

Interviewee: Crystalina Peterson

Interviewer: Stephanie Much

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Abstract:

Crystalina Peterson is a non-traditional student at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire (UWEC). Currently in her fifth and final year of undergraduate work, she will be graduating from UWEC at the end of December 2021 with her degree in Public History before going on to graduate school with the hope of becoming a professor. Originally from Minneapolis, Minnesota, she moved to Barron, Wisconsin, which is near Eau Claire, for school. In this interview, Crystalina talks extensively about the challenges of motherhood during the pandemic especially when you have children in different households as well as mental health and how the pandemic had an impact on her and helped her better prioritize her health. She also talks about her experiences and involvement with the university, how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted that involvement, and how what she's learned in college helped her better research and understand the pandemic. She also tackles the political climate that has heated up around the pandemic and how to handle those with differing opinions than your own.

SM 0:02

Alright, today is December 5, 2021. As of right now, there have been 9,128 deaths in Wisconsin with 992,386 cases and 59.6% of Wisconsin population is fully vaccinated. And in the United States, there have been 48,918,251 cases with 784,893 deaths and 59.4% of the population is fully vaccinated. So, to start off with, if you want to just introduce yourself, your name, age, where you live, family, things like that.

CP 0:48

Okay, well, my name is Crystalina Peterson, I'm 35 years old. I have four children, one that lives with me full time the other ones I co-parent with their fathers, or family members, actually. I live with my partner, my youngest child's father, and we live in Barron, Wisconsin, which has one of the highest rates in Wisconsin for COVID cases. It's kind of scary. Yeah, kind of scary up here. And I was born and raised in Minneapolis and moved up about six years ago? Yeah.

SM 1:26

Alright, so what is your relationship with UW Eau Claire?

CP 1:29

Yes, so I am a senior at UW Eau Claire, technically a super senior. So I'm in my fifth year, final semester. Right now I graduate in two weeks. I am a Public History major. And I started my college career at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire-Barron County campus. So I spent my

first two years there and then shifted down to Eau Claire to finish out my bachelor's degree. And it's been one of the best experiences I've ever had. The History Department there, especially is just fantastic. And I work with Dr. Selika Ducksworth-Lawton very closely. I'm one of her research assistants, and she was also my faculty mentor for my McNair research. And I am also appear diversity educator on campus as well. So yeah.

SM 2:29

Very evolved. Um, I don't know if you mentioned this, my computer just cut out for a second. So I'm hoping that everything is good. Um, if you want to describe like, what type of student are you? Are you non traditional, first generation things like that.

CP 2:43

So I am non traditional. Like I said, I'm 35, I have four kids. I didn't go to college and right out of high school for several different reasons, both of them, involving my rather abusive and very, very controlling parents. But you know, that's in the past, that's neither here nor there right now. So yeah, so I didn't go back to college, I tried a couple of times that never really was successful, didn't have a very good support system. And so yeah, so I am a non traditional student. That's part of my story of why I am, I wasn't a student right away. And then, let's see, I'm also a first generation student, my mom and my birth father, neither of them finished college, my mom was at her university for a year right out of high school, as part of a special program, she was part of the National Guard. So she was able to get into the college that way, so she didn't really have any idea of how to like get me into college anyway. So yeah. So it's been very much not living in the house, having my own life and then trying to navigate college is hard. Like I said, I'm also part of the McNair Scholars Program. So that helps a lot with like, now I'm getting ready to apply to grad actually, I'm in the middle of applying to grad schools. So that has really helped with that process. And it really helped me understand and learn how to formulate research more proper, you know, more appropriately for my field, along with all of the history classes that of course, you take as history students had at UW Eau Claire, which are fantastic, and I wouldn't have be where I am today, if it was not for all those amazing professors and those classes. So yeah.

SM 4:41

Definitely a great history department, a good department to be in.

CP 4:46

Yeah it really really is.

SM 4:48

So kind of what were your first thoughts when you first heard about the pandemic? Especially from the stance as a historian, I think all of us kind of realized pretty quickly on that. This was a very big moment.

CP 5:04

Yeah, so I listen to a couple of podcasts at the time, I was listening to them daily because I have an hour commute to school. So in November 19, or 2019, I heard about this virus outbreak that

happened in China. And they didn't really name it yet hadn't named it yet because it was impacting the economy. It had been talked about on this podcast briefly. And then a couple of weeks later, they're like, we suspect that it's spreading, you know, there's cases in these other nations now. And you know, it's been called COVID-19. It's similar to the SARS virus. And I was like, I remember when SARS hit when I was a kid, like, I remember this, and I'm like, Oh, my gosh, what's going on? So I started paying closer attention. And I think that was really, really a big deal for me, because I remember all of those scares, and how many times that they ended up not really being very serious. But I didn't realize what had been done by the government and by health care, public health in order to prevent the spread of these more dangerous viruses and illnesses. And so I was like, wait a minute, I started kind of digging into that, of course, being a historian, I'm fascinated by like, all of these different developments. And I'm like, How did everybody handle it? And especially, I want to be a cultural historian. That's my goal is to study culture. And so I was like, I really want to understand those social and cultural influences. And I realize that this went all the way back to like, the Black Plague and how they handled things back then. And like the 1918 pandemic of influenza, which we've now had vaccines for, for years. And like, all of this stuff, and like, wait a minute, it's like, that whole thing, like history repeats itself. But obviously, it's not an exact repetition. It's like a cycle, or like a spiral kind of, you know, where we come around to this similar similar thing, but everything that happening around us, changes that, right. So I was like, Okay, I really, really, I want to understand how people are reacting to this. And when it hit, Wisconsin, and we shut down campus in March of 2020. I talked to my mom like three days later, and I had already gotten sick. But I couldn't get tested because we didn't have availability of testing up here. And my doctor said that unless I needed medical intervention, which I didn't, fortunately, I did have long haul symptoms, because it was never a confirmed case that can't really say anything about they're like, eh?

SM 7:51

Maybe you did, maybe you did not.

CP 7:53

Yeah maybe, maybe not. But I definitely had COVID symptoms, and they said flat out that if I didn't need medical intervention, they didn't have the resources, in order to have me tested for influenza. And if I tested for influenza, and it came back negative, they would have to refer me out. But Eau Claire didn't have any bed left for people that didn't have like intensive care needs. Already, like it was that fast and quickly. And so my mom and I were talking on the phone. And she completely dismissed everything that I said about my symptoms about my experience about you know how this needs to be taken seriously. She just wanted to really like run her mouth about how the government has blah, blah, blah, blah, and they should just listen to Trump. He obviously knows what he's talking about and all of this stuff. And I was just like, do you even hear yourself lady like, the guy has no formal education that his last that his last degree was, like in '74 in business from a college that I don't even think has accreditation anymore. Like, I'm pretty sure that this is not the person that you should be thinking, you know, is a scientific expert, you shouldn't be taking medical advice from this person. And I told her, I'm like, I wouldn't go to my grocer and ask them, I wouldn't go to my local tax office that I used to work at and ask them for medical advice. I'd go to my doctor. And she just kind of like blatantly mocked

me and completely disregarded. Like, I'm like my daughter's two, I want to protect her like I'm immunocompromised. I have fibromyalgia. So my immune system is like already suppressed and compromised. Like I I. You don't understand like, this is literally such a it's so dangerous, and you're just gonna like make fun of it. And it was shocking to me. And really, I think the thing that really realized that I could no longer be complacent and just do. What I knew was right was when I have lost six friends, people that I knew, from March 16 to April 6. None of them had underlying health conditions. They were all under the age of 40. And some mutual friends that we had, who were Trump supporters blatantly said that it was their own fault. And that they didn't die from COVID or whatever else and their families were literally how dare you say that? We watched them, you know, be hospitalized, we watched them be intubated, we watched them take their last rattling breaths, like how dare you and that they shouldn't have ever had to ever do that. And that's when I realized their take, they already had this terrible, awful trauma. And not to say that it wasn't traumatic for me too, but it's totally on a different level. And there is no way I was going to just be quiet while they were sitting there trying to defend their child, the loss of their family members life like that's not okay, ever. And so I started stepping in. And a lot of my research also, it's revolves around race and race politics in the United States. So I've gotten pretty vocal about like, anti racism and things like that as well. And I just realized that there's so much it's so deeply ingrained, that people that I know, that genuinely seem like good people. It's so locked into their head that anti racism and critical race theory and science and the vaccine, or government in general is so dangerous, that they're not even willing to see the facts. They'll dismiss hard scientific data, because it's from the CDC. What about all the scientists that helped create this data? Their not from the CDC, they just so happen to send it there, like, but yeah, I think for me, that was like the big turning point. And the big recognition of when it was, it wasn't okay to just sit back anymore. You know, I had to report I had to I also have a certificate in journalism. So some of that came in as well. Like I, the truth has to be exposed, like, we have to be honest, we have to make sure that people have access to proper and vetted information. And so that, like, I think that for me was when I really, really realized that being a historian wasn't just looking at what has already happened, but where it how it brought us to where we are now. And how to you know, prevent us from kind of repeating those mistakes. Yeah.

