “We need to lower your dose of like 0.175, or something, something ridiculous.” And I was like, “That is a drastic change.” And they're like, “Yeah, no, your levels are really, really high.” And I was like, “Hey, quick question: are you reading them in a male or a female range?” And they're like, “Female because it says female on your chart.” And I was like, “Okay, I'm female to male transgender. They're supposed to be in the male range. That's the, that's the point.”

So, it was a lot of awkward incidences like that. Just getting my script filled at the pharmacy was kind of a nightmare. And then whenever I would go to doctors—because I have, like, pre-existing medical conditions, and things that have been going on way before I started testosterone (some of them of which are genetic)—my testosterone was always to blame. I had issues going to receive, like, gynecology care. And to the point where I still feel extremely uncomfortable around trying to get that taken care of. Because although I still need to do that, obviously, I've had several clinics either think one: I'm prank calling them, two: don't feel comfortable seeing a transgender man, or three: I actually also had a doctor tell me that I am destroying my body by being on hormone replacement. So, I've had a lot of—I've probably had more negative experiences than I've had positive.

And thankfully Starland family practice opened up because they are phenomenal. I can't recommend them enough. And they've helped tremendously in regards to medical care because it's the first time I feel like I don't have to sit there and defend my testosterone. And every other doctor pretty much has had an issue with it.

KZ: You said Sterling Family?

TA: Starland.

KZ: Starland. Like Starland neighborhood?

TA: Yeah.

KZ: Starland family—

TA: Family practice.

KZ: And are they full-service? Or they focus on—?

TA: They do a wide variety. It's not, I would say, quite as big as, like, a traditional thing. But I can use them as, like, my general practitioner. I wouldn't say go there if I had, you know, a cold or a broken arm. But I get, like, my migraine medications and treatments like that through them. My hormones. A lot of my basic care stuff. I can get, like, basic referrals. And they helped to get me connected for research and for top surgery. All of that. So, they, they, they take care of the

basic needs. The more specialized stuff, that I do have to go to like, a like, a different clinic for. But usually that's something I would have to go to like urgent care. That sort of thing.

KZ: And how long have they been open?

TA: I cannot remember, but I know I've only been going to them, like, a couple years now. Maybe like two. Two years. But I definitely referred them to every single friend that I know that is, like, on hormones or is just LGBT in general. Just because it's like definitely easier. And it's like, you know, you're not going to get harassed or belittled for being LGBT at the clinic.

KZ: Do you want to drop doctors' names or anything? Are they somebody you recommend we speak to?

TA: I don't know his official title, but Ivanhart is who I see.

KZ: I-v-a-n-h-e-a-r-t?

TA: I believe so. And I know there's at least one other doctor there.

KZ: What other unique issues do trans Savannahians face?

TA: I've actually had issues with employment. Especially before I had my name changed. That was super fun. I would go in—so, oh boy. Yeah, no, the employment one, that's actually a big one. I had my life threatened because a co-worker found out I was trans very early on into my transit—transition. And my wallet dropped, they saw my ID, and they were like—they put two and two together. They threatened my life. Manager overheard all of this, was present for it. I just asked for an apology. I didn't ask for disciplinary action; I asked for an apology. I was like, “This is clear threats of violence.” Stuff like that. I was like, “I just need to know you guys got my back on this at least.” And I was told by the manager, “He had his ‘right to his opinion.’” So, I just quit on the spot. Just because at that point, I was like, “I'm working in a freight area. Not really any cameras. And we're surrounded by box cutters. And this dude is, like, three times my size. And he's already threatened my life because he found out what I was.” So, that was fun.

I had another job that was initially—or at least I interviewed for another job that was in—that they wanted me to work there. I did touch on the, “Yep, you know, I am transgender” thing. And they were like, “Okay, that's fine. That's not going to be an issue. But you can never talk about your status as a transgender individual.” And because at that time I was pre-op, they're like, “You can never show up to work without your chest bound because that would have been a dead giveaway.” And they're like, “Because if you did, we would have to fire you.”

KZ: Is it illegal?

