

Transcript of Interview with Christian Totty by Kit Heintzman

Interviewee: Christian Totty

Interviewer: Kit Heintzman

Date: 06/16/2022

Location (Interviewee): Lima, Ohio

Location (Interviewer):

Transcriber: Lily Crigler

Some of the things we discussed include

Connection to land. Intergenerational trauma: descendent of sharecroppers, lost memories of place and connection; scarcity. Traditional Chinese Medicine as an Indigenous medicine. Learning about COVID-19 in Jan 2020 from a Professor of acupuncture at Johns Hopkins. Acupuncturists work in a liminal space of health care. Closing acupuncture practice early in the pandemic; re-opening space; sometimes being the only person a client left their home to see; treating unvaccinated patients. Nonprofit Board Member of Crime Victim Services. Choosing to get vaccinated. Losing an aunt in Jan 2020 after travel, uncertainty about cause of death. Being bullied as multiracial; body image. Connections with loved ones after death; receiving support from people after death. Child (born March 2019), his first standard vaccines, answering to those who come after us; teaching a young child about health and safety. Multi-generational household; living with people of different ideas about vaccination. Morning ritual of giving thanks to all relations. Changing relationship with partner. Staying connected to colleagues and old friends virtually. Breath and health in humans and other living beings. Pollution, living near a refinery. Rest, joy, and pleasure. Both/and.

Kit Heintzman 00:00

Hello, would you please start by stating your full name, the date, the time, and your location?

Christian Totty 00:06

Yes, my name is Christian Totty. Today is June the 16th. Right and the time is 10:06AM, Eastern Standard Time. And I am in Lima, Ohio, which is in Northwest Ohio.

Kit Heintzman 00:23

And the year is 2022.

Christian Totty 00:24

Yes, and the year is 2022. Thank you.

Kit Heintzman 00:28

And do you consent to having this interview recorded, digitally uploaded, and publicly released under a Creative Commons License Attribution Noncommercial Sharealike?

Christian Totty 00:37

Yes.

Kit Heintzman 00:39

Thank you so much. Could I just start by asking you to introduce yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening? What would you want them to know about you?

Christian Totty 00:48

Yeah, so my name is Christian. I was born and raised where I am in Lima. So this is the traditional homelands of the Shawnee, Kickapoo, Miami relatives as well as Wyandotte, Erie relatives. And so I always think it's important to kind of name place and name the peoples here who have been removed from their original home place. I understand that as being important in part because I have always felt that place and location and connection to land is important. It's been a theme, I think, for many people, but in my life, it's played a significant role. And I find that to be true as I navigate, you know, living, navigate my own personal experiences, heal from intergenerational trauma, as a mother, as a partner; all of that really informs place, and place informs all of my identity and who I am for myself and for others. I would want first and foremost people to know that about me. I come from sharecroppers and farmers in Ohio and Northwest Ohio and in Kentucky. And then further in my maternal- maternal- matrilineal line coming also from people who are stewards of the land in the Carolinas, indigenous folks and black folks. And so, yeah.

Kit Heintzman 02:34

I'd like to start by asking some of how you nurture your relationship with the land where you are.

Christian Totty 02:40

Yeah, thank you. One of the ways that I nurture a relationship with land is through tending a garden. So I have a home garden. And I learn about relationship, about being in relationship with a garden. You learn the things that you think- you learn that you don't know as much as you thought you did about- about life and about what is needed in the moment, about presence, about connection. And so it's a very reciprocal relationship, I find. This year has been the year that I've been able to really get back to gardening as I had once done before I became a mother. So it's been nice to also connect with my little one, and it's a wonderful conversation starter, just having a garden, no matter if it's somebody that you don't know, or if it's a family member. Just yesterday, you know, I think a lot of kids kind of struggle with the vegetable thing, you know, so... And again, that plays into place and so just being in the garden, my little one will just pick up tomatoes, he'll just pick up leaves of lettuce and just eat them and try them. And so that's one way that I nurture a relationship for myself, but also like through- through him, you know, so that's a wonderful connection. Another way that I nurture place is through memory and through- and nurture connection to land is through memory. So my earliest memories are really being in the garden with my grandma in her garden, going to pick produce, rare, fresh vegetables, fresh fruits, in the summertime here in Ohio, and then being in the kitchen with her just watching her cook, watching cooking shows with her like, that is my earliest earliest memory. And also paying attention to the photographs that she had in her house, she and my grandfather, and just kind of like wondering and being curious about where my relatives or elders, ancestors were, you know, what- what was going through their minds, what was the weather like? You know, those kinds of things, I would- I would pour over family photo albums and just kind of let my curiosity fly. And that has a place based in land connection, too, wondering how they got to where they- they were. Some of the photographs were certainly taken here in Ohio, some of them were taken in other parts of the country, California, etc. I have family there, so that's why. Another way I think the third sort of like, trifecta of this nurturing relationship to land is, is in what I do now. I think it's been a thread throughout my working experience; before I became an acupuncturist, I worked primarily in nonprofits for the majority of my sort of adult life and in the education and youth development, and so those experiences really shaped me tremendously and also have a

component again of- of nurturing relationship and understanding what reciprocity means and what it looks like for people. And especially youth because having worked with them for so long, their understanding of where they are and their place in the world is developing, and to have been able to help shape that in some capacity or to help let them know that what- however it manifests for them, then that's okay. And also to- to remain connected as best they can with- with the land. So that- that is an important piece, too. And then moving into a career as a acupuncturist, I definitely view the human body as a sort of ecosystem and Chinese medicine and East Asian medicine as well as other indigenous traditions because East Asian medicine, acupuncture, Chinese medicine is an indigenous- it comes from an indigenous practice or indigenous worldview. And very much so viewing the body as an ecosystem as connected to a wider ecosystem. And so I really- I really love that philosophy, and I really hone in on that. And it's helped me to reconnect and sort of reclaim some of my lost memory of place and lost memory of connection to plant relatives. And really trying to reframe the narrative that nature is a place where harm happens, where trauma happens. It's true, it does, but also being able to reclaim some of that as well. Chinese medicine has been helpful for me for that. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 08:11

Would you tell me a story or two about your life during the pandemic?