SM 13:13

That is all awesome. Um so you specifically reached out as part of the caregivers and COVID Oral History thing, that was the main reason that you were put on the list. Um, can you kind of define in your own words what you think it means to be a caregiver.

CP 13:34

So for me being a caregiver is providing a safe environment for the people that depend on me, not just for my kids, but also for my partner and for our pets our fur babies, and for people that were around on a regular basis, like his, his parents and his siblings, and our nieces and nephews. So creating a safe area where their needs can be met without having to put them at risk for you know, extreme danger.

CP 13:54

Um, and if you wanted to describe, I guess more specifically, like you as a caregiver, like I think you said you have four children, like, how long have you been a caregiver, kind of what is involved in, I guess, your day to day as a caregiver?

CP 14:29

Yeah. So I guess my journey as a caregiver started when I was really young. So I'm the oldest child on my mom's side. I'm the oldest child of six. And I was eight when the next one was born. So I really kind of stepped into that big sister helping take care of the house role right away. My mom, my mom's labors didn't go very well and she had all of them at home. Other than me, I was born in a hospital. So she didn't really have it from what I can tell she didn't really seem to have proper medical care for her special situations, and so the labors and deliveries were really, really hard on her. And so I was able to fill that role. I had to teach my stepdad how to make scrambled eggs when I was like eight. Because he had no idea how to do it. He was a bachelor up until they had gotten married a year prior. And he had like no idea how to cook real food. He was like macaroni and cheese and pizza, that's real food, right? So I think that's kind of when it started. And of course, I love my little brothers and sisters, even if we don't always agree on everything and I think that just kind of carried on, I moved out when I was 18. And right before my 19th birthday, I had my oldest son. So he is 16, he'll be 17 in April, and my other kids are almost 15. And then my younger son is 11. And my little one is 3. So I have quite a range of, of ages that we deal with. And I think that's kind of carried on as a student as well with my peers, because I am older and I've had some life experience. I have a lot of friends that have come to me and been like, like "I don't know what to do. Do you have any like life advice?" and I've kind of become like the real the actual mom friend. But I love it, you know, and being around my peers who are who are significantly younger than me. It keeps me young, and it keeps me engaged with my, with my work as a historian and as a caregiver, obviously, you know, so now my goal is to become a professor, which is a different type of care caregiver, I think that teachers, teachers, and professors and educators all kind of qualify as providing some kind of care for their students, because we can't be there and be effective teachers if we don't care about the outcome, if we're just like "Yep just spew out the information and have your tests" like there's got to be something more to it. And I think that especially the history faculty at Eau Claire has done a really great job of showing that example for me. So I think, yeah, as a caregiver, I think that's kind of like my basic journey of what it means for me and how that's developed over time.

SM 17:28

Um, and how has the pandemic really, has it changed your role as a caregiver in any dramatic ways? And how about like your hus-- your partner and others around you.

CP 17:41

So it has some, in that there are things that we have to be more aware of now. And I like have a million planners and a million ways to like, just keep everything, we've gotten a little more diligent about staying on top of our doctor's appointments and things like that, which, especially as a college student, it's really, really hard to remember, like three people's appointments of what they need to get done and when. So and I will say that my partner is really, really

supportive in that, in that he he's really taken on this, this idea of like the new dad, right, where he's really involved in her care, and he takes her to her chiropractor appointments. And now I've started scheduling her vaccination appointments, so that they're on Thursdays when he has the day off, and we can go get her taken care of together. And I mean, he does almost all of the cooking and cleaning as well. I'm very, very blessed and very, very lucky but I think the biggest change for me was having to navigate the lack of childcare, especially in the first few months of the pandemic, I had to finish out that semester with like, no childcare, and I was like, oh my god, how am I gonna do this? And everything was virtual, and nobody knew what they were doing. And it was super, super stressful. And I just I couldn't see my other kids because they live in Minnesota most of the time. So it wasn't safe. My oldest two their step mom is a health care worker. So it was not safe for them to travel across state lines at all because it would have put too many people at risk. And it was it was really, really difficult. And I've been concerned about my younger son who's 11, as I said before, he lives with his grandparents and they kind of don't really listen to any good advice so I was obviously concerned about his safety through that process. And of course, their health and safety because in the event that they were to get very sick and nobody else was around, there wouldn't be much for options for him to have an extra caretaker there because anyone else from the family doesn't live nearby and isn't available to come help with him. So that was really difficult, just in not really kind of being able to communicate with them, our relationship is tentatively good, but it's really hard to get straight answers from, from his grandmother. So there's, there's just been a lot that has kind of changed and shifted those things. But like my older kids, I wasn't able to see them for like two years, and I was used to, we were used to seeing them and we have them, you know, a couple of times a year, at least for extended periods of time. Over the summer, and then you know, over Christmas break and stuff like that, and we weren't able to see them hardly at all and they were so busy because everything is online and it's so different. And it was really hard for them to be like "Hey, I've got a couple of minutes to text mom" they didn't have that time anymore, because it was all they had to like, do all their virtual stuff and they had to make sure that everything was working for the next class and that they had their homework done. And I think that their teachers did a good job of like understanding that it was a weird and hard time, but also they kind of expected them to still do all the same level of homework, basically, as college students probably experienced that in some regard as well. So it was definitely, really difficult. But it's how, you know, it changed the way that I communicated with them, and still held that caretaking role. I just had to do it virtually I had to do it from a distance and I had to trust that good decisions were being made on their behalf because I wasn't able to be involved in those decisions anymore. So that definitely made a big difference in how, in how I handled that and the stress was hard, like the first, the first three months were so so hard and I ended up, I threw a fit and I moved out I moved down to Eau Claire because I was so mad. Obviously, that did last. But yeah, so I was down there for a year. So I was down there last year during the school year and by the time that first six months of living in Eau Claire had passed, I was like, other than living close to campus and having everything in Eau Claire accessible, I'm ready to come home and, you know, be a family again. So, but yeah, the stress was really, really hard and like learning how to navigate that, both as a partner and a single mom, and not being able to be a part of day to day stuff anymore, as much as I had been before was really difficult for sure.

SM 23:10

Yeah definitely, I think when everything first hit, we were definitely trying to figure all this stuff out of virtual and then to have that on top, I imagine just--

CP 23:20

Yeah, it was a really, it was a really stressful and I was just like, I was already at my breaking point and I really took out more than I needed to. I could have honestly just like slow down a little bit and save like whole extra year instead of just an extra semester but I was like, "Nope, I'm gonna get this done. It's gonna happen" and I was so determined and I mean, obviously I did it, I'm almost there. But yeah, it definitely was that extra layer of stress that I literally, with all of the uncertainty and all of the people that it seems that were around me that were completely disregarding, the people that were supposed to care about me most were completely disregarding my health and my family and my well being and it was really, really stressful and painful. And then of course, I was like, I can't have anyone else go through this. So I'm gonna like advocate for them if I can. And so I was carrying like, a million extra, like really heavy burden and it was just, it was too much and I didn't really know how to regulate because I've never really been taught like good emotional coping skills or anything like that. And I have a great therapist, and she really helped me through that process, but at the time, it was like everything happened at once and I was in the middle of unpacking, like childhood trauma and religious trauma and like historical, like stuff I had just started to learn about like, what racism really was and how it really was in the system and like I had just taken a, an American Indian history course and I was like, Oh my god. It was so much and I was just I couldn't cope, I couldn't cope with it properly and still continue to work on a relationship. And it just got to be to that point where I just like flipped the whole table, threw the baby out with the bathwater, just like no. But through that process and and my partner's been so incredibly patient with me through that a lot and I've had some really, really great support system. I mean, obviously, we're way better than we've ever been before and my kids are doing great and we all made it, none of us got deathly ill. We're we're doing good and my older kids are hoping that as soon as their dad doesn't have a say in their medical records that they can get their vaccine. So, um, and we're fully vaccinated here, obviously, our little one is not but when it's available for her we will. So yeah, it's it's been a long road. But I think for for me personally, like COVID, especially as a caregiver, and not being able to access, you know, my children and my family, and feel supported or whatever, really has been a really important factor in where we're at now as a family, for sure.

SM 26:29

So obviously, you've talked about all these challenges that came, you know, with caregiving during the pandemic, has there been anything, you know, positive that's come out of this experience as a caregiver, like maybe getting to spend more time at home, creating greater relationships.