TA: There's actually not a lot of protections when it comes to transgender individuals. Individual organizations may have policies. But I even tried to pursue that with the first job, and I realized real quick unless you have everything on video, no one's going to do anything. Because I tried to pursue issues with the EEOC before because I had, had a—another job where there—the

manager definitely had a vendetta against me. Was even documented by other employees as being transphobic on multiple times. Refused to change my name in the system so that my name was publicly being outed and therefore my status as a transgender individual was being outed to anyone that could access and book appointments through me. And then, yeah, there was a lot of issues with that. And then it ended up coming to a head. I wasn't technically fired for being transgender, but I was definitely being targeted by her initially for it. And she just found a really good way to get me out.

[laughs] And then, oh boy. There was another job that I interviewed for. Oh, this one's a fun one. You're gonna love this. There was another job that I interviewed for. They loved me for it. I made it to multiple—I made it through multiple interviews. Finally get to the part where I'm, like, presenting IDs. Right? And I'm like, "You know, I am female to male transgender." This—at this point in time, I'm very far into my transition. I have a full beard. My voice is deep. I look like—but at this point, I publicly pass as male. There's no doubt about it. Whereas in previous instances, it's, like, you might have been able to pick [?] me. But in this instance, it was like, "Oh, wow, you're trans." So, I had to show my ID. And I was like, "I have not had my name legally changed yet. I am female to male transgender. It's just a process to legally change the name." And this was the guy that ran the company who felt it then appropriate—during a job interview—to then ask me what genitalia I had.

KZ: Oh.

TA: Yeah. And then, like, just could not get off that topic. Was just way more interested in knowing the ins and outs of what was in my pants than he was about anything else at that point. And it was just like, "I have to, like, disclose to some extent because for like insurance stuffs, my gender marker is still female. So, for insurance reasons, I still have to like state that I am female to male transgender." And then, you know, before I had my name changed, I'd like—that was usually a thing that would come up pretty quick because my dead name was the—very, very feminine. There was no avoiding that. And then I'd also changed my full name, so it wasn't even like I had anything the same. Like, even my last name changed.

So, yeah, I had had a lot of incidences where that happened. And just being asked inappropriate things in just general work environments is surprisingly common. And I'm expected to just take it because "people don't know better." That that's a common—that's a common trend.

I will say that's why I love working at the Humane Society. Because especially—and now, they are very, very, very accepting. And they were honestly more—they were probably just as enthusiastic about my top surgery as I was. Almost every single person there, like, contributed in some way, shape, or form. So, that was a very good, good experience. To finally find a job where I felt accepted and not berated. To the point where there was an employee at one part that did make a remark about "the lady with the beard." And she doesn't work there anymore. So, it's nice to know that I am defended.

So, at least, at least it's not all bad. But I did have a lot of bad experiences. And unfortunately, a lot of other transgender individuals do run into a lot of issues like that. Because I know in recent years, they've been trying to pass protections, particularly for gender identity. But the state of

Georgia makes it very difficult to actually pursue anything if somebody were to discriminate. And then like, like I said, I had so many incidences that I tried to like say, “Hey, like, this wasn't okay.” And then I even tried to pursue things with, like, the EEOC and stuff like that. And nothing could come of it because I didn't have hard enough evidence. So, it was like short of having recorded thumb conversations or video evidence, you couldn't really do anything about it because at that point it's just a he-said, she-said thing. Even though you could have other co-workers and other people say like, “No, no, they definitely had an issue with them being trans.”

KZ: Do you have a sense if that's different other places and that's, like, a Georgian thing? Or is that sort of a broad issue?

TA: It's, it's a weird issue to have in a big city. Considering how liberal Savannah claims to be, it is weird that this is as strong of an issue. A lot of it is because we don't—we're not as big on LGBT rights as we think we are. And like I said, it's not necessarily a bad place to be, but we're no Atlanta. We're no San Francisco. We're no New York. We have a long way to go as far as representation goes and especially when it comes to transgender individuals. There are little to no protections. There are little to no actual enforcement of these protections. So, a lot of these individuals are either forced to compromise for their own—like, they have to compromise their own identity in order to just get by at the sake of their own mental health, or they express who they are and realize that they're just going to receive flak from pretty much every angle.

