

Transcript of Interview with Brooks Long by Kit Heintzman

Interviewee: Brooks Long

Interviewer: Kit Heintzman

Date: 04/14/2021

Location (Interviewee): Takoma Park, Maryland

Location (Interviewer):

Transcribed By: Angelica S Ramos

Some of the things we discussed include:

Using qualifiers to describe how one is doing: “good for 2020”. The trauma of the pandemic and healing pre-pandemic traumas, therapy. Racial strife in America, reparations, descendant from slaves. The killings of unarmed Black people, the toll of these viral videos on the mental health of the Black community. Spiritual benefits of making music. A long history of artistic commentary on over policing and police racism. Health for the body, mind, and spirit. Listening to the body. Democratic candidate’s call for a “Spiritual Revolution”. First noticing the pandemic before it hit the USA, and the American response ignoring messaging out of. China. What it was like to transition off of parents’ health insurance circa 2013. That there is no health care for musicians, consequences of delaying medical care, ER bills, surgery. That work might be one’s only access to health coverage, but is also a source of COVID exposure. University enrollment dependant health care. Part-time work, subsistence wages, losing work, getting on unemployment: hundreds of phone calls, survivors guilt. Comparisons between 2020 and the 2008 market crash. Partnership, moving in together to reduce exposure, and later taking a break. Needing space from others to work on oneself. The USA’s comparative fortunate position to vaccine access at a global scale. Getting the first vaccine shot under Maryland’s Phase 2B for people with underlying conditions; 65+ mother with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease still waiting for vaccine access. Post-vaccination masking. The imperative that artists make affirmational art. Tensions between freedom and safety. Passing judgment on others who pose as a threat. Missing movie theaters. Uncertainty about the future. Cultural appropriation. That people are doing their best. The importance of historians using a compassionate eye. “We are enough”

Kit Heintzman 00:00

Hello.

Brooks Long 00:01

Hi, how's it going?

Kit Heintzman 00:05

Good yourself?

Brooks Long 00:06

I’m doing okay, you know for what I said last year was I’m 2020 good. So now I’m 2021 good. You know, it's all relative to the to what's happening.

Kit Heintzman 00:21

That's going to become my first follow up question. But before that, would you please start by telling me your full name, the date, the time and your location?

Brooks Long 00:31

My name is Brooks Long. Today is Wednesday, April 14. Time is 1 something. 1, I don't know.

Kit Heintzman 00:45

15 ish,

Brooks Long 00:46

fifteenish. And I'm in Takoma Park, Maryland.

Kit Heintzman 00:52

And do you consent to having this interview recorded, digitally uploaded and publicly released under a Creative Commons license attribution noncommercial sharealike?

Brooks Long 01:03

Sure.

Kit Heintzman 01:04

And would you please start by introducing yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening to this, what might you want them to know about you and the place that you're speaking from?

Brooks Long 01:14

Well, I am a musician and semi folklorist. And straight cisgender black male living in America. I sing I write songs writing songs is probably my favorite thing in the world do. I, I record and occasionally write read poetry and fiction. And let's see, what are some other things that people should know about me? I'm from, I'm from West Baltimore. My a, Oh, sorry. It looks like somebody's calling me about a really important either.

Kit Heintzman 01:22

Definitely go take it.

Brooks Long 01:23

Oh, no, no, it's really important, either something about my Car Warranty,

Kit Heintzman 01:29

OH.

Brooks Long 01:30

Or the student loans or, you know, they're finally

Kit Heintzman 01:33

Yes.

Brooks Long 01:30

Finally going in the right direction.

Kit Heintzman 01:35

Yea.

Brooks Long 01:36

I hate to miss those calls. But no, it's better talking with you by a mile. Let's see you. Yeah, I am from West Baltimore. My, my parents were involved in a lot of community initiatives for a long time around there. And that was all happening around the same time that David Simon was writing his book called The Corner. So that book is based on my neighborhood, my dad's even in the book. And then David Simon went on to do The Wire. And he's done a bunch of other things since then. I graduated from Washington College on the eastern shore of Maryland, which is very different from West Baltimore in many respects. But I had a really good time I graduated in English, and music history. In addition to being a musician, or as a part of being a musician. I also like to know about the history and particularly the culture of, of music. Yeah. For history and culture in general, and a lot of the prism that I see that through its music.

Kit Heintzman 04:07

Thank you so much. I want to dive into the first thing you said, which is would you say a little bit about the qualifier, good for 2020, good for 2021 and what that means to you?

Brooks Long 04:20

Sure. I think that I know that the the pandemic COVID 19 has, has changed a lot of things. It's, it's caused a lot of many, many different feelings, bewilderment and anxiety and all kinds of all kinds of things you don't you're not sure what you should be doing or don't know who to trust and, and all that and these are things that, you know, some of these things are things that were understood, at least I understood that these dynamics were happening before the pandemic, but now in the pandemic, they're really, you know, exacerbated, exaggerated. And, of course, in the middle of 2020, you've got, you know, the killings of unarmed black people, which is not new, but the videos are largely new. Even that's not all the way new, but but the responses are new. From from entities all the way from Disney to National Football League. And, and, I think, there, there are a lot of hard discussions that are that are happening now, which we tend to think are better than not having them at all. And we are somewhat on the other side of presidency here in America. It was, frankly, very frightening. And I, as as to me, as ridiculous as President Trump was, I took him very seriously. And I still take him very seriously. So, you know, there's a lot of trauma that has been going on in 2020 and 2021 it for my own personal life, to be honest, I'm, you know, unpacking a lot of stuff that's been going on, since before this time. And, and maybe that's some what prepared me for for 2020 It hasn't, it's been a rough time. I'm not gonna say it hasn't been. But I think that the tools needed to get through it, I kind of was already cultivating before we got here.

Kit Heintzman 07:43

Thank you so much. I'd like to start by asking what the word pandemic means to you?

Brooks Long 07:51

Um, it means that that my life must change for the good of my life and the lives of others. It means that there is a virus that is going around that that is only going to be stopped by by certain engaging in certain behaviors and not engaging in other certain behaviors. And and, you know, there there's a change in culture that must happen. For for people to be safe. Yeah. There's, there's a lot with that. Some people are privileged to be safer than others. Yeah, there's a lot there.