CP 26:45

So it was really weird at first, because it's really hard to connect with my friends, because we were all like, not near each other. So we had to learn how to communicate in different ways. And

I lost some friends through it because of differences in beliefs and things like that. Or just not being able to handle the same stressors and whatever and I think a lot of us have had a really low tolerance for like other opinions if they don't align with ours because of how volatile COVID is, and has been. But it really taught me that it's okay to feel strongly about something. And it taught me that prioritizing the good people, the people that don't just drink from your cup, but that pour back into it, right, and I've learned how to differentiate them a lot better. And so the people that I have around me now, our friendships and our, you know, created family are so much stronger than they ever were before. And I'm not going to lie, I do really like being at home. Like I can just like, put on a sweatshirt and like wash my face and go to class. I don't have to drive, and then like get her to daycare, and then like rush to campus and hope I can find parking and then like go rush to pick her up and rush home. And yeah, it is a lot nicer on days that we can stay home. And now this semester, I've been home almost every Friday. And I will be home on Fridays for the rest of the semester. So that's it just makes it feel less stressful. There's less pressure, it's definitely I've noticed that professors and friends and family have been a lot more understanding. When I say I can't- I don't have the energy- or like "I don't have the spoons for this" [I don't have the energy for this], it's a "no bones day" [Low effort kind of day where you focus on your wellbeing] or whatever.

SM 29:01

Yeah.

CP 29:01

So many different ways that this has I think raised awareness about things like mental health, and taking mental health days even if you're not like having an episode or whatever, whatever that means. I think it's kind of given us, as a society, and as individuals the ability to, when somebody says "I can't do this right now" to be like, "it's okay." And learn how to adapt to that better.

SM 29:30

Yeah, yeah, I think all of us have definitely experienced some sort of just like, "this is a huge thing and it definitely has taken its toll on all of us." So like you said, I feel like a lot of people just have more understanding of and we need to take those breaks so we don't build up until you said like we have that episode we have that breakdown.

CP 29:49

Yeah, like expecting people to push off their mental health until they literally have to go check into a mental institution is not okay. I mean, I got really close last year, I'm not gonna lie, I was taking 17 credits, I was doing my capstone and my mix theory certpaper at the same time plus I was taking for other classes, and it was not okay, like I was not prepared for that level of workload. And that's when I was still living in Eau Claire. So I didn't have a support system at home at the end of the day. And I had to do all of the caretaking, whatever on the days that she was with me, and then I was like, now it's nine o'clock at night. And I have to try and force myself to do all of this work. And I didn't have it in me. Plus, I mean, I think COVID fatigue really hit hard. That was like the the semester of the year anniversary. And I was just like, it was too

much. And I completely overestimated my ability to cope with that on my own. But I will say that this semester has been much easier now that I'm back home and you know, have have that support system available. So yeah, for sure. It's been. It's been an interesting ride. And I think learning like to prioritize my own mental health has been a huge lesson as well. And I'm much better at it now than it used to be. I'm still not great. I'm better.

SM 31:23

Like, it's hard for anyone to be 100%, especially, especially college students like that. Sounded like enough without COVID and caretaking, like all of that extra stuff involved. Live and learn, I guess.

CP 31:39

Yeah, definitely. Please don't do what I did. I say that to everybody in there, like my students. Don't do what I did!

SM 31:48

Learn from my mistakes.

CP 31:50

Yes, absolutely.

SM 31:53

So obviously, you mentioned before, like at the start of the pandemic, um, childcare was very hard to find, I guess like, what kind of resources and networks did you use to kind of help with your responsibilities as a caregiver? And did you find that, you know, childcare wasn't as great did you find that a lot of other resources weren't really available?

CP 32:17

So maybe this is where I went wrong. Because we live an hour away from campus and my daughter attends, she attends the priory daycare, a UW EC children's major Academy. They shut down when the campus shut down. So we didn't have any childcare. And nobody up here that was taking precautions was taking new students, the few people that were taking precautions were full, and everyone else was like, oh, no, we don't mask, we don't care. It's not a real thing. And we're like, not doing that. I wasn't, I wasn't working like I was a full time student. And so I was like, oh, we'll just save money on daycare and just stay home. And I think it wasn't always terrible. But there were many times there were many days that I had so much to get done. And she just wanted time with mom. And instead of looking at a computer and like getting stuff done, I had to go be with her. And I would take my book with us and I would try to read if I could or have reading to do or I'd like write notes down or like I have little a little app in my phone that I would take notes with. But again, it's kind of like those resources being available. I didn't have the like, the knowledge or the coping skills to be able to work from home with a toddler. I had no idea what I was doing. I thought like, if you were a mom, you either loved your kids or hated your kids. And when I felt like I'm overwhelmed, I need to get this done, I really need some time to myself- I felt like I was being a bad mom. And I think that's part of like

that mental breakdown. Eventually, because it was like I literally felt like I was failing everything. And imposter syndrome is real, like I am a I'm a pretty good student. I have good grades. And I've worked hard to earn those grades but I've also I also can have this this constant fear that like I'm gonna be found out and like everyone's gonna know I'm a fraud. And they're gonna revoke my diploma or something- right. Obviously, I'm not doing anything that would actually warrant that but there's kind of this underlying fear that I'm not good enough and so when all these gaps and resources, health care and unemployment and all of these things all of these like social services gaps that were really exposed like glaringly exposed during COVID, I took them on as like a personal fault of my own, instead of being like, hey, the system's broken. And it took me a while to actually like realize, hey, this isn't me being faulty This is literally, the system is set up in a way that makes it virtually impossible for us to get far ahead, that when we have these emergencies, it's not going to drain the bank account, or it's not going to cause huge issues to the point where we won't be able to function. And I started looking around at like, what other nations were doing and how they were handling lockdown, and what their solutions were. And I mean, they did lockdowns, and most of them provided some kind of assistance with broadband internet. And like, unemployment, what we call unemployment, which for them is- I don't remember what they're all called. But basically unemployment insurance and like making sure that their health care system was able to handle the load, even though all hospitals everywhere got full. And there wasn't really anything to do about it other than stay home and stay away from each other. But they did a lot of that really shortly after shutting down. Or here, that stuff didn't become available until months later, when it was already too late for a lot of us. And so, and being a college student, I didn't claim my daughter because I didn't have income, I just had my student loans and grants and stuff. And so I didn't really have real income. So I had her dad claimer, my partner. And so I didn't get any any of those, you know, extra stimulus or anything for having children. I didn't get any of that. Actually, I didn't even get the first two until after I filed my taxes. And then they sent me they sent me those two in my tax return in addition to my tax refund, and then I got to third one. So I was like,

CP 37:13

as a college student, like how the heck are we supposed to survive when we don't qualify for any of this stuff? A lot of us have income, but because we're considered other people's dependents or both. Because we don't have enough income or whatever, all of a sudden, we don't qualify, we need to eat too like we have bills to pay too so and I started realizing that those disparities and things were like really not a reflection of my failures, but a reflection of the system. And I think that helped a lot for like the mental health side of things.

SM 37:54

Yeah, I can definitely relate to a lot of that, especially when it came to the stimulus. Yeah, it's like college students, we have like the most bills Oh, it's because tuition is not cheap. And a lot of that, like, for me, I was still claimed under my parents, but I was over 18 When those things started coming out. And so I wasn't qualified for it. And you definitely felt that, like, You were almost felt forgotten about in some ways, because it's like, especially for like non traditional students. I feel like they're not thought about a lot and overlooked in a lot of cases.

CP 38:32

Yeah. And I noticed like the university shortly after COVID, there was some some of the refunds and things that were issued, it took me almost a year to get my parking pass, my parking permit, prorated back, and then it took me six months to get my Viennese ball ticket refunded. And that was like 50 bucks. I still only got like, \$120 for my parking permit out of the what, 2- something that I paid for it almost \$300. So I was like, Well, how does this work? Like I was really bored. And, and I know, like the students and the housing and stuff. Like I understand that that had to be taken care of first, but I really felt like there was definitely some gaps and cracks in the system that should have been caught before. We had a huge national emergency- global emergency really. That had to, you know, require a couple on those services. So yeah, it definitely made me a lot more passionate about like making sure that we have those things in place before the emergency comes up. I mean, and that can that can affect us in so many ways and in so many different areas of Our lives, from healthcare to paying rent and having affordable housing to having access to utilities, heat, broadband and things like that, having the ability to travel somewhere, just transportation to get to the hospital is a big deal and and rural areas especially. It's actually a problem. Like it's a big issue, especially for the elderly. And then they're like, oh, it's crunch nights are such bad drivers. Like, if you're that old, get off the road. Well, how else are they going to get a doctor if they don't have anybody else? So, yeah, I'm really, really passionate about figuring out those gaps and kind of thinking about ways to close those.

SM 40:50

Mm hmm. Yeah, I feel like a definitely a lot was learned from this, though. No one, in many ways was prepared. And hopefully from in the future, you know, we can be more prepared for this kind of thing to come.

CP 41:04

Yeah, absolutely. And like, like, I think this is the thing that really just made me crack was when to it like two months later, or two months, I'm a week or two later was when George Floyd happened. And like, that corner, I used to play there as a kid. Like when I was little, that's my neighborhood. And people were like, Oh, these people ruiner, bro, I'm like, burn it down. We don't own it. That's not ours. That's Corporation, that's people that don't live here. Like, go ahead. And that's what a lot of people that live there were saying too obviously, like, I don't condone destroying property. Like, I don't encourage it. But like, I think that that was used as such a tool to like, or raise that experience that they didn't even ask why. They didn't even ask why this was such an issue. And I mean, we've been trying to get them to reform the Minneapolis Police Department for decades. And they always just turned a blind ear, or a deaf ear on it. So yeah. Definitely.