Christian Totty 08:15

Yeah, sure. So the pan- it was interesting because I have a professor who was going to John Hopkins at the time, and he was getting his degree in public health. And he started a bit before, and this is a professor who I had the pleasure of learning from in school for acupuncture and Chinese medicine, so... He had just kind of started his program, and then he started to just put information out there, early information around January of 2020 about just words that he was, you know, things that he was hearing from China and then in his program. So I kind of was like, "What is going on?" You know, a lot of curiosity and a lot of concern. And then it was interesting to just kind of like, continuing to- to- to- through him and what he shared, to kind of watch it unfold in a way. You know, trying to be proactive in some senses, but also just trying to get a grasp as to what was happening like, what was really going on. And it was- it was so early in the game that I decided very early on that I was going to close up shop for a few months. So I made that decision pretty early. I think, if I'm not mistaken, I feel like March of 2020 was really when like, "everything is happening, what do we do?" And at that point, I was like, "I'm closing." So I don't- I felt like I was a little bit prepared in a sense to- to- to make that decision because thankfully- because of my professor. And then he also would share things like herbal formulas for- for what he was seeing and what some of his colleagues were seeing in China in terms of how to- how to remedy issues related to COVID. And so that was really helpful, and he was just really generous with that. So that was something that I observed, you know, seeing his generosity, but then also seeing like this widespread, you know, fear and, of course, and concern and anger. You know, it was interesting to kind of watch anger develop in people in terms of decisions that were made, certainly in Ohio, but also nationwide about what we should do, what we shouldn't do. It was interesting to see people's opinions form and emotions sort of manifest around what other countries were doing. So, you know, it was just really fascinating to see that sort of spectrum of opinions and spectrum of just diversity in terms of- of people's actual fear of it, you know, fear of what was happening or what was not happening. And then seeing sort of like, this sort of two sides that we're familiar with kind of develop, too, like, whether you're going to vaccinate, or whether you're not going to vaccinate. And then sort of being in the middle of that, I feel like oftentimes, acupuncturists are- do sit in a liminal space, you know, in terms of the medical field and healthcare. And so I kind of firmly had to occupy that liminal space. And- and I had my own opinions, and I followed my- my- what I believed to be best protocol to keep myself and family safe, to get vaccinated, even in the face of, you know, once

I did reopen, folks coming in and, you know, very openly sharing their opinion about to be vaccinated or not. And for a long time, I just didn't say anything. Part of it- part of it was like, "let me see what- let me see what they say." And then another part of it was, "it's not going to do anything really, except for to make a- [laughs] make an already sort of tense situation that is collectively happening more tense by sharing my opinion, sharing what I've done. And then and then sort of like, disrupting a bit sort of that- that relationship, I guess, that- that I had with patients." And I- honestly, I was like, "I'm not willing to go there right now, especially in the beginning." So- so that- that's kind of like a- it's kind of a more than one story wrapped in one. But that's kind of been- that was my experience early on, and then kind of moving into just watching it all unfold and being a part of it unfolding. I had a lot of people pass away. My aunt, honestly, she probably had COVID, we're still not sure. But we're talking, when she passed away, it was early January, and you know, and she had done some traveling just prior. And-

Kit Heintzman 13:38

That's uh- sorry, that's early January. 2020?

Christian Totty 13:40

20- Yeah, 2020. Yeah. Early January 2020. And we hadn't heard from her, and it was really nagging us. And I just was like, "Okay." Like, one day my mom was like, "Have you heard from her?" I was like, "I still haven't." So I was like, "We have to call her apartment building." And that's how we found out that she had unfortunately passed. And whether or not it was COVID, we're not sure, but I have a feeling that it may have been because she had already had a bronchitis kind of thing that was lingering. So there's all these- I think there's a phrase for it called- what is it called? It's basically like, when grief is unexplained, when there's- when- when- when you don't know why somebody passed away, and you kind of have to live with that unknown. There wa- there's been a lot of that, a lot of that in the last two years. So again, it's still a liminal space. And so I feel like if I were to summarize any story, it would be that I imagine, as others have as well, I've had to kind of tow that liminal space and just- and just be there and be there, you know, fully because we're in such a- we're in such a interesting time in our history.

Kit Heintzman 15:06

Would you share a bit about who your aunt was?

Christian Totty 15:09

Yeah, yeah. My aunt- my aunt's- first thing that comes to mind, I'll just say it, she was the first person to- to claim me. So my aunt is- her family's from the Philippines. She left behind a sister and a niece. And I've since connected with her niece, which has been wonderful, because she would always talk about her, and we never met and vice versa. So my aunt claims me in the sense that I, being somebody who's mixed culture, mixed race, in the town that I'm from, people didn't know what to- they didn't know how to place me, talking about placing, and they didn't know where I was from. I was born and raised here, right, but... So I was never quite one thing or enough for people, if that makes sense. I was not black enough, I was not light skinned enough, my hair was not this way enough, it was always kind of this like, just not- just not knowing how to place me and- and therefore being bullied as a result. But my- and also, I will say that I was teased pretty heavily for my size early on from family as well as classmates, and so... But my aunt, one of the first things- one of the first memories I have of her, she had this beautiful long, dark hair, beautiful eyes just- she was sort of just- just poised in a way. And we were sitting at my grandma's kitchen table, and my aunt, even though her and my uncle had separated, she remained close to my family up until the point that she passed, right. So she was still- my aunt, she was still a sister to my mom, she

was still a child to my grandmother. So- so- of one of the times that she came to visit my grandma, we sat at the kitchen table, and she was like, "You have eyes like mine, your eyes are beautiful." And up until that point, it was like, it felt like I just heard negative and negative and negative, even again from family, just discouragement. And- and at that moment, it just kind of- I felt like I- somebody had seen me, really and truly seen me. And I must have been five or six, I want to say. and it just shifted something for me. And I- she and I were really close. And we remained close until she passed and even- even as she has walked on, I still feel really connected with her. And that's another thing again, I think that has been, with the pandemic, at least for me personally, again, like that- that threshold has been so real tapping into or leaning into whatever gift that I've been given to kind of be able to pick things up from those who have passed or things like that, that has come- become more alive, and so I've tried to trust it. But she definitely has- has let herself be known to me even in- even after passing. Again, claiming me still, right. So that's- that's really who she was for me. She was this- this this matriarch, this person who made sure I knew I was loved and knew that I was seen and that I was important in the world. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 19:25

You had- you had more exposure to the severity of the pandemic earlier through-

Christian Totty 19:32

Mhm.

Kit Heintzman 19:32

-your professor. I'm wondering what, in the liminal space before vaccines, were something that looked like they were really going to happen with any kind of speed. What did that liminal look space look like in the sort of pre vaccine era?

Christian Totty 19:48

Right. I- during that time, I decided to close and so I was just at home just hanging out with my little one. And what I remember- and even- even when I opened back, it was still this unsureness. I had it myself. This unsteadiness is just being completely unsure, this simultaneous distrust and curiosity, this sort of opportunity for folks to become a little bit like, or feel like they were being sort of citizen scientists or like citizen researchers, in a sense, you know, like, feeling, you know, feeling like they had the facts, and they had the latest. And, you know, so I- that was- there was some of that. There's- there was the push pull of family members making decisions that I personally decided not to make, which is, you know, I'm going to wear a mask for this is, you know, this is the decision I made. I'm going to wear my mask, I'm going to get vaccinated, I'm going to treat this as if, you know, it's not just about me, it's anybody could be affected by my choices. That to me, is what it boiled down to. So I saw- I saw a lot of that of just- it did, I will admit, it made me feel like people were just being, even if they decided not to get vaccinated, to not put a mask on, especially in public places, or, you know, if you weren't in a pod, and you're going somewhere, and it's highly crowded, it's not just about you, you know. And so that was what- I think that liminality is really what I saw is this- just this like, it was like a binary was happening like, this sort of like, there was one side of thinking and another side of thinking. And then there were people who are sort of down the line neutral, and I guess in a sense, I stayed there a bit for myself, not sure- not sure what to do. Ultimately, I think for myself, I- I still- I still tried to- I wouldn't call it neutral, but I still tried to be as open as I could, to what new information we were learning and try to make the best decision based off of that. But I saw a lot of, I don't know if hatred is the right word. I saw a lot of- witnessed a lot of hurt, a lot of people just being really firm, one way or the other. I saw a lot of shaming, too. I think that's maybe one of the biggest things is the

