

# ANDREW ALLEN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH JESSICA-SU TANG ON WEDNESDAY 4 MAY 2022 AT EAGLEVALE LIBRARY

**AA** Hello Jessica, let's start with a bit about your background first, so could you tell me where and when you were born please?

**JT** Crown Street Women's Hospital, which now is apartments, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1952.

**AA** Okay, and how many were there in the family?

**JT** There are 8 children and I'm number 7.

**AA** So a large family!

**JT** Not as big as my mother's – she was second of 17 children, and my father was second of ten, so not as big as those days. Now we're lucky to have two! (laughs)

**AA** Yeah, yeah, that's right. How was family life when you were a child?

**JT** To me it was always a good experience, I suffered lots of health problems so I hardly ever went to school, high school I think I was lucky to get there twice a week, had a problem with eczema, and one report, and that's the only one I have, it says "would do better if came more often" (laughter), and that's true. In some ways I think my study at university has served me better. I missed a lot at school of basic maths and basic English grammar, but the university taught me systems thinking, it taught me good communication, and autonomous learning. And those three things are certainly better than, I think, any schooling has because schooling doesn't finish at high school. It's a continuous thing. And if you're not green and growing, you're ripe and rotting. Learning is forever.

**AA** So you had a happy family and childhood.

**JT** Yes, I did.

**AA** Are you close to your parents?

**JT** I was probably the favourite, there was two favourites, and then I became the only favourite, and ah, if you go back to biblical stories, it's similar to Joseph and the coat of many colours, if they could have, they would have sold me into slavery (laughing), but again, ah, I came out when my father died, and I sat around the kitchen table, as you do, and my mother wasn't at the table but all the kids were, and listening to the discussions, I couldn't believe I was in the same household as those brothers and sisters because they had lots of issues, and it's interesting when my mother died the issues were more dramatic because inheritance was at stake, and so that's why I live in Campbelltown. I couldn't sustain the family home, and a hint for those that look after their parents, you can put a clause in your will to say that that carer can stay in that house as long as they need to. And that's a good clause to have because if you become homeless it's a big burden financially for anyone in this day and age.

**AA** Yep, how old were you when you came out to Australia?

**JT** I was born here, I'm an ABC! Crown Street Women's Hospital, is in Sydney.

**AA** Right okay, but you've got the Chinese background.

**JT** Yes, Grandfather, interesting story, you know that Chinese are mad gamblers and my Grandfather was one of them, and he gambled away the day's takings, and they used to have

a tofu business, they would buy the stock and make the tofu and then sell it. But he gambled away the day's takings so they couldn't buy more stock, so he ended up selling himself as coolie labour when the Germans were mainly in control of New Guinea, and explained to the family what he had done, and had to go then to New Guinea and gave the money that he was indentured for to the parents, so they could continue the family business! But for his action, I was born in a free world. Otherwise I would have been born in Communist China. So out of every misfortune there's seeds of benefits if you look for them.

**AA** So how did you meet your wife?

**JT** Through church. Commonly called Mormons but they don't like that as a nickname. They'd rather LDS, which is Latter Day Saints. So the correct title is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. So the history of the Mormon church is the restoration in April 6<sup>th</sup> 1830, where the church was restored, and if you understand Latter Day Saint history, it was through the first vision of Joseph Smith when he was just 15 ½, 16 years of age, and then it was until he was an adult that he could then organise the church. So it's a restoration as opposed to the Catholics claim succession through Peter the Apostle, who was designated the Rock of the Church and so that's how the Catholics claim their right to God's authority. I mean, the Catholic Church have a lot of people in it but all their practices aren't necessarily divinely inspired. When you look at the Dark Ages and the Inquisition. So, it's the politics that get in the way of religion, and it's the same as in Christ's day, all those religions, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, they knew the Bible but they didn't understand it and it's proper application. So if Christ was here today, he wouldn't necessarily be called a Christian, because it's the religion that gets in the way of relationships with God. So that's what I would classify myself now as, basically believing in the relationship with God, rather than necessarily the Mormons who are a particular denomination. You can start there, but it's like starting school and not getting out of primary school, but that's religion the way I look at it. It's a good place to start but you don't want to stay there.