SM 42:23

Going back to like caregiving, um, and your family's experience, like how, what would you say is the biggest way that COVID has affected like, your family and your like day to day lives? And how have you tried to kind of compensate for that and still keep like, your little ones entertained in this crazy time?

CP 42:45

Yeah. So with a little one, especially, like, we've learned how to incorporate TV in a way, so it's more distracting, but not still using it as, like the babysitter, learned how to incorporate those things together and participate in her interaction with TV or game or whatever. And I mean, we bought, I don't know if you're going to be able to see it, but I bought her that for her birthday. That makes her so happy. And I mean, it just gives her you know, fostering that imagination and fostering creativity and having conversations and she'll ask us questions that were like your three, how do you understand this question, but we try to answer that in a way that reflects what we want her to exemplify, you know, not necessarily, how we who we want her to be, but you know, we want her to be kind we want her to be understanding, and be willing to listen to others and understand that her experience might not be the same as other people. So we've started having those conversations already. And I think that was kind of sped up through the pandemic. Because before the pandemic, there wasn't a lot of exposure to these big life shifting things. And it really kind of opened up our eyes to these issues, more so than we already had been. And one of us said, we wanted to set a better example for her. And I know through my personal journey of having like a ton of internalized misogyny and racism, I'm a person of color so that my, on my mom's side, they're not there, they're white. And so it was like I was not raised in with my family or my dad's side of the family and they I didn't know anything about who I was or anything. I, there was kind of like that identifying, or identity crisis, right? So through that process for me, kind of deconstruct a lot of that you learned kind of through with osmosis by my experience, and we're kind of combining that to share that with her. And I mean, the goal is to create something better. And I think as a historian that made it that much stronger cuz like, why are we repeating the same mistakes? Why are we Why do we keep going back to the same process, there's got to be something better, and recognizing that, hey, there are other solutions, we have to just widen our lens a little bit. So I think, you know, for caregiving, I think that was the biggest thing. And the biggest, I think, strengthening aspect of this was that it made us so much more strong as a family unit. And, you know, we are able to say, This is what our goals are as a family unit, and kind of unify behind that that cause, and both, you know, for us, personally, and socially outward. So I think that was probably the biggest thing for us as a family unit, being able to really start to address those conversations in ways that we didn't recognize we had to before. So, yeah,

SM 46:52

yeah, definitely, like you mentioned, like with George Floyd, and everything, this time has definitely caused I think a lot of people not only to reflect on themselves, but reflect on, you know, problems in our society, like with racism and stuff like that, and have those hard conversations that we maybe didn't feel comfortable having with others before, or didn't know how to kind of have before.

CP 47:14

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I mean, I'm talking about things like doctors and health care, and being able to explain to our daughter that, you know, get a poke, and it's gonna hurt, but it'll go away really fast. And it's going to put little real tiny guys in your body that's going to help try to ask if you if you, if you're around, anybody has sick, you know, and kind of breaking it down and

introducing those concepts of science and vaccines and things like that at an early age. And it Yeah, it's been really cool. And I think, you know, our personal growth and, and our journey as parents and our growth as as, as partners, has been really, really meaningful. I honestly, I never thought that we would be today where we are with our relationship with our daughter. So I mean, they say that stress, you know, like bad situations can bring out both the best and the worst in people. And I think at first it definitely brought up. But like I say, we I especially did not have coping skills for it, I had no idea how to deal with any of this. And then once I learned how to do that, and learn how to sort through my feelings, and really address the core of the issue within myself, and then go outward, I was able to Yeah, we were able to come up so much stronger. And I mean, this is really brought out the best in us as a couple and as parents to our daughter. So for sure.

SM 49:04

That's awesome. And I think you've you've mentioned a little bit before, I guess, going in more detail, like how has COVID really impacted how you communicate with people and your relationships with them, like your family and friends? Like I know, you mentioned, like some people that you've kind of got at odds with them with with how they've dealt with things. And

CP 49:25

Yeah, so a lot of our communication is now virtual, I limit my conversate my conversations and my contact with parts of my family that I know isn't good for me. Like if I'm gonna end up in a screaming match for two hours, I'm not having that conversation, so I avoid it. If something is said to me that I know it's wrong, I say, I mean, I'm sorry that you feel that way. But that's just not what's happening. And I just like, sometimes it's just not worth it. You know, and then so being able to save up the strength, or when the situation does call for conversation without losing my temper. So that yes, or like communication wise, there's just then a lot more open communication about like our experiences about like, what is actually happening? And not just kind of like, oh, did you see that on the news or whatever, you know. So I think it's made things a little more personal. That I know that the people that I've been able to stay close to, through all of this have, really, we've been the ones that have really been like looking at each other. And then like, are you actually okay, and learning how to show empathy and care for your friends and your family? Before you know, there's something wrong, right, like, so. Just checking in, Hey, I've noticed you haven't posted on Snapchat, we usually post every day, I just I haven't seen you for a couple of days. And I missed you. I just wanted to make sure you're doing okay. Or somebody will say, Oh, I just had to take a COVID test and be like, let me know how that goes. You know, I really hope that everything's okay. Let me know if you need anything, if you start to feel sick, whatever. And it definitely changed the way that I see my role as in those different areas of caretaking. Yeah, it's definitely communication wise, it's definitely become more about making sure that needs are met before focusing on kind of the more outside trivial, maybe not even trivial, but instead of being like, Hey, did you hear about this better? The other being more like, Hey, how are you and genuinely meaning it?

SM 52:08

Yeah, like we're talking like, I feel like everyone realizes more about mental health and like that how important is just to check in with them and be like, are you okay? And with, you know, tensions over politics and all that I've been so on edge. So, you know, trying to not think about that, and just being like, you know, politics are crazy, but like, how are you feeling about it? And how is it impacting you?

CP 52:34

Yeah, and learning not to share your opinion, like when it's not important, like, if somebody says something that's blatantly false, and it's actually like doing them harm, or like, Hey, can you just go like, look at this couple of things that I have found, this might help you. But instead of just being like, I just don't agree with you, we can actually be like, you know, hey, I'm really sorry that you feel that way, or something to that effect. So I think it's, yeah, empathy is huge. And I think it's given us the opportunity or maybe kind of forced us to look outward from ourselves, not just at society as a whole, but other people, and kind of put ourselves in other people's shoes every once in a while, you know,

SM 53:24

As much as we might want to devolve into that screaming match, like, take the stuff back. Okay, you know, their opinions, their opinions and so forth.

CP 53:34

Yeah, for sure.

SM 53:36

All right. I think you might have already kind of touched on this a little bit. But in addition to obviously, being a student, a caregiver, do you have a job or you're like a paid job where you're making money for?

CP 53:49

So they're what it is, I am a research assistant for Dr. Ducksworth Lawton And then I am a PDE Peer Diversity Educator on campus. PDE, is through work study. The other one I get paid from a grant that she has, or she's getting ready to publish a book. So I'm helping her with that. Which is exciting.

SM 54:12

Yeah.

CP 54:13

Um, so I don't have an actual job off campus, but I do have or I should say that I've signed up for several different Network Marketing Opportunities since COVID. I'd signed up for one, I never really wanted to be a coach Coach. But I ended up being a coach and my health just got so bad that I wasn't able to continue with it. But while I did it, it was fun, but it was definitely a lot of stress. And I think that's why it impacted my health so much more. What I'm really really looking forward to and I did this last spring, during COVID I was a TA for one of the professors,

for Dr. Sanislo in the department there. And that was so much fun. I like I definitely want to be a professor for the rest of my life. And I think it just kind of having that reassurance that I was in the right place, and I had the right plan that was definitely encouraging for sure.

SM 55:19

So, has COVID really impacted that employment at all? Like, did it give you like more opportunities to like, do the TA? Or is it impacted like your involvement in the researching?