shaming that people did to each other for whatever decision they made, other people made. So I think the liminal space was full of uncertainty, again, as I had mentioned, but also a lot of shame. And I think, you know, I think in part when we shame people with something, something is resonating within us. So then- but I don't know if people got curious about that. I tried to listen for that in sessions with people because again, when I- when I came back, I was like, "I'm just going to- we're going to focus on your treatment, we're going to focus on trying to both stay safe during the session, and, you know, trying to really focus on that." I wouldn't- I would not engage as much with conversation about one side or the other, because that's what I found people wanted me to do. They wanted me to choose a side. It's like, "I'm not having the conversation." Thankfully, I didn't have to say that. But I think just me listening was sometimes- it was often enough for people to just be heard, no matter what their opinion was. And another decision- another reason why I made the decision that I did lastly is that, you know, it was also around the time when my little one was getting his first shots for vaccines. And I ultimately was like, you know, if- when he gets older, and he asked me, "What did you do? What choice did you make?" I would want to be able to say, "You know, I tried to protect myself and other people. And so this is what I did." And so that's what really- that's what drove my decision across the board. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 24:40

What's motherhood been like for you?

Christian Totty 24:45

Um, my little one was born in March of 2019. So like, about a year, [laughs] for a full year after everything, you know, the pandemic could have sort of bust- burst open- the seams burst, right? And it- at the beginning, it was really- it was tense, that's a word that comes to mind, it was tense within the household. I live in a multi-generational household. I did then, I still do. It was tense, it was tense before, and it just got more tense. My little one felt that tenseness. And it took a while to kind of soften things. It took awhile for things become more soft, more tender, I guess more open, within my own self, too, I'll be accountable for that. It's been challenging to navigate, wanting him to be- wanting him to have a fortified and resilient immune system, not just, you know, not just about viruses and bacteria and all of those things, but like really be someone who's fortified, who knows that they're resourced, who knows that they are protected in a way and safe. So there's been an interesting dynamic there with how that happens internally and then how that happens in your relationships externally because he didn't get a lot of time with children his age. I just didn't feel comfortable during those early stages, taking him out like that. In his first year of life, thankfully, you know, we met with family, and there were a lot of weddings and, you know, lots more family time. And then, you know, just really sort of progressively over the last two years dwindled and that has since thankfully picked back up, but there is that loll for sure. And it's hard to see that as a mother to see his craving for that connection and wanting him to be around people his age, family members, regardless of their age. And then also- also understanding that there was a period of time where that just had to take- it was had to pause. Thankfully, he's grown up into a very resilient three year old. He was- he is shy, a little reserved, but he is also very warm. And so he's- he's- he's much more quick these days to kind of just observe, and then when he feels comfortable and safe, he'll say something. And I feel like, you know, I'm like, "Okay, he learned that. That's okay to be reserved, it's okay to take a step back, and say, 'I don't know you, I don't know you that well. Let me see what you got going on. And then if I feel safe.'" So I, you know, while it was challenging, I am thankful that- that- that happened. For myself personally, just motherhood, I think, it- it has been such an interesting lesson. I mean, it's hard anyway, but it's also just been a really interesting lesson. Throwing in, you know, this global crises, crises on top of crises, right. And I guess I, you know, for my- for how I feel emotionally, I guess it manifests and, you know, what am I going to say about that? What am I- what am I

teaching my little one about that? You know, that's, I guess, the most important or the biggest question for me is, how do I talk to him about these multiple crises that are happening from the pandemic, certainly, to, you know, climate crises, and other crises related to, you know, racism and colonization and capitalism, you know, how do I talk about those things to- with him? How do I include him in the conversation so that he's aware and so that he can think critically about those things? Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 29:27

I'd love to hear anything you're willing to share about what those conversations and communication with your son has been like and how much you think he's understands about what's happening right now.

Christian Totty 29:43

Well, one- [laughs] one thing that he has a clear understanding about is what it- what it means, I think- I think this is developing in him, is what it means to kind of keep yourself protected and protect other people, and so some of the conversation is very much so just around like, you know, the things that are maybe we take for granted, but that- for a little one, it's like, it's the practice, it's a repetitive reminding, and it's the practice of it. But you know, this the other day, I was like, "Okay, when you cough, you got a cough on your arm; if you sneeze, you know, you can sneeze in your arm, you can lift up your shirt, you know, if you need a tissue, washing your hands after we're- we've been out somewhere." But then also, right, because we do have our garden, it's like, allowing him space to just get in it, you know, literally just get in the soil, get your hands caked, get your clothes dirty. It doesn't- it's fine. Make a mess with your food. There's- there's helpful bacteria in the soil, you know, to make a mess with your food, you get to explore in that way. So it's- it's- it's a- it's a- it's a both and, you know, it's like, "Yes, we have to do these things to keep ourselves and others safe, and we can also get in the soil, get dirty." And when we are around little, little ones, other little ones like, he's in a gym class now. And, you know, just again, practicing those respectful, those things that keep you accountable, I feel like, for- for- for everyone, you know. And- and to be mindful about how your actions influence other people, how your decisions influence other people. Another thing, too, is I used to- when he was really little, which is not something that I did consciously because of the pandemic, but I just kind of did it, but [laughs] I sort of rethought or remade some nursery rhymes that I thought were- they just kind of came quite naturally, but they kind of helped me even sort of broaden my perspective of, you know, the universe and the cosmology of the universe. So I'm trying to think of one because I haven't- I haven't said it to him a while. So one thing that we do every- we try to do every morning is to just give thanks to Creator give things to Father Sky, Mother Earth, Grandfather Sun, Grandmother Moon, all of the relations. I think that helps, too, even in those little day to day things that I mentioned of sneezing in your- or coughing in your shoulder- your arm or something or, you know, being mindful not to bump into somebody and if you do, we apologize. You know, all of those little things help to build relationship. And I'm trying to think of another one if I can. Okay, here- so here's another one. So it's- I used to say all the time to him, "Twinkle twinkle in the night sky, stars shine bright, who gives bituin," which is the word for 'star' in Tagalog, because he is part Filipino. "Stars shine bright, who gives bituin, they fall to the earth, become dust, and then they become us. We are made of stars, we are star people." So just like those, you know, that's an example of one thing, you know, so it's like, helping him- helping him- it goes back to place, have a concept of his place in the world. And then also, that there's a cosmology out there that- that informs- that informs everything. I don't know if I'm answering your question. [laughs] But if you want to know something more specific, please, please let me know.

Kit Heintzman 34:19

You're doing perfect.

Christian Totty 34:21

Okay. [laughs]

Kit Heintzman 34:25

I'm so curious about how discussions in your intergenerational home went about different needs, about safety and different needs to access to different services and different boundaries.