KZ: Are there any uniquely Georgian issues with—you mentioned IDs and gender markers. Is that easier or more difficult in Savannah or Georgia than other places?

TA: Georgia in general is just not super great when it comes to transgender stuff. They make it just—due to like changing your name, and it can be quick or fast, depending on—that's a county thing. With Chatham County in particular, I ran into a lot of issues. One: just trying to figure out how to do it was next to near impossible. And when I would try to call up to try and figure out how, no one would really talk to me about it. I ended up having to find, like, a resource center and, like, pay somebody to basically get all the paperwork ready for me. And the stuff that I could have done on my own. But because there was no resources in order to be like, “Hey, here's how you do a name change.” That's, you know, for this reason, Georgia does require you to put your dead name and say that you're changing your name from A to B in a newspaper. Which I understand to some extent, but it also paints a huge target on the back of transgender individuals. Because that that ad has to be ran for X amount of time. And it also can make it difficult for people that are trying to be more incognito. Now, thankfully, newspapers more of an outdated media form. But you still have to pay to run that ad. And that's something that never technically goes away. So, Georgia makes it difficult to change your gender marker in comparison to a lot of other states. Even in comparison to other conservative states.

They do require usually, if I'm not mistaken, some form of surgery. It used to be you had to have full surgery. I think that they may have tweaked it, that you had to have at least something. And then, like, a psychiatrist letter. The state of Georgia is really, really weird about it. And when you compare [phone ringtone goes off]—when you compare the state of Georgia to most other states, Georgia ranks extremely low when it comes to like access, and then just general rights and protections for LGBT, but especially transgender individuals. Georgia was actually one of those

states that actually is—it's technically still legal to discriminate against transgender people. Protection against gender identity was not considered a protected class for discrimination, which is why you could run into a lot of issues. And then on top of the right to work state thing, it makes it really difficult to pursue any actions if you were to get fired.

KZ: You mentioned the resource center that helped you get your paperwork together.

TA: Mm-hmm.

KZ: Which? What resource center?

TA: I think that literally at that time was called, like, the Family Resource Center. I know they do a whole bunch of different stuff. And one of the ones that they did do was the legal name change. Now, once I got in with them, they got everything taken care of. They notarized this stuff for me. They had everything in different packets. And they're like, "You're going to deliver this packet to the newspaper place. You're going to deliver this to the courthouse." Like, I—it was super straightforward once I got with them. They were like, "Bring us A, B, and C documentation. And then we basically take care of the rest. You sign on these lines, and then we'll tell you what to do from there." So, the Family Resource Center was great for that. It was just trying to get a hold of them. So, anyone that does want to change their name usually has to find somebody who did it here locally in order to help guide them. Because trying to figure out how to do it on your own just through a Google search is next to near impossible. Because I was trying for years, and I was running into constant walls in order to do so. And there are so many sites and websites that'll offer to do it for you, and some of them are kind of scammy, and it's hard to tell which ones are real and which ones aren't. And especially if you can't get, like, any sort of, like, city government official to talk to you. But once I had the name change paperwork, it was very easy to go and get my new driver's license, new social security, that sort of thing. Because I actually had so many issues with insurance before I had my name legally changed because—yeah.

KZ: Okay, that makes sense. Do you have anything else that you'd like to share about your experience as a trans man in Savannah?

TA: Not at this moment. I think I touched over a lot of it.

KZ: Yeah. So, you've mentioned a couple. Are there any other organizations in Savannah that are specifically focused on trans individuals or LGBT people that are providing these services?

TA: Not any that I'm super familiar with. I think that there are some smaller groups, but they're not, like, in-person, physical. I know there's online support groups. I don't really participate in a lot of them just because there is a lot of—unfortunately, there is a lot of, like, internal conflict within them. And I'm gonna be honest, I get a lot of flak from the LGB community almost more than I do from cishet people. Because yeah. It's, it's very fun. So, sometimes even LGBT-friendly spaces are not as friendly as they claim for transgender individuals. Because at that point, they feel like they can say and do whatever they want, and they can't be transphobic because they're

gay or lesbian or whatever. And when you're trying to be like, “Hey, different, different ball game.”