CP 55:32

Yes, so um, I wouldn't have I honestly, I probably wouldn't have even applied if I was going to be on campus that semester. Because my classes have an online option, I was able to kind of shift. And the TA position was actually online as for her online class, so that made it a lot easier to fit it into my schedule, it wasn't as rigid, I was able to kind of shift things around to make it work for me. So that was really, really helpful. I think that's the thing that I liked the most about being able to work from home. Even if it is just sometimes that on those days, I can definitely plan out my time in a way that is most effective for me, I can get up earlier, or I can get up later, I can work later or I can, you know work a little bit on a Saturday, instead of trying to cram it all into like three hours on on Friday, you know, so it's, it's definitely given me more opportunity to be flexible with my scheduling. So for that, I am very, very grateful. And it also taught me that, you know, Hey, it's okay to ask for, you know, if you need to have work from home days, or whatever, it's okay to ask for that. If your employer is not willing to be flexible enough to meet you where you're at, then they're probably not the employer for you. So yeah, that's pretty important. But I think so, so COVID, in that way has definitely, like, positively impacted my work experience. Being a research assistant, almost all of what I'm doing is virtual and at home stuff. So I'm doing a lot of annotated bibliographies. So I get to like look up courses, and I get to go pick them up from the library, and then I get to read that and write about. So I get to do a lot of that from home. And it's a lot less stressful. So that's really, really nice because I worked before I got pregnant. In my first year at Barron County, I worked both on campus and off campus. And I was just constantly schedule packed, I had no time to do anything outside of what my basic school work study and student government requirements were. And it was it was a lot it took a toll on me health wise. And so like, I wasn't, I wasn't healthy. When I got pregnant, and that made the pregnancy complicated. It was really a snowball effect. And I think that's part of the reason why when COVID hit and like I said it wasn't confirmed, so we don't know for sure if it was COVID. But I think that's why I had symptoms for so long. After I was sick that March because it literally my body was just telling me that I needed to stop. I needed to get up and run like a crazy lady. Time to put it down. Like it's okay to let somebody else do it. Everyone. So yeah,

SM 58:50

Your body physically told you Okay, time to take a break. Yeah, I got off here for a little bit.

CP 58:56

It does that quite a bit.

SM 59:01

So how has kind of obviously you said like with the job, you're mainly working virtually anyway, how has kind of the job and caregiving, like how has that balance worked out? And has your job kind of been standing of the role, your role as a caregiver, and even more so now since the pandemic?

CP 59:20

Yeah, so I'm working. I'm not a TA this semester, but working with Dr. D. And with PE, we have the option to do that work virtually if we need to. And like I bring her to our weekly meetings, and everyone's like, Oh my god, she's here. And they love it. So and I think part of that is because obviously we're on campus, so it's a little more flexible than I think like a regular job would be but it's definitely been really encouraging that hey, if a college job, if a work study job can be this understanding and work with me and, you know, help me find the right schedule and pattern for me and my requirements as a caregiver. Then why can't a different job do that with more resources? So that's definitely been encouraging. And that's been a really, really positive thing. For, for me as as a person that's getting ready to go out into the job market, being able to say that, hey, you know, this is something that's important to me, it's okay to have that balance, it is okay to say, my family and my health are more important than this job. I would love to have this job. But if you can't respect my boundary, then I can't be here. So that's yeah, that's definitely been really empowering. And just it's been a really great experience for me. I mean, not COVID, necessarily. But like, just just everything that's kind of come out as having to go virtual and having to have these new options available. It's worked out really well for me, which is, which is really, really encouraging.

SM 1:01:26

Yeah, yeah, that totally makes sense. Like, it feels bad to say like, oh, yeah, these great things have come out of this, you know, pandemic,

CP 1:01:33

I really wish that we would have been able to do this without the pandemic.

SM 1:01:37

Yeah definitely, it hasn't been all bad that's come out of this experience. Yes. I could agree with that. So you can talk about like how, how it's been kind of overall kind of positive working during this time, has there been any stresses that has come with working, you know, during the pandemic and everything that's going on?

CP 1:01:59

I think the biggest thing for me was when I was doing the network marketing position, over the summer, and then into the fall semester here, especially with my health, and I wasn't really committed to working the business side of it, I just kind of wanted the stuff, right. And the person that I was working with was really, really determined that I was going to be a coach, and I was going to love it. And I was gonna be super great and awesome. And I was like, that's great. But I'm tired. Like, I don't want to be here. So that was really hard. But again, like learning how to

advocate for myself through these other positions, I was able to advocate for myself more effectively that way, and be like, listen, I can't do this, this is what I can do. And now I haven't even been able to do that. But because I was able to communicate those boundaries more clearly, I think he's been more willing to work with me on on that side of it. So that's, that's been nice to be able to advocate for myself, without having to, like, be so anxious and like, oh my gosh, like, I'm not going to be able to whatever if I don't do this, this and whatever, for this person. So.

SM 1:03:24

So kind of, you know, you talk about all the jobs you- you're involved in multiple jobs on campus, and you said you were involved with like a lot of other activities. How has COVID kind of affected your involvement on campus?

CP 1:03:37

So this semester, especially like, when I'm done, so I do, my career diversity educator, we have our meetings on Mondays, they end at five o'clock, and I technically could stick around for another hour to go to another, like a orgs meeting or something. But I kind of don't want to like that I'm done for the day. I'm done. Like this is my schedule. And so I've become, I wouldn't say rigid because it's definitely still a flexible schedule. But I've definitely become a lot more adamant about like, hey, at this time, I'm checking out especially when I have my daughter with me if I am not giving her the time that she needs as mom like, I am not doing my job properly. So I have to make sure that I'm taking that time to be like Okay, so I might have homework to do when I get home. But I can at least take an hour or so to just be compressed and be with my family and not have to be at everybody else's beck and call. So I think that's like the biggest thing for me. I'm still heavily involved with the history Enthusiasts. I am I'm the treasurer there. I don't get to go to the meetings because I was like, I'm tired, I'm gonna go home. Which is okay, so And Madeline, our president is doing a fantastic job, she doesn't even need me. And so having people that are willing to kind of like, listen to those meetings and be respectful of them has helped a lot too, in that regard. But it's also been hard for me in the past to say, I don't have the energy for this, I have to say no. And then not feel terribly guilty about it. But I don't have that experience anymore. If I If I can't, I can't, you know, and that's okay.

SM 1:05:53

Yes, okay. Still Still, you're still involved with stuff, but you kind of said, you've been able to recognize your boundaries more recognize like, Okay, I will still want to be involved with this. But like, I need to kind of take a little bit of a step back where in the past, yeah, yeah, full force, do everything I could.

CP 1:06:11

Yeah, absolutely. And like, being able to just have the opportunity to put those boundaries in place is so important. And not everybody, not everybody everywhere will have the ability or the wherewithal to, to give us that. So it's really nice that the people here especially the org leaders have been absolutely fantastic at being like, okay, like, I understand, like cuz I'm part of the LSA as well, the Latin Latinx Student Association, and they're like, We would really love it, if you

could come to meetings, you can really come like participate, but we understand that you can't, and I still getting a store. And I'm getting to go be part of that graduation reception that we're doing before graduation, for our organization, and so it's just really nice to still feel like I have a place without having to overexert myself to quote unquote, earn that place.

SM 1:07:19

So, are you involved in anything like in your local community, like in Barron or?

CP 1:07:26

Um, no. There are several reasons for that, which I will not get into details on. But it's very hard to find people around here that are understanding and kind about my beliefs, either politically, or about the pandemic or whatever. So, I've very much kept to myself, there's not really the people that I've made friends with have kind of either alienated me or I chose to step away from the relationship because it wasn't healthy anymore. So when when we're up here, we have his family which lives they live really, really close and that we keep to ourselves. Which I'm okay with, I have plenty of friends that don't live close by that I can communicate with on a daily basis that love me and accept me for who I am. So.

SM 1:08:27

So generally, that kind of people in the people, your community in the pandemic, like the response has not been

CP 1:08:34

Oh. When there's there's a group in the area. And I had asked for some advice because we're on a delayed vaccination schedule, because I've had some reactions and my younger my older kids have had some reaction. So we have our daughter on a delayed schedule. She's 3 now so she's ready to get her her vaccine, which we've been doing and I asked for some advice. And I don't like what do you guys do before you take your kids to get some chalk? And instead of "Oh, I give them Tylenol before or after" whatever it was literally comment after comment after comment after comment of berating me and ripping me apart that I did put that poison in my child's body. And I was just I was so like, I didn't even know what to do. I just deleted the whole thing because I was like, I'm not I can't I don't have that. I don't have it in me to battle down every single person in the area on a page that is literally called neighbors helping neighbors. That is not helpful. Yeah, I couldn't I couldn't do it and I just had to delete my whole post and I just left it alone. And I talked to a couple of my friends that moderate, actually were admin for a Facebook group that we run, and I was like, wait, what do you guys do when you take your kids to get their shots? So they gave me their advice. And there we are. So I was just looking for a variety of opinion. And it was just, it got so volatile so quickly. And there was nothing good that was going to come out of it at all. So I've really, I used to be more involved in the community with like church organizations and things, but I just, I can't it's it's so hateful, and it's so divisive. Up here, and there's very, very few people that are willing to actually hear you out before they form an opinion about you. So it's frustrating, but that's okay, because we're gonna go to grad school on the East Coast, and it's gonna be so great.

SM 1:10:59

Get away from it.

CP 1:11:03

Yeah, at least that's the plan. We might we might end up in the UK yet. Who knows?

SM 1:11:10

Um, so obviously, you've already talked a little bit about your experience. Were you pretty, pretty sure you had COVID? Um, has there been anyone else like, close to you that has had COVID as well.