Kit Heintzman 09:07

To the extent that you're comfortable sharing, what are some of your what were some of your engagements with health and healthcare infrastructure prior to the pandemic? So what were those experiences like that inform reactions now?

Brooks Long 09:24

Well, so I guess I've been doing my, my solo careers musician has gotten started since about 2009, 2010, 2009, maybe college band, you know, we did some things but then we moved on from that and about 2009 I started doing that and probably, and I moved back to Baltimore. And I got off of my parents health insurance at 23. I can't do the math on when exactly that was. But somewhere around 2013, 2014, definitely 2015 I started to get sick. And at this time I was working, you know, two or three different flexible jobs that I needed to, you know, keep the bills paid, keep the rent paid. And make sure I can keep things moving with, with my band. And those jobs weren't offering health care benefits. And certainly, I wasn't to provide health care to my band much less myself through through music, not at all. We got to be a pretty fairly well known band in the area. And in there's a lot of spiritual benefit from that, but not, not exactly healthcare benefits from that, or, or the, the financial means to get it. So I ignored it for a while, and things got worse and worse. And I would get bouts of bronchitis, you know, really, really badly. And I was not going to the hospital till you know, I did one time actually, when I had health care for a short period of time through a catering agency I was working for. And I went one time, the doctor said, Okay, you need to get this test that test and, and the other thing, I was like, okay, cool. And then I got the bill for her to tell me to do that stuff. And I said, I don't know if I can do these other things she was talking about.

Brooks Long 12:27

So I didn't. And it got worse and worse and worse and worse. And it came to the point where I said, okay the life that I that I'm leading, so that I can hopefully someday lead a better life isn't coming fast enough for for what I need, right this minute. So. So I then decided to stick it out for another year. And within that year, I went to the ER a couple of times, and boy, that was expensive, but but I was able to complete an album and, and, you know, we had a nice release, and all of that and, and that was good and, but it didn't get things to another level where I might actually be able to start taking care of myself with it. So when I was fortunate enough to get a real job as they say, although being a working musician is about as real as it gets. But, But I got me a real job I started working at Creative Alliance, which is a arts nonprofit in in Baltimore. And started, started doing some some cool things there and I had healthcare and so turns out that I had really bad nasal and sinus polyps and you know, I get surgery and and all that. And it it's been a really good thing and that that stuff hasn't all the way gone away but it's so much better. It's you know, manageable and it really is showed me what not just musicians not just artists but but what what kind of situations you're in If you're not able to have health care or if you're not able to have good health care, because at one point I actually did have it and it was you know, not sustainable.

Kit Heintzman 15:16

Staying in the pre pandemic era, would you say a little bit about what your day to day life was looking like before that?

Brooks Long 15:26

Uh, in the I guess in the, in 2019, it was a lot of transition for me I was transitioning out of Creative Alliance, I had a fellowship with them. That unfortunately was renewed but I wanted to move on to, to a master's program in ethnomusicology. And so, so half of that year was was working part time at Creative Alliance and the other half the year was being in school which I had been in school about 10 years. So the first part of 2019 I was actually sick again this time more manageable. But it was still a little rough. I was you know, going to work part time at that point. So when I wasn't working and I wasn't sick, I was at home during, during the days while everybody's out at work. And I'm recording some music and then when the, when the master's programs started I was doing that and and that was very busy. I was commuting from Baltimore down to the DC I was going to college Park University of Maryland College Park and working as a teaching assistant. Apparently part time how's that how that goes and and yeah, I just had my head and a bunch of books typing up papers and and talking to students and I'm all of that for many different reasons that I can go on a tangent that I'm not going to go on I decided that I wasn't going to I wasn't coming back for the next semester and then I was going to try try something, something different which means I was letting go the healthcare that that thank goodness was, was offered me and I probably wouldn't have been able to go to school at all if, if I am not able to have that but I got a quick job in January just delivering pizzas. It's a thing I know how to do really well. And by this time I had moved from Baltimore to to Mount Rainier, which was close to the school and not long after that I dropped school but but I was well with with my partner, my girlfriend and and you know that that was feeling good. And while I was delivering pizzas, I was planning a my own curriculum which is based in song writing as meditation and and I just gotten a I was just hired for an new job and after school care, arts after school care that would have helped that along. Getting me to know people in the, in the arts community and possibly using their facility to do this class. And then the week that I was supposed to start, that was the week of the shutdown. And all of a sudden, after school care doesn't look the same as it used to look. And that position was terminated. And so I'm, you know, we can now we're in like pandemic area, which I can get to where things are right now, if you want

Kit Heintzman 20:59

Yes please.

Brooks Long 21:00

Sure. So for a minute, there I was, I was unemployed and did not yet have health care, I was fortunate enough to get on Medicaid. After a certain period of time, I can't remember exactly when that was. But anyway it was, it was an interesting thing, I had just moved from Baltimore to this, this group house and then the pandemic hits. And, and my partner was, she was living in a group house as well. And it was basically decided that, that I shouldn't be going between one and the other. So I moved in with her. So like, maybe two and a half months or so. After moving from Baltimore, I move again in with her and her housemates. And we did that for a little while and then moved to Tacoma Park. I was fortunate enough to get on unemployment. I boy, I can't tell you how, how fortunate I feel to have that it's, it's kept things afloat. At the same time, or around the same time I was offered employment at at the National Council for Traditional Arts. But it was very, very part time, just 10 hours a week, so it wasn't able to you know, wasn't able to get things flowing for me in off of unemployment. So, so but it's a position the basically the hopefully will flower as the rest of the world flowers right. And, you know, if if it weren't for the unemployment that I'm eligible for, because of what Congress passed and all that I would not be

able to work this this position, because it wouldn't make enough money for me and I would have to do something else. That would probably, you know, put me at risk. And if I got COVID It wouldn't be good. It would not be a fun ride.

