

## CHOICE/LESS Podcast: Jack RR Evans

Jenn Stanley: For Rewire Radio, I'm Jenn Stanley, and this is CHOICE/LESS. Last week, we heard from Amelia Bonow, founding director of Shout Your Abortion. Today's storyteller, I actually found, because they tweeted with the hashtag "#ShoutYourAbortion." I read their tweet, and I thought it seemed like they probably had a great story, and they do. Here it is.

Jack RR Evans: I'm from Minneapolis, Minnesota originally, Saint Paul, and I'm an audiobook narrator and voice actor. I was 21 years old when I had my abortion. It was shortly after my spouse, then boyfriend, and I moved in together, and we were extremely poor when we first moved in together. I was in college. My spouse had just moved back from Iowa and was looking for work and having some trouble. There was a short while where we didn't have health insurance, and I couldn't afford birth control pills, which I had been on for years. You know, we should have done things differently, and we're aware of that. We should have used ... Really, we did use condoms. What we should have done is not had sex at all until I could afford birth control again, but things happen. Choices were made, and I ended up missing a couple of periods and starting to experience symptoms of morning sickness, which sent me into a massive anxiety and depression spiral which my friends and my spouse really helped me through.

I took the test. I was alone in the bathroom. It was pretty obviously positive right away. I walked out of the bathroom, and my spouse was standing there, and he said "So?" I handed him the test, and I think I was probably crying, and he said "So, what do you want to do," which was the absolute most perfect thing he could have said at that point. It made it feel like "Okay. This is my choice. This is my body. This is something that I get to figure out rather than him, again, leading me one way or another." I knew that if I was going to have to go through with the pregnancy, I probably wasn't going to come out of it alive, which is a horrible thing to say, but it was a horrible experience. I never strongly considered ending my life, because I knew that I had an option.

I did some research on the internet. I found, basically, every abortion clinic in the Midwest area, and one of them was quite close to my apartment at the time. It was the Planned Parenthood that used to be on Ford Parkway in Saint Paul but now is on University Avenue. I was, at the time, on my mother's insurance. Basically, I called my insurance company, and I said "Do you cover this particular service," and they said "yes." I said "Do you print what it is, exactly, in the records," and they said "No, we do not." I said "Okay, thank you," and then I hung up and called Planned Parenthood, and I said "I need an appointment for an abortion."

I was very nervous. My spouse couldn't come with me, because he had to work. I walked in, and they called my name, and I had to do, I think it was like a psychology screening where they just talked to me about my life and how I was feeling and if I was sure I wanted this, and they told me that it was mandated by the state and that I had to go through this. Then, they did an ultrasound. Then, I

was taken back into a room, and they actually provided me with someone to hold my hand. Then, I had a friend pick me up and take me home, and I laid down for a long time, but mostly, what I felt was relief.

Jenn Stanley: They had never wanted children, never wanted to get pregnant, and described the pregnancy as "out of body, an incomprehensible trauma."

Jack RR Evans: Though I could see how in someone else, that would feel like a really amazing and beautiful thing and a desirable experience, for me, that was horrific. For me, that was akin to the Alien movies. That was just something that was inherently disturbing to me, and at the time, I didn't understand why.

My brother and I have been incredibly close ever since we were kids. I went through a lot of struggle internally, because I wanted to be his brother so badly, and I always acted like I was his brother. Anything he wanted to do, I wanted to do. I mean, it wasn't that I didn't want to do those things, but I just wanted to do them because he did. I wanted to do those things, anyway, but I wanted so badly to be his brother. Even when I was a six year old, I remember being in my bedroom that I shared with my brother and looking at his body and saying "Why isn't my body like that? Why is my body like this? It's wrong. This is not how I should be." It was really painful for me when he hit puberty, and, suddenly, he got his own room, we weren't in the same room anymore, because we had been, basically, twins up to that point, even though there's a three year difference. We were inseparable.

I've always felt like something was wrong. From a really, really young age, I just didn't feel like my body was really what I felt it should have been, and I never felt comfortable being referred to as a girl or doing girly things. Sometimes, I tried to force myself into that box, and it was just really uncomfortable, and I never really felt like myself. I didn't come to the realization that non-binary even existed until I was in my twenties and some of my friends started talking about it. At first, it was almost alienating. I felt like I wanted it so badly, but I also felt like if I adopted that, I would just be following the crowd or I would just be adopting something that wasn't really mine to have. Then, I realized, eventually, with a lot of talking and a lot of struggling within myself, that I deserved to have what I needed, that I deserved to be recognized for what I am and who I am.