CP 1:11:23

Um, as far as we know, there's only been one infection. No. Three in the family. Have to look at him. Because for sure, yeah. So he had an uncle that got it last October, not this year. Last year, we have a small party for our daughter's her birthday at his parents house, we were in the garage and we didn't invite many people, you're trying to be safe. And he ended up having symptoms and didn't say anything. And he came, he thought it was just like mild allergies or something. And he ended up testing positive. Fortunately, he wasn't there very long. And he only exposed a couple of people. And there's only one person that he was spending, you know, that was close contact, that actually ended up having it who, honestly, judging by their activity, they could have honestly had it before they got there too. So who knows? But, um, and I think since then, there might have been one more, but I'm not 100% sure on that. But fortunately, some long haul symptoms, but nothing that has affected like anything too bad yet that we know of. So hopefully it stays that way.

SM 1:12:41

And kind of you've already said a little bit of a kind of like what was your general experience when you pretty sure you had it was it kind of just like general flu or you kind of think you had a little?

CP 1:12:53

Miserable I think I've only been that sick one other time in my life. And that's when I had mono when I was like 15 or 16. And I was literally bedridden for two weeks straight because I could not function I couldn't talk it was miserable. And I don't remember hardly any of it. And I had a terrible fever for like a day for probably more than a week but I was like genuinely sick and I lost my memories of my all of my schoolwork. I was homeschooled. So all of my schoolwork and all of my reading that I had done the week before I got sick I lost complete memory of that and I had to go back and backtrack and redo all of his schoolwork because I didn't remember any of it I had no idea what I was doing. Benefits of being home- there aren't many for me there was in that case there was it was a it was a gave me the opportunity to catch back up again. But with when I'm pretty sure I had COVID I just remember like that first week I was so I was exhausted constantly. And I was so miserable. And I like to try to like force myself to get stuff done, but I could not do my schoolwork. I, the brain fog lasted I think for almost almost a year and a half. The brain fog didn't really clear up till I got my second shot, which was just this year. So it was

so bad. And I was like I'm gonna be this way the rest of my life. I had a lingering that upper respiratory cough that's really common with COVID long haulers. I had that for like six months. I couldn't go up and down stairs without losing my breath for almost a year. I had constant headaches, and I would randomly get just exhausted out of nowhere. going grocery shopping for an hour would wipe me out for the rest of the day. And so it was really really difficult. I wouldn't say I would say it was like a bad flu. I wouldn't say that. It was like the flu I would say was worse than that. But It wasn't as bad as when I had mono, but I definitely would not wish it on anybody it was, I was miserable. And just those long lasting symptoms, I think made it 10 times worse. It was just like, when is when am I ever going to be myself again? And I still, like I said, a lot of that I didn't feel like myself again until over the summer, this summer after I got my second shot. So

SM 1:15:27

I know a lot of people who had those long term lasting effects definitely, I've heard a lot of people talking about, like you said, you don't feel like yourself. You're like, when is when am I gonna start feeling like myself? Again, go back to normal. Is this gonna be the new normal?

CP 1:15:43

Yeah, and I think that was the thing that was so terrifying to me, it was like, I like no matter what I did, I couldn't feel better. And I had like, a little bit of an allergy about last January, so almost a year later, and I was still not feeling myself. And I took all the medicine I could, and normally, that would knock it out in a couple of days. You know, cuz, you know, seasonal stuff, or whatever. I could not shake it. And it took me probably two or three weeks to finally get the last of that kind of lingering cough out of my lungs again. And I knew it was COVID because I had been exposed that I've been getting tested weekly. So it was like, I knew that it wasn't COVID. But I was still like, so now that I potentially maybe had COVID. And I have one called symptoms. Does that mean that every time I get sick now that is going to last forever? Like what I don't want to live the rest of my life this way. I'm only 35. Like, I mean, that's not that old. So, so yeah, it just, it was it was kind of scary. Like I don't want to live this way, I want to be able to think straight, I want to be able to function, I want to be able to go up a flight of stairs without dying, like I want to be able to go grocery shopping or go to the mall and like spend the day shopping without feeling completely and utterly exhausted. And I already had issues with like stamina and things like that because of having having fibromyalgia. It definitely causes issues with things like that. But this was 10 times worse than I'd ever had before. And now that I've gotten my shots, and I'm boosted now too the symptoms have definitely lessened and I'm starting to feel a lot better than I have since March of 2020. So.

SM 1:17:43

That's, that's awesome. That's great. Um, and you've, you've talked a lot about, obviously, how the impact that this all has had on like your mental and physical health. Have you kind of seen those around? Have you seen that kind of effect in those around you as well?

CP 1:18:00

Yeah, definitely. I've noticed, especially in our area here in Barron County, like there's a lot of people around from both sides and from the neutral middle, that are like they just have zero tolerance for stupidity or for like, people that don't agree with them. They just like they just don't want to deal with it anymore. Because we're already so exhausted. We just don't have the mental capacity to deal with any of that anymore. So yes, I think that's the biggest thing. I know when one of his when his uncle got COVID, he had some really long lasting, breathing issues and things he seems to be okay now. But yeah, he struggled for a while with kind of some old long haul symptoms and like that physical health. And like it's gotten to the point now where he's literally been like, if I can't do it, I can't do it. If I can't physically cope with it, if I can't be there all day, I'm not gonna push myself, I'm just gonna go home and rest. If I don't want to have this conversation, I'm not going to have this conversation. So I think that's pretty common. I think that's happened with a lot of people, because we just, we're already so drained. And we have so much energy that we're exerting just trying to get through that dealing with anything on top of that is just too much.

SM 1:19:36

Yeah, I think before you said COVID fatigue, and that's I definitely that is definitely a real thing that I think everyone is experiencing at least for one way or another.

CP 1:19:47

Yes, definitely it is so intense and it's so like it changes the way you see people around you like you see more of their humanity. But you see less of them acting human. In a way. It's both super encouraging and amazing. And completely frustrating and exhausting at the same time. Like, some days you just like, why are you like this, but then there are other days that is just or even, same day different person, where it just makes you feel like, hey, we can do this, we're gonna make it you know, so it's trying to it's leaning that way trying to remember to lean towards the, hey, we can do this. We're gonna we're gonna get to it, we're gonna be okay. And that's not always hard to do when people around you don't act.

SM 1:20:51

Um, so you mentioned in the beginning that you had some friends or mutual friends who have died from the pandemic, you could talk, I guess, whatever you feel comfortable talking about, I guess, like the experience and coping and going through that.

CP 1:21:11

Yeah. So I had her. Most of them were kind of like mutual mutual friends, like people that I knew. But I wasn't terribly close with. There was a couple of them. But I honestly had them close with years before. And we've just, I moved away and that we didn't communicate as much. And I remember one specifically, and I was like, I'm going, I should, I should message this person. And I got I was just so busy with school, and I kind of slipped my mind. And I was I would think about it at night. I'd be like, Oh, no, it's like 12 o'clock. I'm not going to bother him right now. I didn't realize that he was in the hospital. His family didn't post anything until after he died. And that was the sixth, the sixth person that I knew that had passed away. And I think it was two, two or three days before I heard about Andy, I'd heard about another one that was an older guy that

I knew from where I used to work at the bar, and he had passed away too. And I was just like, he was like 30, 39, I shouldn't say older for him. He was like 38 or 39. But he was super healthy. And he was like into working out and he was always eating healthy. And I didn't understand I was like, how, and then. And then I heard about Andy and I was just like, oh my gosh, and it happened so fast. And I mean, there was a couple within the first couple of weeks. And then it was like the rest of them. Like I think it was four that were in that last week of that first week of April. And I couldn't do it. I was so overwhelmed. And I had no I couldn't even process it. And I honestly don't even know if I have even still processed it. Because I wasn't there. I didn't get to go to the funerals. Three of them didn't even get funerals. They just cremated their ashes in a jar because like they didn't have the option. I remember it happening really, really quickly. There was one that I heard when she went to the hospital because she was having a hard time breathing. And I told her sister had contacted me and I told her, you know, hey, let you know, let me know how it goes. I didn't hear from her for a couple of days. And I was like, Oh my gosh, like I hope it's okay, because I heard that this was potentially attacking people really, really quickly like taking them out like overnight. So I reached out to her and I was like, Hey, how's Rachel doing? And she was like, they intu- they intubated her this morning at like 4am We're hoping that will help. But it doesn't look good. And I think it was it was either I don't remember if it was later that evening. Or if it was overnight that she texted me that she messaged me. And I thought when I woke up and she said that she passed away and I think that was when she was like a couple years younger than me and she's healthy. She's a gymnast, and I was like how and like I said like I wasn't super close with her but like I wasn't really super close with any of them but They were still my friends, like they weren't people that were meaningful to me. And it was like, it really, really made me think that it could be anybody, it could be me. And of course, like, I was still sick as this was all happening. And I was just like hoping beyond our hope that I could keep it at bay enough that my body would be able to fight it off. And this is, of course, before we knew about long haul and everything else and.