Brooks Long 24:37

So there there's a lot of fortunate things that have and continue to happen for me and it or they're in America unfortunately. But It's it's something I, you know, I know lots of people who are, who aren't able to have that kind of setup, I'm able to work from home. Also have just in the last couple of months started recording a radio show in Towson, Towson, Maryland from Towson University WTMD. And right now that's not paying very well either, you know, all their DJs. And they had to go because the sponsorships are leaving. And so that opens an opportunity for me that I'm only able to take, because I went on unemployment. And if if I was to get off of that the two jobs that I have now would not be sustainable, I wouldn't be able to pay rent with either one of them. And my rent is very cheap. So sometimes I have survivor's guilt, and I feel like there's always people who are really out here struggling right now. And, and here I am getting, you know, weekly income from the government so that I can continue to develop in these positions that I have that hopefully will lead to something and hopefully will eventually be financially sustainable, but they're not able to be right now. That's a real gift. To me, that's that that's a gift, maybe it's the way things kind of should be. But it's not often the way things are. So in that way, I feel fortunate. And also, there's a lot of there's a lot of the discussion going on now about racial strife here in America, and it's, you know, something that I've understood for as long as I can remember. But I think there are a lot of there are a lot of conversations that used to happen, just at the kitchen table, that that are happening, you know, out in the world. And the, the reasons that, that the conversations are happening out in the world are generally very sad. But, but the fact that the conversation is growing and spreading is a very, very, very good thing. And it's got us talking about reparations, right? And so, sometimes I joke about it, maybe make myself feel better. But I think there's also some truth to it. I call these weekly income I'm getting from the government, my unemployment, reparations. Yeah, there's, there is a lot that, that black and brown people have had to endure in this country, particularly myself as a descendant of slaves of, of people who were enduring enslavement. There there are, you know, so many ways in which white supremacy shows up in our lives. And, you know, I look at the things that I'm able to do in this country, and, and I feel fortunate, but even that feeling of being fortunate, I think, is I think sometimes is an aspect of, of white supremacy, things that, that I feel fortunate to have, well, why do I feel fortunate to be free to do this or that? Well, it's because generally, I wouldn't be. And generally, lots of people aren't. You know? They're There's, there's a lot to that but this this time this last two years I've for me while while I see a lot of really, really sad things going on, and, and certainly sad things going on tin the me in the media, it's not like these things haven't been happening. It's not like, you know, police started killing unarmed black people 10 years ago. You know, as, as a musician, you listen to these songs and you know, people were Marvin Gaye was singing about Trigger Happy policing back in the early 70s. And, you know, people were complaining in their own subversive ways about policing. You know, an early early blues there's some Mississippi John Hurt stuff and, and, you know, Ma Rainey and all kinds of people are talking about this stuff. I actually just played a song for my radio show, called the Saturday Night Fish Fry. Which is song by Louis Jordan. It's like the father of r&b and, and he's singing this song about how how great this party is. And then about halfway through, it gets busted by the police. And, and it's kind of sort of played for laughs, but you can also hear the trauma in it, too. And this is like 1944, something like that. But it's, it's, it's true, our parties got broken up all the time, or the joy that we were having amongst each other was constantly being shut down. And that's, that's the thing that still happens today. As a musician, there's noise ordinances that you know, so often there will be, you know, some, some party that somebody's having a, I don't know, some warehouse that used to have nothing around it. And then

all of a sudden, the area starts being bold, because it's so fun around there. And those people start to move into that area and then there's noise Well, the noise is what made the place cool for you. And then now you're calling the police. Yeah, that's a boy. That's a tangent. I don't know how to get out of that one. But what it's just an interesting thing that's been on my mind since I've played that that song.

Kit Heintzman 33:29

I want to reiterate no such things as tangents everything you give us a gift. If so many follow up questions. That sort of go back in time. I was wondering if you would say a little bit about partnership during the pandemic?

Brooks Long 33:47

Yeah. Partnership. Partnership like with with my partners?

Kit Heintzman 33:54

Yeah. You had mentioned having a girlfriend?

Brooks Long 33:57

Yeah. Well, it's, this is this is a hell of a time to be a partner. It's, it's a, it's a really good time to be one. In a sense, that you, again, you feel fortunate that that you've got that you've got somebody that that that you can rely on, you're not just going through this experience by yourself. You know, you you know, I've got somebody who, who gets it and if I'm being totally honest, we're on a break right now. And, and, and you know, you know, have [inaudible] go, we'll see how it goes. Um, but but, you know, while that became a necessary thing, because, you know, we're, you know, we're just hanging out in this apartment and, and, you know, we see people on Zoom and that's nice. But, but it's been just us and, and I'm glad that it hasn't, for the most part been just me. But, but you know, there's, there's this stuff that we both need to work on, we'll have the space to work on it. You know, we, that's basis is there in this in this pandemic. So now we're given that to each other. I gotta say though, going on camping trips, you know, we're able to get out into nature and, and, you know, enjoy each other and enjoy, you know, where we are and, and smell some fresh air and, and sort of help ground each other has been really, really, really important. Yeah, and you may we may not like, what, what got us in the situation, but the pandemic situation being what it was, there was a lot of growth, it's a pressure cooker.

Brooks Long 37:13

And in you, you know, you grow or die, and so you grow. And, and, you know, right now we're, we're giving each other the space set that we need, I don't know how it's all gonna work out. But what I do know, is, is that I'm going to look back on on 2020 and 2021. And know, I can't tell you if the pandemic was was, you know, worth the growth. I can't tell you if, you know, certainly, I will. I would like all the racial strife that's going on the the near fascism, the so many different things that are happening, I would like my growth to come from some stuff that that is less than that. But, but I, you know, I am going to look back on this time and know that a lot of growth has happened. I very much appreciate I'm fortunate for that growth. This is how I got it. This is how I got there. You know.

Kit Heintzman 38:59

This is another follow up from before. So you had talked about the sort of emotional and political experiences of being on an unemployment within the context of reparations, also the sort of general absence of like social safety net within the US, the US that you can't take unemployment benefits for granted. I was wondering if you would

say something about how that emotional world was shaped in the application stage. So before you knew that you had that income when you were working to get it, would you say something about that part?