**AA** It's interesting that you should say that, it's an interesting way of looking at it.

**JT** Religion should create a relationship with God but it doesn't, it usually gets in the way of the relationship with God because it's man propagated. It's my sad experience that we learn that when man gets a little authority he immediately exercises unrighteous dominion. So would you believe that in China today, it's an atheistic country, there are over four hundred million Christians. Big number, when they are forbidden to have a belief in God. So it's interesting that there is a peasant girl who writes hymns, she's not musically trained, she's just inspired. And so there's a tape if you want to find out about Christians in China, just go on line and Google it. Some of the stories are amazing. There are people at the Conservatorium of music were asking 'who writes all these songs' and they said, you wouldn't believe it, a peasant girl. And she has no musical training, but she has inspiration. And that counts for more.

**AA** Can you tell me, when you first became transgender, how did your family, what was their views on that, and how did they deal, how did that happen.

**JT** Well I was divorced, so, I think my daughter took about three years to accept. And I understand that, I mean, your father is your father and she does introduce me as her father, and I am, but if people look at me and you can see the curiosity, I just say, just call me Jessica. (laughs) and people get uncomfortable with labels, and it's just a label and it's not who you are. So living authentically is what I would say to people, if you are questioning your identity, just live authentically. You can't be like anyone else, 'cause they're all taken. Just be yourself.

**AA** Do people, I guess people judge you, or they...

**JT** Of course people judge,

**AA** Or they're not sure how to...

**JT** Respond? Of course! And so you make it as comfortable as possible. I've never changed my name, I have changed my gender on my passport, so.....

**AA** What about your parents, how did they...

**JT** My father was passed away, my mother really didn't question it, I mean my siblings have really never asked me, nor my children. It's something that they have never experienced before until me. But it's interesting my sister has told me that her grandson has transitioned, that's not commonly known amongst the family I don't think, but these things happen. The percentage is higher than you think. (laughs)

**AA** You seem very happy to me, I guess that's, you're very positive. Everything you say and do is positive.

**JT** I've done more as Jessica than I ever did as Jeffrey, that's still my legal name, never changed it, because I realised that being transgendered, you're hiding who you want to be, and when most transgendered transition, they end up are hiding who they were. And who they were is part of their history. So if you run away from something it will always chase you. Classic example of that is one of the Bond girls, I can't remember her name but she married a very rich, I think he was Muslim, and they were on their honeymoon and they came back, he divorced her, because it was in the tabloids that she was a he, before she became a she. Beautiful she, I think, but yeah, that's what happens if you don't disclose you'll be discovered. It's easier to be open and authentic and live the life you want to be, without having to hide the past. The more lies you tell, the more tangled it becomes.

**AA** And you're physically fit and healthy too, I guess that helps

**JT** Yeah, of course,

**AA** You look fantastic, I know you're just over 70, I think.

**JT** No, I will be 70 this year.

**AA** Yeah, so you look amazing.

**JT** And it's understanding the laws of health. There are three ages of the body, and the one you just mentioned is chronological age. But you can control your biological and your psychological. Right?

**AA** Yeah, that's true. Can you tell me Jessica, if you think society is becoming more accepting of transgender people?

**JT** I think yes, because it's more publicised, there's more discussion about it, and the number of transgendered primary school kids coming out is extraordinary. I mean it's probably doubling every year. That may be official statistics, but you look at it, there's more often than not in the news, and you get people like Courtney Act, who, I don't know her official status but I think she looks better as a woman than she does as a man, personally.

**AA** What about in Campbelltown, is Campbelltown any different in reactions or is it just the same as...

**JT** When I first came to Campbelltown I went to the Council and asked did they have a LGBTIQ liaison officer, they had no idea what I was talking about. But it's changed since I moved here in 2013, I think even this interview here with the library is I think, only the second year that I think that you've actually had this forum going.