Christian Totty 34:40

Yeah. So... the conversations were, I want to say in the beginning, we all kept a little quiet. We kind of formed our opinions to ourselves, certainly informed by family and other things, but to each other, we didn't talk about it at first. And then when the vaccine was available, when that became more readily available, that's when we really started to, you know, people's opinions came out, you know. And I feel like there was a level of respect. And I also feel like there was just a level of, what do I say, a level of just knowing that this person's opinion differs, and you just have to keep it moving because you live in the same household. Whether or not those things have been resolved, right. So whether- so, for an example, my mother and I think similarly, in terms of the vaccination, my little one's opinion is, you know, not formed around that yet, but he has other vaccines. And I stopped, let me think here, I may have had some antibodies in breast milk, but it was we stopped breastfeeding, you know, of- at least a few months before, if not, six months, nine months before the pandemic, actually, you know, kind of rolled out, so... Um, so, you know, there was- I was curious about that, you know, and then, you know, other people in the household, they were very staunch like, they were skeptical, you know, that's the best word for it. And I understand that because I felt that as well, skeptical about the whole thing, not just the vaccine but just about, "Is this conspiracy, is it- was it planned?" All of that, and I get- I get that, I really do. I also, you know, pandemics happen, you know, why the timing of some of them may be curious, you know, they happen, and it's a part of sort of- it's a part of our larger ecosystem, right. But there was some skepticism, very much so some differing of opinions, a lot of tension. And so the conversations- the conversation that I would have with my partner were different than the one that I would have with my mom. And while I feel like the conversations with my partner were hard, more difficult, specifically around the pandemic and the, you know, the virus. They- we had a conversation, we went through the hard conversation, and we came out of it better understanding ourselves and each other and in better understanding how we want to move forward, individually and as a family. With my mom, there were the- you know, it was a conversation, certainly, we had similar beliefs. And- and also, though, it was- they were challenging in the sense that, you know, because of- because of the presidency under which this pandemic happened, there was just so much energy toward... there was so much energy put toward blaming this one particular person for the array of things that went down, and it just was exhausting. Like most mothers and daughters, or, you know, mothers and children, our relationship was learning that once we lived together, it was strained, and it became more strained. And so there were conversations that didn't- that didn't necessarily involve anything to do with the pandemic but that just were not being had, that needed to be had. You know, so it- while it wasn't pandemic specifically related, it just was this satellite, you know, they were the satellite of conversations that weren't happening. So it was a very interesting place to be in to be having hard conversation over here about something specific and then not having conversations, so having similar opinions about the pandemic with this other person, and- but these other conversations were, you know, so it left this kind of weird void in a sense on that side of- on that side of things. And, you know, it just kind of makes me think of [laughs] I guess, as a mother too, it makes me think of what gets unresolved, I guess, in your relationship with your- with your children or with your parent, you know, all that gets left unresolved. And I think, thinking about that in the face of so much grief

over the last two years, I think about that too. All that doesn't get said or is miscommunicated or just doesn't- doesn't- doesn't have a period. And some things don't- things don't have a period, sometimes things don't have a period, and they shouldn't. But yeah, I would say, of the conversations that were had, they were- some of them were more difficult than the others, and some of them related to the pandemic, we're, again, similar in opinion, but then this emphasis on the blame, which I wasn't really interested in. So that just didn't feel like it was an actual conversation. It felt like it was just a, you know, yeah, like just this monologue in some ways.

Kit Heintzman 41:01

What's partnership meant to you?

Christian Totty 41:07

Partnership has meant a lot of different things. Oh, gosh, related to the pandemic, can I confirm? Yeah. I found partnership- so for my- I, of course, I think about this in context of partnership, as it relates to my little one, right? As well as myself. So, you know, it has been- it felt isolating, certainly, in the beginning. I had felt isolated before. My partner was gone a lot for work. Sometimes, unfortunately, some days would be out and would not really get a chance to see him; we'd be up early in the morning. So he wouldn't really get to see our son. And that felt isolating, that felt alienating felt, I felt very alone. And then to have this sort of strained relationship with my mom, that also was, you know, kind of perpetuated that- the pandemic heightened all that.[laughs] And so, but I had to- I had to shift my thinking around letting myself, I guess, just bringing some softness in to the relationship. Not because I thought that- not because my- my mother necessarily was willing to change anything, but I knew I had to, in order to get through things, so I had to bring in some softness. If we're gonna, I was like, "If we're gonna get through this, I have to just be softer with things within myself, give myself some grace." And then in there, I felt like we could partner a little bit better, helping to- with, you know, the needs of my son, and just the needs of trying to, you know, keep things going with household and- and all of that. My partner, I felt was absent for some of it just because of the nature of his job. Things started to change, he got a different job, he just switched jobs. And so it got better because then he was present more, and he was there more. So that changed that partnership dynamic where I didn't feel so- as a loner, as isolated, and I could- I felt like I could rely on him. Before I didn't really feel like that; I felt like I was kind of like on this island surrounded by these two other islands that were my mom and him and- but they- we- there was no cohesiveness. There was no attempt to share supplies, you know, that kind of thing. It just kind of sort of- kind of felt like... I found partnership also within relationships online. So colleagues, that was a saving grace, hands down. Connecting with older- with friends from the past that I've been friends with for a long time, though virtually, that was a saving grace. At the time, I was also doing a breathwork certification, and so I was meeting every week for a period of time during the pandemic. Part of it was spent getting the certification, the other part was spent hosting or facilitating space for women of color every week again to- to practice breathwork together. That was a saving grace. And then when I started to see folks again, started to see patients in the clinic again, that was really helpful, too. And that was resonated back to me. I started with really low, really low numbers, you know, I intentionally saw only a few people at a time, sometimes only one person a day, you know, I kept it really low, the census low. But people would always tell me like, I'm- like, "This is like, the only thing I've done this week. I'm glad that you're open." You know what I mean? So that was helpful to hear, and it was also helpful for me to, you know, to allow myself time to do my work, and then be more confident that my little- little one was okay with my mom and not be so tight around that, you know, because that was also a stress factor. So that it- so I would sum that up to say that partnership has really, for me, been about like, it's felt, I guess I could express it that way, it's felt like a softening,

and it's felt like being more expansive. More mild deep, instead of mile wide, you know, kind of framework. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 46:20

I'd love to hear what your work in breathwork how that- how that engages with our moment, with a respiratory illness. So how are you seeing breath? How are you working that?