Brooks Long 39:38

Oof, well here in Maryland, it's really rough. And, and it's been rough. I actually when I when I got out of college, my first job with this is in 2008 during the last economic downturn that we had, and, and I was working at the Department of Labor, and it was my job to do the best I could to help people find jobs. Boy, that was something. And even that, then it was a really frustrating process for for people, a lot of people would come to our offices hoping to get assistance with, with applying for unemployment, and we actually, there, there's nothing that we could really do that there was no unemployment line anymore. It was all either over the phone or on the computer. And, and a lot of that, you know, I don't actually, no, no, no, no, it wasn't necessarily or over the computer to the initial application, you have to do it over the phone. I mean, that's even true today. In the phone lines, are back back then in 2008, and now are atrocious. You know, I think about how is it that I can get four or five different calls a day, from, you know, these scam agencies that are, you know, telling me about my Car Warranty, that that has never existed. But somehow unemployment can't, can't call me back even though, you know, I've, you know, asked for that option or whatever. It was really, really difficult to get through on the phone lines. And as fortunate as I feel to have that now. I know that there's some amount of intention, in not properly, staffing not properly having, you know, enough phone resources, or the proper computer resources, which I think have been somewhat updated now. But that's somewhat intentional, I think. Perhaps there's, there's a feeling that you don't want to put too much into the unemployment infrastructure, because people are lazy, and they don't want to stay on it. You know, the, the idea that, that there are people who were gaming the system, and that's why we can't help everybody is a constant, a constant roadblock to progress as far as I'm concerned. But on an emotional level, it was it was really difficult, I think it would be incredibly difficult if it had just been, you know, a couple of years before when I was working as a musician. Because at that point, I wasn't making a lot of money. As a musician, in fact, I was probably putting more money into the music than I was getting back from it from all these these other jobs that I had, and, and whatever I had saved up was to go to this next thing, this next thing and so at that time having savings any amount of savings, that just didn't exist. So I'm just saying that for me, other musicians may somewhat be different. But for me that that that wasn't a reality it was, by the time I applied for unemployment in in 2020, I had a little saved up enough to get by for like two months or so, of this really cheap group housing rent that was paying and, and, you know, the utilities and things like that. But but, you know, time was ticking the, you know, the hourglass sands were coming down. And and I you know that I'm just fortunate compared to comparatively I am the I never had to miss a payment on anything, I never had to, you know, miss rent or anything like that, but the stress was there. And even once once things work out from a stressful situation sometimes the stress doesn't go away, you know, I, I got my first vaccine shot last Thursday, and I'm still waiting for the, you know, a certain amount of stress to go away, and it hasn't.

Brooks Long 46:16

Yeah, that, that, that period of time before I got on unemployment, and when I was trying and trying, and getting up at the crack of dawn, to get on the phone and call. Um, and, you know, just, you know, just hoping that through sheer repetition, I'm, I know, I had to call hundreds, maybe 1000s of times over a period of about a month and a half or so. And each time you call, you get down a little bit more and a little bit more and a little bit more. You don't want to have to be calling in the first place. You don't want to have to need it. But, but, but you do. And I really do think that it's it's somewhat designed to, to make the people who don't need it the most. You know, in however people wherever people feel about who deserves it and who doesn't. I think it's somewhat designed to

weed those people out and and break you down so that the people who are finally able to get through are are the folks that really need it, yeah. That was really rough. And really it's one thing to know that you need that help. There's a certain amount of dignity you're giving up and really just knowing that but you know, then to go through all of the call prompts, and, you know, press you get to know exactly when you're supposed to press this button exactly when you're supposed to press that button, and the disillusionment of it all I know when I pressed for that nothing's gonna happen they're gonna hate me. And, and to go through that over and over and over again. Sometimes I think, like, is this some sort of, or they're, you know, scientists and lab coats on the other end of the call just like writing stuff down. Is this an experiment? But it's it, it takes you know, the sapping of of dignity when you're already down. Can can be soul crushing. And it was.

Kit Heintzman 49:48

Would you, you had just mentioned having had the first shoot, would you say a little bit about what the process of getting the vaccine was like, either like, again, thinking about practicals I also struggle to the emotional world?

Brooks Long 50:06

Well be because of my at times severe asthma and, and nasal polyps and stuff like that I am eligible, I was eligible for phase 2B, I think, is what they call it in Maryland, have other vaccines, which is after essential workers after people over 65 years old after, you know, a bunch of different things get out of the way. And I guess I'm fortunate to be eligible for it a little bit before every body else but the signing up for the vaccines, or, or the pre registrations here, and you know, CVS, and Walgreens don't have anything for you. That kind of stuff. That was a similar process, similar, similar feelings to trying to get on unemployment. And, you know, just so happens that it, it took a while after I was eligible. Probably, I want to say a while this is this is relative, I've probably been eligible for about two or three weeks before things started to open up to, to everybody. Not that everybody was able to get something. But it was it was definitely a process. There was a point there, where where my my mom who had just gotten out of the hospital for complications with her COPD, she has a lot of respiratory issues herself, and is over 65 as well, both of my parents are over 65 She wasn't able to get a vaccine for a very long time. My dad had been talking to his doctor, he was, I hope I'm not giving away too much medical information it doesn't [inaudible]. Here had been talking with his doctor and his doctor just out of the blue gave him a tip he said, Listen show up at this place, you know, at this time, and and you're you'll get something and that was at a time when only you know, only older folks in essential workers are supposed to be getting vaccines. And when when he got there, he's looking around he's like these people are the people shouldn't be in line. So you know, it is frustrating but but not surprising. This is the the world we're living in. This is the culture that we're living in where privileged people you know, if we're all out in the in the middle of the ocean we're just waiting in the water and privileged people are getting on the boat first. That's just that's just how it goes. Even when the rules are supposed to say otherwise. There's rules behind the rules and, and sort of goes but, you know, even in that I'm hearing that, you know we're among the fortunate nations, there lots of nations that that you don't have the vaccine yet, you know, the vaccines have been prioritized for you know, the, the leading nations of the world. So, you know, I can be frustrated about, about who was in that line when my dad went to get his vaccine and I can also be frustrated about the fact that there's just inequity all over the place. We're all living in it and trying to trying to navigate our way through it and address it when we can.