CP 1:25:36

And I think that's when I realized that they were starting to develop a vaccine, that I was like, I've already lost six people from this, I've potentially had it. And I still have symptoms. As soon as that's available, I'm going to try and get it. As soon as I know what's safe, I'm going to try and get it because I didn't want to risk it. And it was not worth the risk for my daughter. It was not the worth the risk for my kids. And even if my parents refused to get vaccinated, it is not worth the risk for me to get exposed at school on campus and bring it to them. If we go visit or whatever, like there's no I'm not, I'm not, I am not willing to not do the bare minimum, to protect the people around me. At least knowing I did everything I could that was in my power, even if they do get sick and end up with what lifelong issues or beyond you know, the worst happen. Knowing that at least I did what I could to try and prevent that. I couldn't live with that guilt, knowing that the option was available and that I got exposed and didn't do anything about it. And I know not everybody thinks that way. But for me, that's the thing is why would I not? Why would I not? I have nothing to lose. Yeah. So it's, it's really hard to lose people that even if you weren't close with that you that you knew well enough, you know, and realizing now, like, if I ever go to Minnesota to visit, I'm not going to be able to like, have them come meet me. I'm not going to be able to call them when I graduate, and be like, hey I did it. Rachel was a big, big supporter of

mine. When I went back, when I went back to school, and knowing that she's not going to be there now is really hard. And knowing that, that's just the people that were close to me that I knew. I can't imagine losing one of my siblings or a parent, or child to COVID. And there's so many people that have experienced that. And I think it's I personally think it is abominable to not do what you can and not to your best to try and protect the people around you.

SM 1:28:37

Yeah, well, thank you. Thank you for sharing. I know that, you know, death is never easy to deal with, obviously. And then when we're dealing with, you know, this thing that you know, at that time we really didn't know anything about and like you said, like, you were hearing like, oh, the older people, the people who are already sick, like you were hearing those were the people that are dying, and you have these younger, healthy people dying from it. It definitely is like, well, you know, we already knew so little about it. It just made it so much more confusing.

CP 1:29:12

Yeah, definitely. And I think the thing is, is that it's so ridiculous to me that I knew these people and it wasn't like one or two, it was like multiple people that were healthy and took care of themselves and that had families that were young, and they got it and they died. Like they literally died from it. And then just to have people like be like, Oh, it's not a big deal. It's fine. Like it's only killing the old people as if old people aren't important like what? And I think that's the thing that's the most frustrating is just dismissing the value of human life while also still screaming about abortion. I think like that cognitive dissonance and that complete disconnect in logic for me is really, really difficult. And I don't I don't understand how people can be so cavalier about the loss of life, but then be so offended when the loss of one not fully formed life could potentially save another. Yeah, so it's really it's really interesting to me. And I think there's so many of these issues, social and healthcare and whatever that have been so politicized that people just want to have, they want to kind of like tow that line, because that's what the party says, or whatever, instead of kind of really using their own critical thinking and coming to that, those logical conclusions. And I think it's really hard for people to do that, because we're not taught how to think critically in high school. We're not taught how to do that, usually, until we get to college. And there's a lot of people that don't go to college. So, yeah.

SM 1:31:11

Yeah, like you said, like, so many big topics nowadays are becoming politicized, where it's like you said, the value of human life is held in so many different stances like so many different viewpoints, depending on the topic. And it's like, politics is almost reigning above that importance of life.

CP 1:31:32

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I think that's the thing that that is so fascinating to me, because the, one of the founding principles of the United States was that we're supposed to value all life above politics and government. But then, like, the politics and government were built into this crazy thing that literally upholds that above. And obviously, that I don't think that was the founding fathers intentions. But there are a lot of those kind of conflicting ideologies that even they had

about slavery and and women's place in politics and all of this stuff that has no kind of snowballed into this long lasting effect and how we approach any kind of issue. It's always looked at through some kind of political lens. Whether it is actually a political issue or not.

SM 1:32:34

Everything becomes political, even when it has no right to be.

CP 1:32:38

Yeah, exactly. That's like viruses aren't political, like how, like, when I would say that it's important to take care of like people around you, and then you're like, "Oh, you crazy indoctrinated liberal" Like what? But, you know, and I think that's just kind of like where we're at in our American government, and the way that our politics, and that system is set up. And we see this, we've seen it play out in multiple other nations that have used capitalism and have used those kinds of founding principles over time, and you would think that we would be taking some advice from those more developed nations that have been around longer, but instead, we just because we're America, we got to do it our way. We're smarter and better than everyone else, as we have the highest death rate in the entire world. Okay. But, you know, it's just one of those things. Like, okay, I'm just gonna do what I gotta do, I'm gonna keep focusing and I'm they keep fighting for what I know was right, and teach my children and hopefully, someday my students to do the same so.

SM 1:34:01

You can do what you can and that's about that's about it. Really.

CP 1:34:06

Yeah. And knowing that I did my best is, I think, more important than being like I made a huge change. You know, I mean, if I impact one person, the way that I've been impacted by those really meaningful people in my life, I did my job. Like I can't even I can't I would not be here if it wasn't for people like Dr. Patrick up at Barron County here or Dr. Duckworth Lawton, or even Dr. Frei has been a huge part of me understanding what doing history looks like. So I would not I would not be who I am today without those people and I'm incredibly blessed and very, very fortunate and very, very grateful.

SM 1:34:50

For sure, for sure. So you've already kind of talked quite a bit about you know, your stance on the vaccines and all that. You want to just kind of, I guess give a little more in depth, like when you first heard about it and, um, versus kind of like how you're still feeling about it now with boosters and all of that. And are you fully vaccinated? And how did you kind of how did your body respond when you got vaccinated?

CP 1:35:17

Sure. So, um, like I said, I'd experienced this loss, and I have long haul symptoms, and I knew people that have long haul symptoms so I was like "Hey, I'm gonna do my research". I was raised by anti vaxxers. Like, they were anti vaxxers before it was cool. Not that I think it's cool

but you know. I had a reaction to the MMR vaccine, my first MMR when I was like, five, and I haven't had any vaccinations since. So well, okay, well, I have now, I hadn't. And so I was really, really nervous about like, anything, getting anything. I was like, Oh, my God, I'm gonna die. And I was, like, think for a second, you know how to do your research, right? And I talked to my doctor I talked to and my doctor is amazing. We got a whole care team together and we went through all of the research because she knew of my history of reaction, and it's like, serious reaction. And she knows that I have an immune immunocompromised system with Fibro. And so we're like, going through all of this research. And as soon as as soon as they were available for emergency use. I think Pfizer got their approval first. And then it was Moderna. Shortly after we I just immediately messaged her, I was like, what's, you know, what's the plan? Should I get this? Is it safe for me to get it? What do we do? She's like, Okay, so let's, let's dig into this and we dug and we dug. I did my own research, I found the ingredients, I looked up what they each were, I figured out where they came from, how the risks were, I studied the mRNA thing. I understood that, hey, you know what, this has been in development for like, almost 30 years, like, hey, then actually new. It's just never been used on a wide scale before. It's like, oh, my gosh, what, and started really using those research and that critical thinking skills, both those critical thinking skills that I learned through my work as a historian and as a journalist, and I was like, Okay, I have my information that I know is through vetted peer reviewed sources, its scientific, its sound. And that's pointing me towards a positive experience that I'm just gonna like wait to hear from my doctor because if she recommends I wait until we know more about side effects, then I will. So we ended up I got my first shot. I got Pfizer because it has the lowest risk of side effects. So then, of course, you wanted to take the safest route as possible. So that was the recommendation so I took the Pfizer. I got my first shot in April, I got my second shot in May. First shot I was like I was a little tired for like the first it was 36 to 48 hours and then I was fine. Second shot my arm hurt for like a week and it was like it like hurt like I felt like I overdone at the gym every day. And it was just right here. So I was like I know this is from I know this is from the shot, but I didn't have any other issues with it. And then when I got my booster I was like tired that night and then that was it. And I had no other symptoms. So I had very minimal, almost no side effects at all. Like I said before, once we get approval for the youngest group the ages 2-5, we do plan on getting our daughter vaccinated. My partner also got his first two shots, and I think he is planning on doing a booster, I'm not sure. And he had almost no side effects as well. And so we were able to have a really, really good experience with it and I think that helped alleviate my fears about vaccines that had been kind of like so deeply ingrained in me by my mom and stepdad and I was like, Wait a minute. Okay, so I got to start doing more research on these other vaccines because I was like we already have our daughter on a delayed schedule. Which I still am glad that we did the delayed schedule because we don't want her to have reaction like my older daughter did. She had hers when she was 18 months old and she ended up hospitalized in NICU for like two weeks because it was so bad and it just wreaked havoc on her and she still has issues with breathing and stuff and she's super sensitive to things like mold and dust and whatnot. But so I would probably still have delayed vaccination just to make sure she didn't have a reaction that could have been long term have long term effects like that. But, um, we are quite confident in the fact that these are safe and that and like I said, it's not like I'm just listening to the news or whatever, like I literally went and did all the legwork I possibly could do to make sure that I was making the best decision for my health. And I use those resources

that were available with my doctor and my medical team and I'm really glad that I made that decision. And I would not take it back for one second, even if for some reason, even if I somehow which we know doesn't happen, but even if I somehow develop some kind of weird side effects from it, where I was like, had like muscle pain or I don't what the claims are like, I would rather do that and know that I'm protecting the people around me, then do nothing and end up even if I didn't get terribly sick, having people around me get sick and potentially die. So like I definitely I would still make that decision. And I don't regret it for one second. Actually, what day is it? The fifth. Yeah, I just got I just got my booster on Wednesday? Thursday? Thursday. Yeah. So. And I feel great! I feel just fine.