Because if you break slightly from—I guess the, the traditional mold—if I was like a gay trans man—because like I said, I identify as queer. And that's just because an umbrella term, stuff like that. I'm like ninety percent more attractive to women. But like, if I was, like, exclusively gay, that is a whole different can of worms. If I trad—it was more effeminate in my appearance even with hormones, or if I didn't want to be on hormones, or if I didn't want to have surgery—if I did not present myself in such a masculine way, in such a traditionally accepting like gender role kind of way, it would be something that would be open to criticism. And honestly a lot of that criticism does come from within the LGBT community. So, a lot of those quote-unquote “safe spaces”—not quite the same for trans people.

KZ: Okay.

TA: So, there's, there's as far as I'm aware, there's nothing really for trans or non-binary individuals specifically.

KZ: Are there other organizations that are safe spaces? Or—?

TA: Not that I'm fully aware of. A lot of the groups are usually going to be specific to, like, universities, or they may be religious in nature. And anything affiliated with religion is all automatically going to be kind of a touchy subject for a lot of people in the queer community. So, it's, it's kind of hit or miss. But I'm not aware of any, like, just general access public groups that just anyone can join. You usually have to be already part of another group. Every, every other quote unquote “safe space” is going to be usually an online only thing.

KZ: Okay. Yeah. We've partnered a little bit with the First City Network or for City Pride Center. Interviewed a couple of religious people. Pastor Candace. So, that's interesting. So, have you seen Savannah's relationship with the LGBTQ community change over the years or specifically transgender, non-binary individuals?

TA: Yeah. so, since I have been here for ten years, I actually have seen the difference. It's definitely improved. I have seen some local politicians definitely push. Like, some alderman definitely push for, you know, more representation, more protections. That sort of thing. Unfortunately, because these things get posted publicly, it becomes kind of a hot button topic for debate. But there's definitely been a shift. And it is trending positive.

Yeah. I would say one of the the biggest issues I have that while it's—while things are definitely trending positive, because of that LGBT rights are definitely becoming more common place in the news. And local news likes to use LGBT rights, but especially transgender topics, as kind of like clickbait, hot button issues. And these talks are not productive because at the end of the day, my life is not a debate. It is my life. And all it does is create a lot of discontent within the community. Because these are things that—what they're talking about is not necessarily like “Why we should strive for rights” or “Why transgender people are people that should be treated with basic human decency.” It's just like, “How do you feel about transgender people using

public restrooms?” And it's literally just to garner views. And all it does is—it's a very controversial topic. And I have seen I, I think almost every single local news station participate in debates like that. And it's just like, I get that you guys need a little bit of something, but this is my life, and it's not something that's a fun debate topic. Because at the end of the day, you guys get to be like, “Oh, well, okay, well, that's done and over with.”

And then I have to live with the repercussions of the fact that I can't so much as look into the comment section without people saying that I should be murdered in the streets. And that if they caught me in the restroom, what they're going to do with me. So, it's nice—it's very nice to know that those people are alive and well in the community. Because those, those comment sections bring out the worst in people. I mean, it can be like that with just about any topic with any comment section.

But it's just like, it's instead of shifting—like it should shift the focus to “Why transgender people, you know, deserve access to rights, and care, and stuff like that” instead of being like, “Hey, this is a topic anyone can talk about.” Like, you shouldn't have a cis men talk about—it's like a board of men talk about the reproductive rights of a woman. Like, you should have the people of that community represent their community. And you're having these talks about transgender people, and there's not a single transgender person involved. And it's just—I, I that, that's the one thing that drives me crazy, that has been a consistent trend. It's every single time something comes up in the news, or makes national news. And those talks come back up again. And then they end up using transgender people as a fun topic point in clickbait just to engage in views. So, that's always fun.

KZ: So, so, would you say that Savannah at this time would be an inclusive community? Why or why not?