Christian Totty 46:33

Yeah. Um... so I- I- I did my training about a year after my father passed in November. So it was like, the timing of it was meaningful or significant for me in that way. And in Chinese medicine- in Chinese medicine, the breath is really what we refer to as Qi, and in many senses, and the breath- the universe itself has a breath, and it- the breath patterns itself. And so we can see this breath pattern in everything from, you know, the- the rate of our own breathing and as humans, but also in the pattern of a lead and in the graining of wood, in the way that the water ebbs and flows from the ocean and onto sand. And there are other patterns too, like viruses, right? That's a pattern too, the way that it manifests. And that- that particular pattern has was put into motion by other patterns, right? So... and then also the breath, it is that vital life force or Prana or Qi. And so it also plays into our lung and large intestine system. So think about it this way. This is kind of like my trail of thinking about [laughs] it as I answer your question. And with the lung and large intestine, that emotion is grief. So it's all very well, again, these patterns are very well connected, you know, it's not on accident. It's not by chance, maybe some of it is, but you know, it's also a chance that happens to be very auspicious. Um, and so it was no wonder to me- it was curious, but not wonder, I guess, to me that we are in this moment, this pandemic, this time in history, where we're all going through this grave grief, and we can't breathe. And you know, George Floyd, "I can't breathe." How many times has that been said, but I feel like at that moment, it was heard by people who didn't necessarily hear it before. And so this concept of this- this idea of breath and breathing and what that means, and through the pandemic, I saw also research being done- Well, maybe new research, but from an old way of thinking, you know, indigenous folks from various countries and communities, especially in East Asia and Southeast Asia, have utilized the breath to keep themselves healthy and... And I- but I did see, I think probably about the middle of the pandemic, doctors starting to speak out at advocating the use of breathwork, so that was really great to see for COVID recovery. I worked with a few folks who were post-COVID, and it was- it was hard, it was challenging. But also just the, again, the sheer amount of grief was hard for people to breathe through. I had that in my own experience. I mean, it the- and because the fear factor plays in- in Chinese medicine, the water phase is associated with fear and kidneys. And so and this is true in Western science or Western, excuse me, medicine as well. And the kidneys and the lung have a, you know, they- they have a relationship, and they help each other out. One- one is sort of an upper source of water and fluid regulation, and, you know, turning over, and the other is the sort of lower source of fluid regulation. And in Chinese medicine, the lungs have- the kidneys have to be willing to receive that- that Qi to receive the breath. And if there's so much fear that your breath can't root down, right? If there's so much grief that you cannot root your breath, that's a very real thing. Whether it sounds like it's, you know, because I realized that might sound maybe esoteric, but it's also really true anatomically, you know. Like, if- if, like, for example, a lot of us tend to inhale because, you know, whenever we say take a deep breath, it's like [inhales] and- but where's the rest of it? What happens to the breath after, you know what I mean? We can inhale all we want, but if we're not exhaling fully, then we are not getting as much oxygen as we actually could be optimally. So the exhale is just as important. And in exhaling, your diaphragm is allowed to kind of rest back up, allowed to ascend a bit. And the breath then can kind of find its way back, or find its way to- to its paired or its partner water source. And here's another, you know, way of partnering, right? But again, if these- if we're- if

there's so much emotion involved in those functions, and those systems, that it's overwhelming, then it's- it's- it's hard to- it's hard- it's literally hard to breathe. We literally cannot breathe. And also our environment was- is and has been becoming a place that is hard to breathe in, in so many ways, but certainly through pollution and other environmental factors that, you know, like I live near- there's a refinery here in my town. So growing up with that, and then coming back here and live here. And it's a very- it's a reality for a lot of people, a lot of people do have respiratory issues and cardiovascular issues. And so there's that component of it as well. But yeah, I think in that, what I've- what I'm getting more curious about is we are able to breathe because early ancestors, most relatives, you know, early moss, early plant relatives decided that they were going to migrate, you know, in part it was due to water fluctuation, you know, right, in terms of sea level. But then also, they were like, "Well, let's..." Whatever in them decided to like hang out on, you know, and make that migration. Whatever was in them, whether it was a trauma I- who knows. It could have been a trauma, it could have been something that forced them to move, to make that move. Could have been curiosity, it could have been all at the same time. All of those things can be true. But whatever it is, they decided, and they moved to land. And they formed- they were able to form more complex plant life. And because of plant life, we're here, because of plant life, we have the ability to take in oxygen, and that the plants- that plants, you know, expire out, and so there's a relationship there, and I guess in all of it, especially after these last two years, I'm curious about that, you know, like, what does that mean that- that's where we really started in a lot of ways, and what can that mean for helping ourselves to breathe more fully? And breathe- breathe more freely, you know? Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 55:22

You'd mentioned earlier the crisis on top of crisis on top of crisis that we've witnessed recently. I just wanted to open some space for you to share more about what that sort of compounding experience of one thing after another has been like for you. And you've mentioned some, but to also just create a bit more room for you to discuss what some of the heavier things on your mind and heart have been over the last couple of years that aren't just COVID.

Christian Totty 55:52

You said that aren't just COVID? Mhm. Yeah, I'm a Pisces- so I'm a Pisces, so it's kind of [laughs] sometimes hard for me to like, separate things out because I'm like, "But it's all one thing connected." Although- [laughs] although I do have a lot of fire, you know, in my chart, too, so it helps with that. But, um... I think it goes back to, gosh, I think it goes back to patterns to me, you know, it goes back to, what do we see in the patterns that are presenting? When it comes to, for an example, a pattern of lack of- lack of the ability to breathe, you know, as an example, whether it's because of COVID. I guess what I'm saying is, so people might have various or varying levels of inability to breathe or- or something that is restricting their breath, it could be an illness, it could be- this could be COVID related, a long term chronic illness, it could be because they can't breathe as a result of environmental pollution, right. And all of those things, all of those different things might also intersect. And so it could be that somebody has a chronic illness, and we saw this play out in the pandemic. Somebody has a chronic respiratory, cardiovascular illness, and they live in an environmentally toxic environment, and they're a person of color, and they- their access to certain health care, their access to certain living in a different place, their generational access has been restricted. And so all of these things intersect and lead to a sort of pattern of not being able to breathe, like literally being strangled for breath, they might also have a congenital history of trauma, excuse me, not trauma, but although yes, that might be true, but asthma, as an example, right. And that just kind of also could play into, you know, family history, and it can also play into the environmental piece. And so, um, it goes back if I'm talking about- if we're talking about like, the- the- the pandemic as a crisis and environmental catastrophe, or climate crisis as a crisis, or racism as a crisis, capitalism as a crisis, the continuing- continuation of

colonization as a crisis, all of those things just, I guess, it is hard to- sometimes it's hard to piece it out, you know, it is all very much so threaded together. I think there's value in- in understanding how one piece is different from another piece like, how the climate is very specific in its- in its- in its presentation, that as a pattern, the crisis of a warming climate, how that actually manifests and what that actually means, and what that kind of transformation will actually look like. And it's also important to understand and unpack how racism affects people and how that manifests in that pattern. That continuization of colonization is patterned and how it manifests in people, or how it manifests in relationships. I think it's important to kind of make sure we understand those things as they are and also to draw those lines, you know, to- to- if everything was up on a board sort of we have these circles of things, but then also doing the work now, I think, especially and- and organizers have been doing this work. That's a large portion, I think of what I know organizing work to be is to make connections where otherwise they would not be seen, or they otherwise would not have the opportunity to come to light. So that conversations that need to be had can be had, so that people can work toward a common goal, right. So it's not a new concept, but I think that- I do think that we're going to be- we're going to need to rely on that- that sort of strategic way of thinking and doing things. That's really kind of how it's- that's how I've seen it playing out through the pandemic, and that's how I see it- kind of like, I see where it's going with that like, really needing to- to rely on that. And I think- I think too, like there have been so many people that have- that like, the Net Ministry, and Adrienne Maree Brown, and Prentis Hemphill who have also done the really important work within all of those complex crises to do the work of saying yeah and dressed, yeah and joy, yeah and pleasure. Because that's- it's equally as important. Especially because it's hard work, you know, the work is not easy work; it can be joyful, it can be pleasurable, and in some ways, too, it can be restorative. I think that- I think that it does take some imagining, though, of how we do things- how we can do things differently. I work- I'm a board member at a nonprofit here, it's called Crime Victim Services. And I'll admit, I have some, you know, I have some opinions about the word 'crime' and... But, you know, I very do much understand the people that we work with and serve our victims of violence and trauma and their survivors. And we're at a place now, where we are transitioning leadership, and we have big, big questions and big, big visions on the table. And we're in a process of looking how everything, all of the work that we do, and all the people that we work with, intersect. And so I see it even in the organization that I'm a part of, like, the hard conversations that need to be had, while also remembering that we're human beings and that we- we- we- we need to- we need to just keep our relationships in mind and work from a place of- of reciprocity and work from a place of, again, I think it's about softness too and not needing to think that we're right all the time. But yeah, I see- I see relationship being integral and intersectionality being integral, and knowing that we are, you know, interdependent, that's also a concept that's really important in Chinese medicine and East Asian medicine is that interdependence, you know, we are talking about the lungs and the kidneys. You know, our- our bodily systems work in tandem with each other. They work in pairs, they work- they work to- they- in one- one system's work is not more important than the others. And so there's that, you know, there's that kind of relationship too. And I think, I hope that's kind of where we're moving into as we tackle these crises. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:04:05

What have been some of your sources of joy and pleasure over the last couple of years?