Kit Heintzman 55:58

Would you be willing to share something about your initial reactions when the pandemic first hit?

Brooks Long 56:09

So when the pandemic first hit, I'd been aware of it. And actually, probably one of the reasons why I put a priority on finding a new job because I had been working at att I've been delivering pizza at the time, I don't know why I don't want to you know, tarnish the name of Domino's pizzas, Domino's. They'll be fine. I remember saying, you know, this, this COVID thing is, is happening in, in China. And, you know, I feel like it's probably gonna, it's probably gonna get a year I think. And then, like, whatever is very, we'll see. And I, I remember, this was, this is back when I was in school this semester, before and 2019, winter of 2019 There was a Chinese grad student who really wanted to see her parents and was afraid that if she went to visit her parents in China, you know, is she going to be able to get back here is she going to be able to, to come back to school and be with a partner and all that sort of stuff? So, I had, I had had someone in my life that I was seeing every day, who was already dealing with the impact of COVID-19 on, you know, on a, on a daily basis, back in the early this probably would have been maybe, I don't know, Thanksgiving or something like that. Yeah, so, so I had had a more personal connection by that point, and stayed, engaged and stayed informed to the point where I think there was a certain point in the pandemic, where were the US community started to realize that it was airborne, and it wasn't just like a surface thing and the surfaces that you touch and things like that, actually must much less important than wearing a mask and, and, you know, much less than important than, you know, the air that you're breathing and all that. And I remember thinking to myself, well, isn't that what the Chinese were saying? You know, back in the winter, I I know. I think there are things that If that weren't that for whatever reason had to be relearned in our country. But but because I was engaged with what was going on, I kind of knew yeah, we got to be wearing masks. We got to the the hand sanitizer and stuff and washing our hands, that's always good. But it seems like there was there was information that we should have already known.

Kit Heintzman 1:00:59

What are some of the ways that your reactions have changed over time?

Brooks Long 1:01:11

I think on a, on a personal level, I was coming up with that songwriting as meditation curriculum, and I was really excited about it. And I, I, I had I, you know, I had a I had a thing, you know, I had a direction. And, and I think at the beginning of the pan of the pandemic, as, as we began to really understand how serious it was, and, and how this wasn't going to just be a two week thing. I think I was and to a certain extent, I still am mourning, the the things that didn't happen, the planning that for, for the life that I was going to lead in there was a certain amount of reorganization of, of my life that I was really happy to get into that. That didn't happen. There was a reorganization of reorganization. And, and that was really rough for a while. And then and then at some point, I was able to sort of let it go. And there's, there's all kinds of other things that are that you know, start going on in life and now it's time to pay attention to those things and the opportunities that that I'm getting to grow in these two positions that I have the opportunity to grow with in that currently without my partner there the adjustments have been made. I think, and I was just thinking about how much you know, the movie theaters open, I'm not going to the movie theater. But I really miss going to the movie theater. And I really, I drove past one yesterday and I really longed to go in. I didn't care what movie it was. I just wanted to go see something and at the same time I go gotten very used to watching something at home. And you know, I've gotten into A certain routine here and reading books and stuff and and it's felt very much like a holding pattern but I think I was very impatient and frustrated about that holding pattern at the beginning and, and now through the magic of humanity I've adjusted.

Brooks Long 1:05:43

Yeah. I never had a problem with, with masks. Now we're getting into a new era where we're not really sure whether, you know, once you get fully vaccinated, are you supposed to be wearing them or not? As of April 14 2020, 21, nobody knows. But some people would seem to know. I think there, there's a lot of judgment that that everyone including myself, that we're doing in regards to what other people are doing as, as we pass by each other, or see each other or whatever. People who get super close and then not wearing their masks. They make me uncomfortable. And, you know, I'm learning the science. And the science says that I'm relatively safe, you know, as a as I, you know, if I'm outside and, and especially if I have my mask on. And, and somehow I'm unable to avoid somebody getting close to me, and they don't have their mask on or something. It's a thing or somebody you know, who's doing the, the no nose thing that happens. And it's like, why are you talking to me that, you know, there's a certain amount of, of anxiety and, and judgment that comes with that. And right now, last couple of weeks doing what I can to step back from that and really think about the actual danger that I'm in and, and also thinking thinking about not just the the health rules, but also the the cultural rules, like from a scientific health perspective. Perhaps the evidences is that in certain cases, not wearing a mask is all right. But are you really respecting me? And, you know, because we we know so little about, uh, about the science, and it's also new. Are you sure you're not, you know? You're not putting me in danger? Do you care that you're whether or not you're putting me in danger? And so those are different questions that are separate from whether you're really putting me in danger or not. Are you respecting me? There's there's some disrespect.

Kit Heintzman 1:09:17

Would you tell me what health means to you?

Brooks Long 1:09:28

Health is, health is about where your body, mind and spirit are. And you can if any one of those things is in a poor condition, then you're in bad health. And if all those things are in an all right position, you're in all right health and those things are in a good position. You're in good health. Um, I think I'm learning about how those things are interconnected the body and the body, mind and spirit. And, and well, I guess it's I guess I'm learning about those things in a more logical sense, but those are things that, you know, I know from from music and, and from, you know, being out and having a good time or being out and having a bad time. Yeah, I think Health here in this country is one more thing that is politicized. And I think a lot of times our views obstructed, it well, I guess it turns out that our views are somewhat obstructed on even physical health. But on mental and spiritual health, as well, I think. And in American society, in general, particularly in the black community, the mental health and mental wellness. understandings are really starting to form right now. And I think part of that is maybe from the pandemic, part of that maybe is from not having the not being as tied to traditional anchors like church. And then there, there's also the real need to address mental health when when, you know, there are viral videos of people dying. So I think those those things are starting to be talked about more. I think we, like with so many other things. They're starting to become an awareness. And, you know, awareness is the first step in anything. But, but the first steps are, are really important steps. And it's so sad that so many things had to happen for for us to start having these kinds of conversations and start to develop these sorts of understandings, but will be better for it.