TA: For transgender, I would put it at neutral. It's not the worst. It is okay, but it's not—I would not say that this is a great place to be if you're transgender. There's a reason I don't want to live here forever. It's not. I've had too many—I've had more negative experiences being a transgender individual here than I've had positive. And although it's still trending positive, it's—there's still not a lot of representation. There's not a lot of inclusivity for transgender individuals. And it's, it's tiring after a bit. For the general queer community, though, it's definitely, I would say that this is a safe space. It could be bigger, but Savannah is also a very small city in the grand scheme of things. It's a major city, but it's also very small. So, I think in comparison, some more groups would be good. Some more, like, representation from particularly city government would be very great. But overall, the City of Savannah is very good in terms of, like, protecting its, you know, queer community. It's just when it comes to anything outside of the norm for gender identity, it becomes a kind of a different topic. And it's also one of those things that we always get roped underneath the same umbrella, but it's two separate things. And because of that, we get forgotten about a lot when it comes to inclusivity.

KZ: Do you know of any other important leaders in the community, specifically any, like, important trans individuals?

TA: I'm not aware of any transgender people in the community that are—or just—not transgender. I, I know of my alderman is a gay man—Kurtis Purtee. And he's great. I mean, I've even had some conversations with him before, just as an approachable individual. And that's great. Just to see some queer represent—representation for the city. Like, that's always great. But as far as trans individuals, there's not a lot.

I don't think that there's—I think it would be a very difficult thing for somebody to be openly transgender in Savannah and be in a public office. I think that would put them in a very difficult position. Because although it's usually okay to be seen as publicly gay (even though there are still going to be people that have issues with that) being openly transgender puts a whole different target on your back. Especially because it's, like, you can either just not say anything about it and constantly worry that somebody's going to out you. So, “going stealth” is the term that's used for that. And that's dangerous because once you get discovered, then your whole world can be shattered around you. Or if you're very open and honest about it in the way that I am, you just put yourself—you just put a constant target on your back. And you just constantly have to worry about the intentions of other people. So, it's more power to people who try. It would be one of those things I would love to see transgender people doing more for the city, but right now, I don't know how safe it genuinely would be, especially for a trans woman.

KZ: Any social or business people? Prominent people?

TA: As far as individuals go, I'm drawing a blank. I know that there are definitely LGBT-friendly businesses. And then—because I mean, we have to acknowledge Club One. Like, let's be real. Even though I'm not a clubbing person, everyone here knows Club One. I know—even my job is extremely accepting. Pounce Cat Café I know has even—they are very, very accepting as well. A lot—actually, honestly, a lot of the local businesses try to do what they can. I would say especially when, like, Pride rolls around, there's always that fun issue of just like, “Who is being commercialized?” But there are a lot of people that just genuinely enjoy and love representing Pride, so it's actually nice to feel like the local businesses around here just like to get into the spirit of things. Which you don't quite as feel that when you, like, go on social media and you're just like, “Oh, Netflix says that they support gay rights. Okay. Alright.” You know, you know? Like that sort of thing. It feels more authentic seeing it particularly from some of the small mom and pop shops. Not everyone here—I don't have like a list of businesses off the top of my head, but it's, it's more than people realize. It's—I would say a lot of the businesses here are very, very accepting, particularly I would say the smaller businesses.

KZ: That's great. I want to get back to the Tybee Pride Parade. Can you talk a little bit more about that? How that came to be? How it was?

TA: So, I wasn't really involved so much in, like, the planning aspect. We had just originally—our group had volunteered because they were like, “Hey, we're having the gay Pride. We're having a gay pride parade on Tybee. And it's going to be, like, the first one. And we're getting the flag in from the Miami Pride.” Which is the huge, super long flag. And they're like, “We need a bunch of volunteers to come down.” So me and the secretary, Lindsay Snowpeck, at the time we were like, “Hey, like,” we're like, “Let's corral some people. We'll go. We'll all help carry the Pride flag. It's gonna be a big deal. Like, that's it's cute to be, like, a little part of

history.” That sort of thing. We get there, they're getting the whole flag down. You have, you know, your older members of the queer community that were just like, “This is gonna be, like, a huge deal. Like, we've gotta, like, make a good first impression.” And we didn't really know these people, unfortunately. And it was unfortunate because we were just, like, this college group that just came in, or like, “Hi, we're just here to help. Just throw us wherever.”