Christian Totty 1:04:12

Mhm. Gardening has been really helpful; it's been really, really helpful. Just spending time outside is always very restorative. And when like, for example, my little one will just, you know, wake up in the morning randomly on random days and say, "I want to paint." And just like leaning into that all the way like, "Okay, let's just paint." And then just- just letting the creativity flow, that has been really, really, really helpful. You know, just being

inspired in that way by somebody who is you know, learning the world but still relatively new to the world. And- and just the way that he trusts like, "This is what I'm supposed to be doing now." You know, like, "I'm gonna paint because it's gonna be awesome," you know. And just having that urge to- to follow that, I think, you know, and trusting that. So part of it, I think is trusting the joy and trusting the pleasure, knowing what brings me joy and what brings me pleasure, really, really thinking through that. And- and being honest about it, you know, not trying to pretend like this thing brings me joy, while this thing doesn't. And a lot of that, for me, has been about, in terms of career, has been about, you know, the question of getting a doctoral degree or do I go this other route that's a bit more creative and might be actually more joyful? Still within the realm of Chinese medicine but would bring in all of these things that I've- that I've learned in my life that could, as a way to kind of culminate everything together, do I go with that, or do I go with what I thought I wanted? Which is that title, you know, and not to say they're mutually exclusive, but I, you know, they're not exclusive. But, you know, sometimes you have to prioritize, and you have to say no to something that you really want to do. I think that's a part of it, too, for me in terms of joy and pleasure is like saying, "No, I really want to do that, but timing's not right. So I'm just gonna like, say no." And like, just- just to kind of, like feel how my body feels with that is really nice. Because it does feel like a- like, an exhale. Yeah. So other things that have been bringing me joy, especially recently is exercise, I- and just going all in for it, like, "Okay, I'm gonna- I have these goals. And this is- this is what I'm going for." And- and getting up early to do it and really changing some of my habits, certainly food wise, but also just like, things that I did habitually that I was just doing because it was a habit, changing that up entirely, exercise has really been- really been helpful. Also, like the mental like, I have so much more- I find myself in this process now because I have been exercising and Qi is moving better. A part of the reason why I started the process is because I was having some health issues. And I have a family history of digestive disorders. And so I was like, "I have to get my bloodwork, and I have to make some changes and follow it up with, you know, additional imaging and labs from a traditional doctor." So but the exercise has been integral, and I also realize at like every time I do it, I feel like it's a bit- it's a little bit like a practice of- of resistance in a way or reclaiming in a way where- where the body that was shamed, or the person that was shamed when I was young, that when I exercise, and I move my body in a way that people may have told me that I couldn't or that I shouldn't even maybe even now, I feel like I reclaim a little bit of my own power back. Also, because my ancestors had- my ancestors' bodies for many years were not necessarily their own. I'm reclaiming that, too when I exercise. Like, this is my body, and I get one body, and I get to- I get to make this decision to move my body and to clear my mind. So I say all that because I've found that I'm going through this process right now. Where there's so much space being made that I'm finding like new ideas coming in. So I have to like, you know, I kind of have to like say, "Okay, okay, let's start to organize a little bit." or just kind of like, "Give yourself some space to let- to give yourself space for the space- the space that has been made to kind of dream a little bit." You know, that's what happens, I think, when we are able- when- that's what happens when the Qi is flowing, is that it it flows, and you kind of sweep things out, and things can come in that weren't able to come in, and things are let go of that weren't able to let- that you weren't able to let go of before, and there's more of a flow overall. And so that flow in particular that's like my word for the year, that just focusing on that, and- and participating in it in those various ways have brought a lot of joy and pleasure. And fin- kind of like, "Oh, okay, that's cool. I didn't know, I felt that way about that." You know, letting- allowing space for curiosity in as well is helpful now.

Kit Heintzman 1:10:23

I'm curious, what does the word 'health' mean to you?

Christian Totty 1:10:27

Health, yeah... Health, to me, means... it does really go back again to... I guess vitality. And within that, knowing that there- it's dynamic. And it can change, and it can transform. And it's not stagnant. And I think then, to really hone in- I would say that health is about embracing the both and. It's about embracing that there are many things that are true all at the same time. That- and there's a vitality, I think, to that too, to know that- to know that the world operates in a dynamic fashion, where things change often. Health is not a- health is not a destination, it's not like you get there and then you're there and you stay there. I don't think a healthy community is like that, or a healthy ecosystem, or a healthy person individually; there's always change happening. And we influence that change through our- our thinking and our actions and our words. So I would say that health is a state of dynamic. I would like- I mean, certainly, I'm leaning toward a textbook description of dynamic equilibrium, right, but, you know, it is a dynamicism I think. And I think it's a- it's a transformation. I think we're always sort of becoming health, or we have a vision of becoming more healthy or sustaining health. And so I think it's always- it's always in motion. I don't know if that's concrete enough, but that's- that's how I think- and even in my thinking, when I think about I'm like, "That's not like this. That's not very linear." But it doesn't feel linear. It feels like a big circle. This feels like a big circle, and I'm okay with that, I think. [laughs] I'm okay with that, you know. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:13:51

What does the word 'safety' mean to you?

Christian Totty 1:13:54

Safety. The word safety, to me, means feeling that- in part, I think it's feeling that you- a feeling of being resourced. Like, you are enough, you have enough. And also that where you are is also enough like, where you are in your life. The place that you actually live is enough. Safety, I think, also is about feeling that you will be held or you will be- somebody is looking out for you. Somebody has you in mind and trusting that. I think of safety too, is connected to like, what's the- what's the most benevolent outcome for everybody, if that's possible to achieve, but or at least having that ideology of people being taken care of. So I think safety is about- I think- I mean, Robin Wall Kimmerer says this, but, you know, like, knowing like, really, really trusting that the Earth loves you back. If you really- if you love the Earth, the Earth loves you back, right. If it's true that you love the earth you love, the Earth loves you back. And I think that it's complicated when we're talking about human dynamics and relationships, right. But I think if one can feel safe in knowing that they are loved and that they are again, being thought of and considered, I think that, for me, embodies a feeling of safety. Self- loving myself embodies- is an embodiment of feeling safe in my own home, and then out in the home with the world. Safety, I think, is also in- then, of course, as people are being considered and thought of and looked after, that means that kind of like ravel or kind of unfurls or whatever you want to say, into people having what they need. And shaping- shaping worlds around those principles, shaping structure around those principles or that principle of people having what they need. And people feeling safe, and people feeling cared for. Shaping system around care, and what- and really sort of safety and care go hand in hand. And so we need to, I guess, understand what those two things really mean to us, I think, as a- as a- as humans, which is a very large undertaking, but I mean, you know, it happens one person at a time, one community at a time. And so having those kinds of conversations, I think, play into what safety means. And I think safety- so that's what safety means for me. And I think safety can look and sound like something different for us, somebody else or another community. Safety for somebody else very concretely might mean like, "I don't have to lock my front door or something." Or safety could mean like, "I don't feel like I need to carry this knife with me to this location anymore." Safety could feel like, "I don't feel like my doctor is going to misgendered me or say the wrong pronouns to me." So I think finding out what those- what that looks like to people is a part of- is a part of the work too. Yeah. May I ask, can I take a small break?