Kit Heintzman 1:13:34

With that scope of health in mind, what are some of the changes you would think you think might be necessary to have a more holistic actualization of health for people?

Brooks Long 1:13:54

Well I think I'm paraphrasing Marion Wilson here. Is that Marion? I'm forgetting her name. But but it was she was a Democratic candidate for president. And, and she was laughed at she was laughed off the stage for continually saying that there needs to and, I'm paraphrasing, there needs to be a spiritual revolution in this country, and that we're just not spiritually well. And I do think, personally, that things start to align in the body and the mind once you start to have more spiritual connection for me, that primarily comes from art, but also nature. And in certain practice, I'm involved in TM practice right now transcendental meditation practice. I'm not sure how I feel about it as an organization, but, but as a practice, it's, it's great. And it's, it's another, it's another tool in the, in the arsenal, but I think that right now, in a lot of different areas of American life, we're, especially with, with Twitter, and we have so many characters. So you see this thing over here, and you talk about that thing over there, and you talk about that thing over there. And then there's this and this, and that, and that and that, and, and, it's, it's hard to get the, you know, 3000 foot view of it all. But for me, if you take a step back to look at it, the general message that we're that we are telling ourselves as a, as a, as a body, is that is that our spirits are not well. And, and, you know, our own individual bodies will tell us that through pain and anxiety, and they'll let us know, hey, things aren't going well, you we need a Tylenol or, you know, we need to go to the hospital or whatever. And I think as a society, it's very clear that we've been neglecting our mental and spiritual health for a long time and, you know, white supremacy and patriarchy and, and homophobia and, and, you know, anti semitism and Islamophobia and xenophobia, all the things are manifestations of spiritual unwellness. And, and I think we're we, we may well be able to, to get to some some new levels, if we're able to, to address that. But it'll, it'll they'll take more than than the NFL putting out a tweet. It'll take more than then Major League Baseball deciding not to have their All Star game in a certain state.

Kit Heintzman 1:18:38

Could you tell me what safety means to you?

Brooks Long 1:18:42

Oh, wow. Well, I think there's this thing going around. Interview with Nina Simone, where she was asked What is freedom for her? And she said, You know, it's no fear, just no fear. And I think that freedom and safety clashed a lot. But, but I think when I think of safety, that's what I think of I think of No, no fear, and that doesn't mean no conflict. It just means that whatever conflict is there can be handled. And I I trust myself to handle it. And I trust the people around me to to handle it with me in a in a way that where where things can feel stable and grounded and equitable and, and in that I don't have to worry that all of a sudden, you know, something's, something's going to happen. That's, that's just trust in life and trust in the people that you're living around and who impact your life that safety.

Kit Heintzman 1:20:27

There's been a quite large and narrow sort of large discursively but narrow and focused narrative about safety under COVID 19. Would you talk a bit about how you have been negotiating within that smaller framework, what feels safe to you with the people around you who you're still interacting?

Brooks Long 1:20:53

Well I feel I feel safe, being outside with a mask on with with you know, folks who are not in my pod, which is but actually do have two people from from our job who are in a pod but they only came over one time. Anyway. Yeah, that's that's pretty much where, where my safety is, I haven't spent a whole lot of time and other people's houses I haven't even spent that much time in, in my parents house, just a little bit, you know, cut the grass and

stuff like that. But, but I have been very, very aware of my health for years now. And, and the respiratory problems that I was having, a few years ago, where I didn't have health insurance and all that were really scary. And honestly, they were they were traumatizing. And so this period of time is somewhat traumatizing on its own. But I am neither interested I'm not interested in the the physical consequences or the mental or spiritual consequences of having COVID 19. So I've been very careful, very careful. And, and, you know, my partner, you know, bless her heart was when, when we were living together, she was with that program, she was like, okay, you know, that, that's me, I know, that's how it needs to be. And I and I, and I feel very fortunate for that. And at the same time, hope that she is getting to enjoy things being a little looser than that. But that's, that's sort of where it is for me, as I have the vaccine and I'm learning about the new science in there. There's stuff that I'm hearing about, you know, it's okay, as long as you're not in a certain room with people for like more than 15 minutes and things like that. You know, I trying to keep my mind open while keeping my body protected. You know, like, okay, but when people are sure about that, you know, I'll make sure my havior behaviors adjust accordingly. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:24:43

How are you feeling about the immediate future?

Brooks Long 1:24:50

I think the immediate future, personally in my personal life is a Been there, I really don't know what's going on, I don't, I don't know, if I'm going to be able to sustain these jobs or even if I, if, if, if I want, one of the jobs that I have, I just feel fortunate to have it, you know, fortunate to have this roadmap to a career. But, but I was before, directly before the pandemic hit, I was in the process of hitting the reset button, seeing, you know, seeing where I was reset, once, once I pressed that button, and you know, what needed to happen, where I needed to go, what I wanted to do for, for working, and all of that, you know, how I was going to continue to be an artist. All all those things. And like I said, I think I'm still very much in a holding pattern with all of that. I'm excited about this radio show, we'll see, we'll see what happens with it. I am somewhat getting paid right now. But it's really one of those things where it's basically volunteering. You know, it's, it's pretty much gas money to get to Towson. And, and the hope is that, you know, sponsorship will come back for the radio station, and, you know, things will, things will start moving. And that would be really cool. You know, I've always dreamed of having a radio show and, you know, playing people music. So, I'm in, I'm enjoying that process. Right now. I don't know how sustainable it's going to be. And, you know, there's lots of things around that. So that so that's like, what's, what's happening personally, personally, everything's in a holding pattern, I feel confident that the, the right things will or will happen, I'll do the right things I need to do once I'm able to do, there's just a whole lot, it's not a whole lot going on right now. As far as like on a societal level in the short term. I don't think things are going in a very good direction. And I'm ultimately hopeful in the long term. But I think that things are gonna get worse before they get better. And I think that I always said about the Trump administration, that, that a lot of things that needed to be recognized, that weren't being recognized are now in your face. And, and you have to deal with it in some way. And, you know, some people are, are you know, you know, some white people were out in the street you know, marching along with Black Lives Matter and so some white people decided to go to to Congress and get the and finally get the Confederate flag in our Federal Building and, and that, that side of things I don't think is over and in the short term when it comes to he's various conspiracies and Trump in people who, you know, feel a need to have his political currency, that's, that's gonna keep going. And people were, are, you know, still gonna get pulled over by the police and lose their lives, that's, that's, that's going to keep happening. And that's so sad. But that's how I see the the short term, it's not gonna get better in the short term, it's going to get worse as as you know,