For me, I actually didn't come out until I was 27 years old, which is when I also changed my name. My full name is Jack Rowan Rose Evans, and Rose is the only part of my birth name I kept. It's my grandmother's name. It was the most relief I think I've ever felt. What I did first was asked some of my close friends that I see often and my spouse to start referring to me with my chosen name. I was expecting to spend a year, maybe two, with that before I started even considering coming out to family and going through the full social transition process, and it was maybe two weeks until I couldn't bear hearing my birth name as referring to me anymore, and to ask everyone like "Look, I need to come out. I need to do this."

I ended up coming out via a drawn comic that I did on Facebook, which was, I don't know. I think it worked pretty well, because my family was able to read the whole thing before asking any question or reacting, necessarily, in front of me, and so I was able to do things like give them resources to read up on what I meant by non-binary, what I meant by transgender, and what it meant for them as far as how they were going to need to adjust to seeing me and talking to me and talking about me.

Jenn Stanley: Jack says that finally having the language to describe their lived experience helped them process a lot of the anxiety and gender dysphoria they'd felt throughout their life, particularly during their pregnancy and abortion.

Jack RR Evans: The lens was absolutely very suddenly different when I came out as trans. Thinking back on the experience of my abortion and wishing that I'd known at the time, I feel like I would have had a lot less anxiety. I feel like I would have been more secure in myself and just talking to those doctors and talking to the person that gave me the, whatever you want to call it, psychology screening beforehand and discussing things with them. I feel like it would have been useful even just for me to know "Hey, this is, this is part of your deal. This is part of why you feel this way." It wasn't 100% of why, but it was the vast majority of why, and I didn't know that, and so I couldn't articulate it at the time. Just looking back and realizing how important that was and how much it would have affected me if that hadn't been a possibility, if I hadn't been able to end that pregnancy, and just knowing why at this point, I would have, why I felt so strongly and why I felt so horrified by the idea. It's really eye-opening for me just to know why I was feeling those feelings.

The reason that I started talking about my abortion story publicly was actually because of the "#ShoutYourAbortion" hashtag, and I was terrified when I wrote my tweet, which all it said was "As a trans person, my abortion saved my life." What went through my head when I made my tweet about Shout Your Abortion was "I have never seen any trans person mention this. I have never seen anyone talk about abortion in a trans lens or even, you know, not talk about it as women, just talk about it as people with uteruses." I felt like "There's a need here, and I am a person who can talk about this, and, as such, I should do so." Especially as someone who's effectively self-employed, I have no fear of employment backlash where if someone found out that I'd had an abortion or that I was trans, maybe I would be fired.

Jenn Stanley: Transgender Americans experience unemployment at twice the rate of the general population according to a report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey. 90% of respondents to that survey reported experiencing harassment, mistreatment, or discrimination on the job. Jack says they didn't receive any backlash from the tweet and has since spoken out about their experience publicly in other forums, including, of course, here on CHOICE/LESS. Still, as a transgender person and a person who's had an abortion, they know all

too well what it's like to have politicians and others who will never have these experiences debate their truth and validity.

Jack RR Evans: The most important thing for anyone is just to listen and to believe us and not to ... Don't go by your own experiences, because everyone has different experiences than you. Maybe you have never experienced this things, or maybe you don't know anyone who has, but that doesn't mean that it's not real, and that doesn't mean that it doesn't happen to people.

Jenn Stanley: CHOICE/LESS is produced by me, Jenn Stanley, for Rewire Radio with editorial oversight by Marc Faletti, our director of multimedia. Jodi Jacobson is our editor in chief. Brady Swenson is our director of technology. Music for this episode was by Doug Helsel. Thank you to all the staff at Rewire, especially Rachel Perrone, Lauryn Gutierrez, and Stacey Burns, our communications and social media team, for working hard to get out the word about CHOICE/LESS. If you like what you hear, you can get the word out by rating and reviewing us on iTunes. For more on Jack's story, including their coming out comic, visit our website at [rewire.news/choiceless](http://rewire.news/choiceless). Thanks for listening.