Kit Heintzman 1:18:31

For sure. Thank you so much for asking. [laughs] Do you want me to hit stop on the recording and then restart or just like, leave it running for a moment?

Christian Totty 1:18:40

Yeah, let's- if we can stop it for a moment.

Kit Heintzman 1:18:42

Yeah.

Christian Totty 1:18:43

Thank you.

Kit Heintzman 1:18:48

How are you feeling about the immediate future?

Christian Totty 1:18:51

The immediate future. To be honest, I feel a lot of unknowns. But they're not the kind of unknowns that I've felt at other times in my life and not the kind of unknowns that I think myself personally, that many of us felt during the height of the pandemic or the start in the height of the pandemic. And I do feel a lot of unknowns just because so many things have changed and shifted in my thinking, so I'm really trying to- really trying to- I guess I'm asking myself the question of like, "What kind of ancestor do I want to be?" You know, "What kind of legacy do I want to leave?" Yeah, I'm asking myself that, and I- I don't- I would like to- I think that in and of itself, that question has- has an answer. And I know it in part, what I'm- what I'm now doing is really kind of like, Okay, how do I work- not- kind of work backwards in a way, so how do I- what do I need to put into place to make that true? And so some of that is more personal spiritual work, and some of it is very much so just in terms of my career. I see travel in my immediate future just to- to visit some family that I haven't seen in a while and family I have not met on my father's side, I didn't know I had. So I see that really opening up, which is exciting. But again, it's really unknown, you know. And I see my [unintelligible], and I feel some like just being curious and staying with that and allowing that to kind of guide me a bit. Allowing curiosity and creativity to really- to really move me through not knowing and to trust that I am resource, you know, we had talked about that being really important for me in terms of my own feeling of safet- to be feeling safe. Really knowing that I am resourced and trying to allow that- that- that truth to let some of that intergenerational trauma surrounding scarcity to kind of melt away. Because that- that is- is something that I'm always working on. So... I'm trying to think. I also see- I do also see for like, more, I guess, collectively like that... I like, I keep going back to the Adrienne Maree Brown quote, and she may have gotten it from somebody else. But the "small is all" like, I'm like, I keep going back to that, like "small is all, small is all." I think- I think we'll find a lot of expansiveness in- in- in more local and hyperlocal engagements. Um, I think- I think yeah, and I think that'll- I think that'll help create different kinds of solutions that we haven't thought of more collectively as well as for ourselves individually. So I do see that, and I'm kind of looking forward to that as well. And seeing what that will look like. Like, seeing what that would- what does it mean if we like, have all the food we need [laughs] in our community, you know? And don't have to, you know, rely on importing as much even... Yeah, for myself personally, though, I definitely see a lot of- I see the travel in a sense of like, literal travel, but also like traveling into, you know, letting my mind kind of expand on things and yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:23:21

What are some of your hopes for a longer term future?

Christian Totty 1:23:25

Hopes? Mhm. Such a good question. This one feels... I have to go back to Mariame Kaba, just who was genius and generous and also just a really wonderful person. "Hope is a discipline," which I know that she has also given credit to that being a part of a larger conversation that she had with somebody during a meeting, I believe it was at a church. She's written about it before. "Hope is a discipline," that phrase I think about a lot. And so I think it- if you ask the question of, "What am I hopeful for?" It- I have to go back to what is being practiced like, what is the practice that we are engaging in? In how we go about imagining a different reality than what we have, in sustaining what works. And I'm also thinking about the idea that I heard from... I ca- her first name is Ayana Johnson is her name, but she- she's a marine biologist, and I believe she co-wrote the book *All We Can Save*; I think I'm not mistaken about that, hopefully not. But she's- she did a talk with *On Being*. So I love that podcast, I was listening to that. And she has this idea that she's working with about what if we get it right? So think about that too, like, hope is a practice, we have to practice what we hope for. And what if we- what if we get it right in that process? And it- no matter what the outcome is like, whether or not we can save, right? Maybe not being as attached to that as much as the process with which we work within. And then- and then maybe trusting that that is enough and trusting that the more that we do that, and the more that we help people engage with that, the wider it goes, you know, the deeper it goes, the wider it goes. And what if that is enough? And what if that is what we get right, you know? I think for Chinese medicine, I specifically have a very clear hope in that we stop using the term 'oriental' in our language and in our accrediting bodies and things like that. Like, there has been a big campaign, that Influential Point, it's just an organization, they were very steadfast and trying to campaign against that- that term. But it's still being used. Some schools have listened and have changed their name. A lot of it is based in fear and on the unknown of not knowing what will happen if- if it's changed. So I would love to see that changed, I would love to see more people of color and bipoc folks, especially Asian relatives, leading that field in the U.S. at least. I know it's different for other countries. Although in Western countries, it's a- it is often. There's- it's similar to the U.S., it's not often led by people of color in terms of the- who was teaching, right? [unintelligible] is a very clear example. I would like to see more- more folks, bipoc, Asian relatives teaching within the field. And also really setting whatever standard we decide is the right one, sort of like relooking at that because it is a point of contention. So having those really hard conversations, I think is important, and I would like to see that change in the field that I'm in. And then yeah, again, kind of collectively like, really understanding what it is we hope for and making it true through our actions day by day. And maybe even a little bit of trusting that, you know, that we can get it right, that we can- we can move towards something and not see the end of it in our lifetime. And- and in that being okay, you know, and like let it- kind of letting go of that whatever the outcome looks like, but knowing that we're doing what we need to do in the meantime. That's- it's kind of almost like that saying- it's kind of almost just like a sigh of relief, I guess to just, "Okay, like, I know my part, and I trust that others will after me see this through." Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:29:00

Who are some of the people who have been supportive of you during the pandemic?