things open up again, we we have to re engage the parts of ourselves that that interact with people. You know, I was just listening to NPR this morning and there was a songwriter who was it was an Japanese man, I believe, who is apprehensive about going into bars. Because what is what's it gonna be like, when, you know, I walk into a bar as an Asian man. And, you know, a bunch of a bunch of hateful people have had a couple of beers, see me, you know, you know, you know, even if there isn't physical violence, maybe, you know, there's verbal abuse and things that that you don't want to expose yourself to. So there's, there's a lot of tension, there's a lot, that there's a lot of tension that needs to get released. And in the short term, it's going to be released, it will, in the short term.

Kit Heintzman 1:32:03

May I ask about some of your hopes for a longer term future?

Brooks Long 1:32:11

In the long term I think I think that there are a lot of lessons that will be learned by enough people, enough of us and we all have some some things that we gotta learn. And I think enough of us, will, we'll be able to get there. And, and some of us won't, but the really, really, really good news is that there are a lot of things that are just hard to hard to hide. And there are a lot of things that people are dealing with that, you know, I'm dealing with people in my family or are made to deal with, that we didn't even know existed or not to the extent that we had to really think deeply about it. And people have different reactions to to the lives of trans people, that people have different reactions to you know, do black lives matter do all people have, you know, various reactions to whether or not our tax dollars should be spent on on, you know, helping people but all these things are like, out in the open all the arguments are most of the arguments are there and they're relevant. And, and I have faith that when, when faced with challenges, most people will rise up to them, and they'll find their own ways of doing that. Not everybody's going to be able to but, but I think that there are certain things that were just denied before that are impossible to deny right now, health care's certainly one of those things you know, the, the, you know, the massive inequities between people who can't find a place to live can't find anything eaten. And, you know, families that are amassing so much wealth that they won't have to worry about that for many, many, many, many, many generations. We can all see that. It's, it's, it's right there right now. And I think that awareness of so many different things is, is going to cause some really important shifts climate is probably bigger than is bigger than any of that other stuff. And I am, frankly, very excited to see what happens on the other side of this because we haven't ever been here before. We've been someplace like it before in terms of, of social change, but now this is this is a little this is more different than other different times. So for the long term, I'm very hopeful

Kit Heintzman 1:36:59

Self care has been a really big part of the pandemic discourse and I'm wondering if you would be willing to share some of the ways that you've been trying to take care of yourself over the last year.

Brooks Long 1:37:11

Yeah, well, I Excuse me. I have had a therapist since I guess, before of 2019 and I just [inaudible] actually. I gotten to a certain point with that one and I had sold when I think suits a little better and that's a whole process you know I think that there's a constant evolution I am learning a lot about codependency very hard things to learn in, in that department. But it ties into a lot of things whether it's whether it's family life, or you know my art and and lots of other things so you know, reading Codependency No More which came out when I was born and it took us that long for the information to trickle down to me but but it's I'm getting there with the new therapists and learning about intra family relationships which is all really about the body and and its connection to our mental

wellness you and I just got just got another book that said that nonviolent communication and there's another book that should be honest way soon, which is radical acceptance. And yeah, so I think I'm trying to absorb maybe in the past a lot of a lot of wellness and a lot of a lot of growth came really from music. But I have a complicated relationship with music now. Music almost killed me. It didn't, that's not true. But the idea that I needed to pursue it as a career at all costs, including the cost of my physical health didn't serve me. It's so so I'm branching out. And, and, and finding another places go to a lot a lot of parks and to be around the trees and the birds and things like that. And as I said, I've been practicing Transcendental Meditation, and really has been very effective for me. It's not an endorsement, not an official endorsement. Just just saying that and it's it. It said that is branded, but it's it's Vedic meditation, Vedic tradition meds have been around for 1000s of years. And yeah, I, I guess that's, I guess that's it. That's, it's, that's the self care the that I've been up to these days, little yoga. I should be doing more yoga, but I'm not. And making this music show has has been really cool. It's a way for me to engage with music and engage others with music in a safer way, a way where, you know, a lot of codependency things that happen between artists and audiences are not really triggered.

Kit Heintzman 1:42:15

This is my penultimate question. So we know we're in this moment of a flurry of biomedical and scientific research. I'm wondering what you think people in the humanities in the social sciences could be doing right now to help us understand this moment?

Brooks Long 1:42:39

What are what can people in the humanities and social sciences do to help us under to help biomedical? Sorry.

Kit Heintzman 1:42:51

So to help sort of the world at large to create a contribution to this moment. What should we be doing?