But it ended up—it was a nice turnout. And as far as I'm aware, I don't think they keep it by the same name. But they have had several parades since then. And they have regular Pride events on Tybee Island now. And that's super nice. So, the Tybee Island community was very enthusiastic about it. It just goes to show, honestly, it'd be nice if the Savannah Pride was more of an actual, like, event instead of just, like, a get-together in Forsyth Park. Because I feel like the community wants more, and they like these events and stuff like that. And if we give them the opportunity to try and celebrate, it would be a fun way to, like, get ever—more people involved. Instead of having just, like, through closed doors, and, like, “Here's your gay shopping” like what Savannah Pride is. I honestly enjoyed the parade more than the traditional Savannah Pride.

It was a, a very fun thing to one: accidentally leading the gay parade [laughs]. Like, it was in the newspaper and everything. I got a picture of it somewhere on my phone. I can show it to you. It was also me, like, before I was on testosterone, so I'm baby-faced. And it's—it was just super funny because we're just sitting there holding the flag, and we're just, like, walking down and going by the beach and everything. And it was, it was a blast, honestly, because they, they had like a whole bunch of cars, and they had a huge flag, and they had a bunch of drag queens out there. And it was just—it was focused on being a family-friendly fun event. And everyone there was—the thing is, is that not only did they just want it to go well, just for the sake of this is a big event, they wanted it to go well because they wanted to be, like, “We need this. We need the community to recognize us and love us.” And it was particularly something that I didn't really notice in the moment, but looking back as I'm getting older and I'm starting to see who's—like, they wanted this to go well so that way they don't have to worry about the younger generations having to deal with what they went through. They want to know, “Okay, they're going to be fine here.” And that's something that I, I think about honestly a lot more often than people realize. Is just being a little part of that maybe could have helped some people be a little bit more open-minded.

KZ: And that's different from Savannah Pride?

TA: Yeah, the Savannah Pride, like I said, is very much you pay for your ticket at the door, you go into a gated area, and it's, it's pretty much just a little shopping thing. They have some live music. But it's—Savannah Pride is not literally like any other pride that I have seen in any other city, especially for a city as big as we have. Especially a city that loves parades as much as we, we do. Our gay pride is very disappointing. It's like—it's nice to have like the shopping aspect of it, but there's not much going on. The more fun aspect that I really had was the, the Pride Pawrade, which was, like, the little walking of the dogs that we did with work a couple years back. The Humane Society participated in.

I think they do—like at least before COVID—they did like a small parade, but it was, like, at this really weird time, and it wasn't like really associated with the Pride event that we do here in

Savannah. And it was—I remember because it was really out of like a weird time interval. So, it was just like, the Pride events here are just not as promoted, I would say. And they're not as, like, big and theatrical as, like, pretty much every other city event that we do. Which is weird because, especially with the universities, we have a lot of very, very huge queer population. And it would be nice. And people will travel for Pride events. I mean, people go from Savannah to Atlanta Pride all the time. And that's a four-hour drive. So, it's just like, we could do something more. Like, it doesn't have to be like huge, huge. But it would just be nice, you know, to have something more—to make it seem like the city wants us to do more instead of fencing off the entirety of Forsyth Park and putting up a pay wall. And be like, “We're gonna get your money, and now you can go do some gay shopping here.” That's pretty much what—and, and that's—and I will say, that's not just my opinion. A lot of a lot of locals are usually pretty disappointed, especially if they were not always from here or if they have been to literally almost any other Pride event.

KZ: I need to know more about Pawrade, the Pride Pawrade.