Christian Totty 1:29:05

Mhm. I- certainly my family and friends and colleagues. Yeah, I think that... and interestingly... this might sound strange, but I'll- [laughs] the people who have passed away, I still feel their support. My father, my aunt; I had a cousin who passed away. I had two friends when I was in college, I had the opportunity to travel to Mali in West Africa, and I had two friends pass away there of COVID. More recently, like two weeks ago, I had a friend from college pass away. Aunts pass away, you know, but I still feel like they are- have been supportive in a lot of ways just either things that I remember about them or things that they said before they passed. Yeah, and I honestly, I know it sounds- I mean, it might sound very strange, but I feel a lot of support from those people. Like, you asked me the question. I'm like, "Yeah, it's kind of strange," but I do you feel like this- this great solidity with- in having... [Christian cries] just... having shared time on this planet with them. Of course, the people who are living have been immensely supportive as well. But I do feel a lot of support from- from those who have passed. And I think what they- what they've taught me about want to like, what to hold on to, I guess, and we talk a lot about what we need to let go of like, "Oh, you need to let go of this, you need to..." [laughs] You know, "You need to let go of that." But it's like, okay, what are we- what are we holding on to then? You know, what are we really holding on to? And I think I find a lot of- I find that very supportive to think about as a sort of paradigm or a thinking shift. You know, I certainly have been on the- on the, "I need to let this go, I need to..." You know, but then reframing the question of, "What are we holding on- what am I holding onto?" is really important too. And I do feel like that in and of itself is a supportive shift in thinking too. Yeah. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:32:49

What are some of the ways that you've been taking care of yourself?

Christian Totty 1:32:56

Um, massages. [laughs] I started that recently. I'm, you know, I work- I- I work sort of, in the realm of embodiment, I work with the body, also with the mind. But- and they, you know, they certainly go hand in hand, but I wasn't receiving enough for myself, I realized that. So, I've started- I started to do that- I'd say that's probably been one of the more pivotal things. It hasn't even been that long, but it's really- I forgot how- how helpful and supportive it is to- to have someone work with your body, your flesh, in a therapeutic way, you know. I mean, I'm very- I'm very literal here, but it's true, you know, to have somebody really have that kind of attention, you know, on you is really, really helpful, and the therapeutic value is just [clears throat] it's- it's priceless, you know. And the creativity piece too, like, just like kind of letting myself explore that because I have been really restrained in the past with that, you know. I started off in a creative field, and then, you know, because of my own doing, as well as from others, was deterred, and, you know, still stayed within that realm a bit, but then just not really fully engaging. I think the immenseness of my own creativity, that's something I'm trying to do more. And so that is a practice that I'm trying to really just- when I feel that sense of like, "But you shouldn't," or "But it won't turn out great," or "But, but, but." You know, that I'm- I just try to just listen and say, "But what if I get-" you know, "What if I get it right?" You know, "What if it's- what if it's horrible?" It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. What matters is that you practice, you know, what matters is that you just keep trying something, you know, keep- keep engaging. Which is very much a muscle I think, you know? Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:35:30

I'm coming to the end of my questions, and the last few are a bit odd. The first is, what should we in the social sciences and the humanities be doing right now to help us understand the human side of COVID-19?

Christian Totty 1:35:49

Can you say your question one more time?

Kit Heintzman 1:35:52

For those of us who are scholars in the society- in the society? [laughs] In the social sciences and the humanities, so like literature departments and sociology and polisci, what should we be doing so that we can help us understand this moment that we're living through?

Christian Totty 1:36:08

Mhm. I think this project is really wonderful. And I- and I- and I've seen projects kind of- kind of blooming, that are just in a similar vein, where they're really like listening projects, oral- oral history projects. And I've participated in my- in a few myself as an undergrad, as a research and the research side of it. And I think- and I- the- I mean, just that just being in that space in and of itself of listening, I think is so needed, and of allowing people to share their story. In a way, I think writing is essential. And I also think just the human voice is really important too. So we think- I would say, keep doing what you're doing, you know, I'd say, open up opportunities for listening, collaborate in different ways that maybe you haven't thought of for listening. One project in particular that I'm thinking of is with the United Plant Savers, and they're doing sort of like an oral storytelling or history project with farmers and farmers who have varying levels of experience or- and who are at various stages in their life. And, you know, again, I think that's such a wonderful thing to do. So I really feel like that- I feel like that will also be, I hope, something that we see more often, and again, in new ways like, inviting more people to that table. Certainly to tell the story, but also to maybe even frame how to structure the process of holding space for people to share their stories. I think too, could- there's a lot to learn there.

Kit Heintzman 1:38:27

Would you tell me something about the kinds of histories you'd wished you'd learned more about when you were younger?

Christian Totty 1:38:35

Mhm. I'd have to start with my own. I wish I would have- I wished I- I know some but, I wish there was more oral history within my family. And, you know, I think a part of it too, is asking the questions that want to be asked. And so I think part of it too, is if you come from a generation, where scarcity is the mentality. And I think that- that in- that applies not only to what resources you're being scarcest, but your- your- you have that attitude toward like food, shelter, clothing, but it also can speak to or apply to a scarcity of sharing one's history, for fear of it running out or for fear of it being stolen or for, you know, various other reasons. So I think that that's a history that I wish that I would have- I would have grown up hearing more. I think another history that I would have liked to know the actual truth of was certainly indigenous history, and certainly history of- of the transatlantic- transatlantic slave trade. Those, to me, are woven into my own personal story. And also about how those like, how nuanced those relationships were between also, Irish folks and other Europeans that they enslave- that were enslaved in this country. And native folks and black folks like, those kinds of relationships like, what was the- how did that flow? You know, what were those dynamics like? I think that's very finite. But I would have loved to learn that because that- that is- all of those people are a part of my personal history and family and ancestry. I think another history that I would have, really... it's- it's- I guess it's a more gen- I don't know if it's general, but it is coming to mind. But I guess a history of what I'll just loosely call as activism, which could involve resist- movements of resistance, revolt, revolution, all the R's right. Reciprocity, you know, reciprocity and how that

plays into activism. Relationship, you know, what, what kind of communities were working with each other toward a more common good? That's a history that I really wish that I would have learned early, early on. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:41:49

Thinking of a historian watching this in the future, someone far enough away that they have no lived experience of this moment. What would you ask them that as they go forth with this like, raw idea of "I'm going to write something about COVID-19." What would you tell them needs to be remembered about this moment as they go forth with this project?

Christian Totty 1:42:13

Yeah. Something is forming, give me just a minute. I would ask them to keep in mind- I would ask them to remember as they work on their project, that... I would tell them to look in all directions. So I would tell them to look at where the wind came in. [laughs] Where- how it swept in, how the pandemic came in. I would tell them to look at what influences were in- in- what influences were impacting the very real- the very real reality or the very clear reality of a virus and the work that it was doing, the work that the virus was doing. I would tell them to look in all directions and have an intersectional approach to their project, to look- to look in all directions. Yeah. And let that inform the story that unfolds or the history that unfolds. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:43:56

I want to thank you so much for the generosity of your time and the kindness and beauty of your answers. Those are all of the questions I know how to ask at this moment. But if there's anything you'd like to share that I haven't made room for, please take some space to do so.

Christian Totty 1:44:15

Thank you so much, Kit. I really appreciate you asking me to be a part of this project, and it actually is coming in a very auspicious time when I'm just doing a lot of reflection anyway. And so I am thankful to whatever guides helped me answer these questions. I'm thankful to whatever guides helps you ask the questions. And I'm thankful to whoever- whomever might be listening to this at whatever point in history it happens. And I just am thankful. Thank you so much.

Kit Heintzman 1:45:00

Thank you.

Christian Totty 1:45:01

Mhm.