Brooks Long 1:43:03

Wow, well, so much about the humanities and about social sciences. Our things are about how people are doing how are how are people making it? What are people, what are people doing to physically mentally and spiritually survive? What were some harmful things that people are engaged in water? What are more beneficial things that that people are engaged in? I think if I if I put on my, my artists hat for a second. I think that they're I think there is a feeling in the culture or there is an ask in the culture, to artists to be informational. And I hear that, I understand that. I support that. And yet, I think that I think it's very limiting and I think that there's more the art can do that then, simply be aspirational. In simply Prop people up and certainly we need we need propping. We need prop in many different identities are under attack at all times, but it's it's very on the surface right now. And, and that's, that's important. But I think that the art can do many many many many many different things in cluding not making you feel particularly good in the moment you encounter it. And but that encounter can do something for you later on or, yeah, that's that. Yeah, that is what I want to say. And, and I think that there there are certain depths to be explored, that are uncomfortable, and they're not going to immediately provide affirmation for you. But, but these steps are worth going down provided you're able to come back up. And, and I think that in the humanities, in social science it it's, it's so right to be compassionately divergent. It's all right to to do what the sciences are supposed to do, which is question everything. Go down every hallway, knock on every door. And I think that as an artist, that's you're in this on, or at least, I feel as though I'm in an uncomfortable place where there's a certain demand. And I only have a certain amount of supply. For that demand, I only have a couple of

informational songs. I got some, and I really love them. And I put my you know, my love into them. But I put my love into everything, including the really hard things

Brooks Long 1:48:31

I see on social media and you know, you know, in the news and, and things. I see a lot of surface. And in there. Oops, oops, sorry, I have to call her back. I see a lot of surface. And there are a lot of things that are being said repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly that I agree with. I do agree with these with a lot of things that are being said on the left as it said but but when we repeat the same statements over and over again. I'm thinking of when I when I saw the documentary I'm Not Your Negro, which is really putting James Baldwin's perspective on white supremacy out into the world and I remember sitting in the theater and and walking out of there And I love James Baldwin. But I remember walking into the theater feeling. And there were so many people who were really felt so affirmed and really happy. But I didn't come out of there learning anything that I didn't already know. And I'm like, well the movie just beat up on white people for two hours. And maybe that's what they needed. But what about what I need? What about the way you know, these are surface things that he's talking about? What about the depths? In James Baldwin can go to those depths? How come this thing didn't go to those depths? How come? How come you know? How come I? Am I supposed to feel good? Because things that have known for a long time are finally being said? How can I get deeper? You know, why do I? What's in it for me, you know, and, and, and I think that the humanities and social sciences, can, can play an important role in, in going to the depths. And don't be afraid to go to those depths. So like, issues of cultural appropriation, that's something that is coming up a lot. In, in, in conversations, especially in my area, and music. And that's a little bit of a surface conversation, the, you know, when you go to the depths now, we have to enter it act with with, with human behavior, and we we just are always absorbing different behaviors from other people things. We're inherently an imitative species. That's, that's what we do. So how can we imitate in the right way? How can we go to how can we acknowledge the surface of it, which is, which is black peoples, and many, many other cultures are, are being mined for their cultural resources without being properly without properly benefiting from it. But the question at the depths is, what is the proper benefit? You know, what, how, how can people properly do yoga? You know, or do or are people not supposed to do yoga? And if so, why? Because maybe they're not, maybe I'm not supposed to do yoga? Maybe maybe, why people shouldn't play the blues anymore? But if so, why not? And if they should, how, how should they? And these are things these are questions. Questions like cultural appropriation, other things are things that I think the humanities and social sciences are suited to give us information to give us larger perspectives than the ones that we're in right now. And art can do that, too. And so that's what I want to see.

Kit Heintzman 1:54:11

This is my last question. So this is an oral history interview. And as a historian, I come to it with some of the old my own assumptions and baggage from my historical moment in the field. And one of those is that is to take very seriously what my historical actors valued and what they thought was important. So if you could imagine yourself Self speaking to a historian of the future, one at least far enough away that they didn't live through this. What would you want them to know about this moment and be sure that they don't want to forget and what kinds of stories would you want to ensure get told in the future about this moment?

Brooks Long 1:54:59

Yeah Wow. Well, I think this is excuse me, this is a moment of those hard challenges the COVID-19 has been really hard. And the way that people live 2030 You know, 100 years from now could be very different because of this moment that we're in right now. I'm remembering the way we as Americans lived before. The before 911

before the terrorist attacks, and it's, I'm still struggling to convey to, to people who, you know, were too young to understand or people who weren't there, just how different things felt before that time. There was just a greater even for me, as a black male, there was just a freer feeling, a, a, a sense of, of privacy, that, that wasn't there before and all these different things. Were that that isn't there now. And in this moment, I think we're at some kind of turning point, I don't know how everything's gonna shake out, but but I think

Brooks Long 1:57:49

I know that there is a tendency in contemporary times, to, to look back at the past, and I'm hoping the great hope is that people look, look back on the past, in the future, and they see how crazy we were and and how barbaric we were in and, you know, how, how many, you know, things we were doing that that would never be done today. And, you know, there might be a need to, to feel like, Man, I'm things are so much better. Because, again, this is me being optimistic. Things are so much better, and people are so much better than they used to be. And I want to challenge the people of the future to you know, take a real, critical, compassionate eye towards both the past and their present. And we are here, we're going through a bunch of stuff we've never been through before in the way that that we're going through it. There are a lot a lot of technological things that are happening that you folks will understand a whole lot better than we do but we're engaged in it. We don't know what it's doing to us, but you do a little bit better. Understand that on you know, the on an individual level And on a national level on a global level, we're always doing the best we can do. And, and, you know, I hope that the life is better in the future, I hope, I think there will be lots of things to learn from this moment. Certainly, racism and homophobia and patriarchy and fascism and how it happens in the dissolution of truth, and hopefully, folks have come to restabilized themselves. But all that instability, can, can, can rise and manifest in different ways. Throughout time, and, and, and things can be better and we have to learn from the past to, to get a sense of, of what needs to be better going forward. But now, that there's there's always going to be stuff that that you're going to have to deal with, and I hope you're, I hope you're doing the best you can.

Kit Heintzman 2:01:45

I want to thank you so so very much for everything that you shared today. And at this point, I just want to ask if there is anything you want to say that my questions haven't given you the space to say to please take that space now, if you'd like.

Brooks Long 2:02:08

I think the perhaps the spiritual message that people need to know the most when, when you know, Marianne Williamson, I think is her name says that we need a spiritual revolution, I think the central message is that we are enough and and we need to realize a world that is expressing that. And and the different all the different individual aspects. Can, can be handled. If, if we first understand that I am enough, this person that I'm talking to may or may not understand that they are enough, but they are and and if we can keep that in front of us. We'll do all right.

Kit Heintzman 2:03:43

Thank you