TA: I only got to go one time because I did not know this was a thing. But it was this little event. And they wanted to do a walk around one of the squares with a bunch of dogs. And the Humane Society, we ended up bringing some adoptable dogs. And then I ended up bringing one of my dogs that I had adopted through the shelter, and I actually brought my special needs cat at the time, Wolfy, who I actually have a tattoo of. And we did a walk around. Everyone's decked in, like, rainbow bandanas. We've got—we made Pride shirts for work because our dog, our dog behaviorist at that time, she had like, a like a Cricket machine, and so she was like, “If people buy me t-shirts like,” she's like, “I'll do it. I'll do this because we didn't make like an official one.” So, she like made these like t-shirts for the staff so we could have our Humane Society logo with the rainbow colors. Because like half the staff is LGBT. So, it was a fun thing for us to do outside of work. But it was members of the public. We had adoptable dogs there, too. It was a great way to like represent it. I had my kitty in a stroller. I still have—like some of the cutest pictures I have are actually from the Pawrade—the Paw Pride Event. And wolfy was actually very, very popular as a cat. And it was just—it was overall a very fun experience. And because of the popularity of how many comments we actually got on our work shirts that were made really quickly, we actually ended up starting to sell Pride shirts. We had official ones made. We started selling those at the shelter. And those were so popular that we have—now it's a regular thing that we sell pride shirts for the rescue.

KZ: I've been curious about this. Would you say that the animal rescue community is an inclusive one?

TA: Very much so. There is a reason why there are so many queer people in animal rescue. There—you're going to get, like, weird, like, blurbs and stuff like that. But so far, people that are drawn particularly to animal rescue, it's not uncommon, particularly with younger generations, those that had more difficult upbringings, maybe had family issues, maybe difficulty having friends. But especially LGBT people. They find a solace in animals that they did not find that same acceptance with people. So, you see a lot of people drawn towards animal welfare, animal rescue. So, even just in the recent years, the shift for the Humane Society, now being part openly in the LGBT community—because previously we weren't, even though a lot of the staff was

openly clear. It's shifted drastically now that we're under new leadership. And it's been great. The staff there feels a lot more comfortable. We've had nothing but positive comments. We like to decorate a little bit. They even let me have a trans flag—Pride flag at my desk. And I'm at the front desk. And then—so, it's just like they they let us do a lot of fun stuff. And animal rescue in general is one of the, one of the fields that's very, very accepting.

KZ: It's great. That's awesome. Do you recall any pivotal points or in time or major events that were turning points in Savannah as it relates to the LGBT community? Or specifically the trans community? Either positively or negatively?

TA: Not any, like, major events. The only ones that I'm aware of are ones that involve me specifically. But nothing that affects the community really as a whole. I know—the only thing that I can possibly think of, I know, that there was a push by some of the, like, councilman members to create, like, an LGBT, like, task force and group. But that's—and that's not even, like, that long ago.

KZ: So, what future do you imagine for Savannah as it relates to LGBT, trans individuals?

TA: I think that it will continue to try to improve, especially as local government seems to show a lot more interest in promoting LGBT people. I'm more concerned about the T for obvious reasons. There isn't a lot of specific focus on that. Because, like I said, it's, it's also kind of a different can of worms and being grouped together with the rest of like sexuality. It's, it's fine until there are specific issues that only affect transgender individuals. Like, I know people that can't participate in sports. They can't, you know, do a lot of things. And stuff like that. And those topics are still not being discussed at all here. In regards to those sorts of rights. So, although we are shifting a huge focus on protections and stuff like that, and there's a massive trend upward in the positivity towards the rest of the LGBT community, there's still an insane amount of work that has to be done in regards to trans representation and protections.

KZ: And what would you say to young trans people today or those who come along in the future?

TA: As comfortable as it is and as nice as it is to be who you are and to express who you are, always make sure that you're in a situation which you're safe. Because nothing, nothing hurts more than losing absolutely everything in life because you came out a little early. Always make sure that you get in connection with somebody who can help mentor you. And find a group that will accept you—and truly accept you—for who and what you are. Things are going to be rough. Not everyone's going to get it at first. And that is a process. You don't have to tolerate somebody's intolerance. And if you want to see change, you have to be a part of change. So, a lot of it is just, be who you are, but be safe about it. Be with your community and say something.

KZ: Awesome. Great. Anything else that you'd like to share with us today?

TA: I feel like, I feel like I pretty much covered—

KZ: Covered a lot of bases.

TA: I covered a lot of bases. I do like to talk.

KZ: Happy for it—makes for a good interview. Alright. Well, thank you so much for sharing your history with us.

TA: Thank you.

End of interview.