**AA** I think so.

**JT** I think we missed a year for Covid, but that's it, I think its improved, I mean I don't think there is a LGBTIQA+ community officially here, I'm happy to have them, a meeting at the library, if you want to have a support group of some sort. We could use the rooms, and talk about the issues that are facing them, because there is really no right way to transition. There is only your way. And your way is the right way for you. That's basically it. There's so much available and you just have to know the resources and utilise them.

**AA** I think that would be fantastic.

**JT** I'm happy to participate in that.

**AA** Do you do, have you had much public speaking.

**JT** Yeah, that's where Mormonism comes in, they teach you how to public speak, from a primary school age. So you get up and talk for 2 ½ minutes. And so yes, that is where I've had most of my public speaking is from church.

**AA** Have you ever been approached by somebody who is feeling like they'd like to become transgender and asked advice?

**JT** Not personally but I have participated in the Gender Centre, and that's what they do, help people navigate the pitfalls of transition, so they're in at Parramatta Rd, Annandale. Google Gender Centre. And they're a good resource to start.

**AA** You were telling me before we recorded about your ideas about death, and how you see death. Could you tell me a little bit more.

**JT** Ok, a personal epiphany just before Christmas of 2013, so I know the day I die, and it's not a date, it's a day, so I didn't die yesterday, and I can never die tomorrow, and why can't I die tomorrow is because tomorrow never comes. So, there's much talk about living in the present and that's the only place you can live. You can learn from the past, you can plan for the future, but life is happening now. As John Lennon said, you make all these plans but life gets in the way. And it's life that we live.

**AA** So you're living life as much as you can, because you know that...

**JT** Today's the only day I can die and it's the only day I can live also, so in your life the quality of the questions you ask will determine the quality of the life you have. So ask better questions.

**AA** And I believe you're thinking about writing a book.

**JT** Yeah, it will be called ABC of You am Me. That's evolved from all sorts of different titles but I think I'm happy with that. And the You am Me is a take on umami which is basically, if you're into food, umami is basically the universal flavour that everyone likes to eat. So Vegemite is umami flavour, but not everyone likes Vegemite. But You am Me is a dual purpose statement. You and me, the "am" comes from when Moses was asked "who should I say that sent me". And because God's name wasn't to be spoken, God's answer was "I am that, I am." Now the comma makes the difference, and if you say "I am, comma, that I am", there's a different meaning if you put the comma after 'that'. And if you look at something and say "I am that, I am", then basically God's everywhere, if you understand the difference. So You am Me, it means there's no difference, we are one. So that's what my book would be called.

**AA** Ok, well I look forward to reading it when it comes out then. Good luck with it!

**JT** (Laughing),

**AA** I've really enjoyed talking to you this morning, it's been a pleasure and I wish you well in the future.

**JT** Yes, have a wonderful life. And I create acrostics out of words, and what got me started on this was when I was doing a lot of self-development, fear, is False Evidence Appearing Real, and I thought, wow, that's a very clever way to understand the meaning of words. So I'll leave you with the one I created for love. Living One Vibrational Energy. Because life is all vibration. You talk to people like Nikola Tesla, everything's vibration. So, have a happy life, live from a happy vibration. That's all I can say.

**AA** Sounds good.

**JT** And happiness, I was asked when I did the ad for NAB back in 2018 campaign, it was, Talk to yourself. And they asked me one night, what did I think of happiness. And I came up with Having A Progressive Positivity In Nearly Every Stressful Situation. That's what I did.

**AA** That's wonderful. To get all that out of that word, to get all that, and it makes sense.

**JT** Makes sense, yeah. And that's what I do, I create acrostics.

**AA** I'll have to try and remember it and practice that one then. Sounds good. Ok, thank you very much. Thanks Jessica.

**JT** You're most welcome.