SM 1:41:48

Less less than a week ago. And you're still, you're already?

CP 1:41:52

Yeah, exactly. Like I said, it was like a little bit that night, I was kind of like, okay, I am tired. I'm gonna go to bed a little bit earlier than normal. Other than that, it's been completely normal. And I barely even noticed it. So I'm I know, that's obviously not the case with everybody. But I would rather have I would rather deal with some side effects, then, then take the risk for me the risk, or the benefits far outweigh the risk. By far.

SM 1:42:27

Yeah. And do you kind of think, I feel you might have already kind of touched on this, but do you think your role as a caregiver kind of impacted your decision that you wanted to get vaccinated when you could?

CP 1:42:38

It did. In some ways. I, I can honestly say I probably would have still made the same decision with all of that information and legwork that I did. But I was more proactive about doing that kind of research, because I was like, hey, if I get sick, and I'd already been sick with what we already suspected was COVID. I was like, if that happens again, and I don't make it who's gonna take care of my kid when her dad at work? Like, we have to do something like I have to do the best that I can. What if she gets sick, and I was really worried about getting it on campus, and then accidentally giving it to her and having her have long lasting side effects or worse, you know, because of my inability to prioritize her health. So that wasn't an option for me. I you know, I was not capable of dismissing my child's health like that. So it so yeah, it definitely it definitely did impact the speed at which I made that decision and how proactive I was. But I think if nothing else was different, I can honestly say that I think I probably still would have made the same decision.

SM 1:43:56

So kind of what has been, you'd say, your primary news source during the pandemic, and has that changed at all over the course of the pandemic.

CP 1:44:08

So I get a lot of my news, the Washington Post and The New York Times, mostly because they are really, really diligent about sourcing a lot of their material. They don't just say stuff. And the two podcasts they listen to one is called Start Here and the other one is called Marketplace. One focuses more on news, the other one-- and business and the other one focuses more on economy. But they're both through ABC news networks. So they have done a lot of interviews, they are very careful about who they use for sources in these discussions, and they represent both sides of the argument and quote people and they, it's really easy to trace where that information came from. It's not like you have to be like, wait a minute, where we're coming from, where are you getting that information. So if I caught especially during like the depths of COVID, like, if I caught something on one of those podcasts about COVID, and I'd hear the source, I would like make a mental note, or I would like write it on my hand or something and I would look it up later. So I think that was a really great way for me to like, practice those skills that I'd learned with critical thinking and researching, while also making sure that I wasn't kind of just taking things at face value. And I mean, there's other news sources that I'll like, occasionally glance at, but especially having gone through journalism courses now, if I scroll through, and within the first three paragraphs, there's no source listed, I'm like, bye. I don't have time for this. I know, this is just BS, and I'm not going to pay any attention to it. So um, yeah, so like my primary, my primary news sources have been through Wash. Po., and NYT, and ABC News. Mostly because they seem to have the most unbiased reporting, and they provide the most sources for their material.

SM 1:46:48

So it kind of felt like those were the most credible. And, you know, it was important for you to kind of stay informed on those, like, all sides and kind of be able to do your own research, if you felt you needed to kind of take that step further.

CP 1:47:03

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And like being able to trust what, that what I'm being told isn't just part of the story is really, really important for me, and always has been I was I've always been like that devil's advocate, but like, wait a minute, let me hear the other side. Because I want to understand what this rebuttal or whatever this response actually means, why are they saying this way? And being raised the way I was raised, and I was really hardcore conservative, for a long time, had no idea what I was actually talking about but you know. And I voted for Trump in 2016. And I had no idea how to vet sources, I had no idea how to figure out like, what people were saying. And I watched Fox news a lot. And I read like the Fox News, clip things from their websites, and whatever. And I started to realize once I started to learn how to do my own research, when I started college, in 2017, so a year later after voting for Trump, I was started, like, at the end of that first semester, I was like, wait a minute, what's your source? And then by the end of, I think, by that by the end of 20--2019, for sure, but I think it started in like 2018 in my last year up up here. By the end of fall 2019, I had taken both African American History and American Indian Studies, and two world history classes, all at the same time. Like, oh.

SM 1:48:57

You got all these different perspectives.

CP 1:49:00

I did a bad thing. And I really started exploring, like, why did they make that decision, and I started deconstructing my own beliefs. As what I thought was a conservative, I realized that a lot of the things that I've been told conservatives were supposed to stand for, were actually what the more liberal side of the spectrum stood for and what their party platforms were based on. And it was like, "But I'm not a Democrat. What? What's going on?" and I still don't identify with a political party. So, but I've been able, but I can now consciously say that I don't identify with a political party because I choose to critically think about the platforms and the policies before making decisions. So yeah, being able to critically think about things and being able to vet forces and being able to really take the time to look at the information that's presented has been a huge part of both my personal journey and my experience with COVID and making the decisions that I've made.

SM 1:50:09

Awesome. Um kind of, I guess, in general, like, how have you felt about how the media has covered the pandemic? In like all different aspects, you know, the important topics that they maybe haven't covered? And I guess, kind of going off like that, how do you feel like the experience of caregivers has been covered by media during the pandemic?

CP 1:50:32

Yeah, so I hear all of this talk about these parents that are like, Oh, my God, you have to send our kids back to school, we can't handle it. And I think that's a really poor way to portray parents, because there's so many that I know, they're like, I seriously want to homeschool my kid because I don't trust the schools to protect them, especially in this area. In Wisconsin, and in some parts of Minnesota, it's dangerous. But then, of course, you have people on the other side that are like I'm pulling my kids out to homeschooling, because I don't want them to learn about critical race theory and you're like, they're not even learning that, but whatever. It can go both ways, obviously. But I can definitely understand the fear of having your child in a facility, a school, a daycare, or whatever, and like not knowing if they're going to make it out safe, if they're going to come home healthy, if, especially in the age era, that we're in now of school shootings, like if they're gonna come home alive, like we don't know. And it's really, really scary. And I think for me as a caregiver, COVID has made me more aware of a lot of those social issues, and has given me the ability to look at all of the information so that I can make the best decisions for my child and for my kids and for my family. So that we're working and playing and living in places that are safe, or safer, you know, and so that they're going to facilities, like my daughter, at the children's nature academy there at CNA, that is a secured door, you can't get in unless they know you, or if you have a key. So the facilities and situations like that have definitely made me feel a lot more in charge of my child safety, my family's safety and my community's safety, even with COVID, I can make the decision to wear a mask or if I'm not feeling well to stay home. And having those, the ability to do that is really, really important. And I think that's something the media has kind of missed. I just hearing in the last few months now of like, "Oh, how is mental health being affected?" and whatever. But we were saying this stuff back at the beginning, you know, back in the first summer of COVID, when we'd already been

shut down for three months, and it seemed like there was no end in sight and we couldn't get access to any resources because the ruling party decided that we didn't need them. And so being able, and I really think that at the time a lot of the issues that I take with how the media portrayed things had to do with the Trump administration and how they focus so much on trying to shout down the misinformation and the false narrative that they completely missed all of this other stuff that was going on at the same time. And is that their fault? Maybe not. I mean, I it is but I think that there were some very, very important things that they took the time to combat that needed to be said. Please don't pour bleach into your body. Like that's a really important.

SM 1:54:17

Yeah.

CP 1:54:18

Yeah. So like I think there's some really, really important things that the media accomplished. But I definitely feel that there was a lot of things that fell through the cracks for the media that they could have covered more effectively, like mental health and lack of social services and things like that. But again, I think a lot of that despair and a lot of that missing information comes from them spending so much time trying to do damage control for the administration we had an in power at the time so.

SM 1:54:54

Yeah, I guess kind of going off of that. How do you feel the government handle the pandemic and how do you wish things would have been done maybe differently?

CP 1:55:04

Um, I think that politicians shouldn't go against the advice of their medical advisors and say things. And that goes for anybody, anybody in any position of leadership or power or public figure that says anything that directly violates basic common sense and scientific evidence, like he should just probably not say anything like just don't talk about science, if you're not a scientist or a doctor, like you don't understand how it works, right. So that would be like me, I don't claim to be an expert on vaccines or immune-- immunology or virology. Like, I'm not a scientist, I'm a historian. And I am currently I am not a European historian, I'm an American historian, I spend most of my research has been on the United States. So I wouldn't claim to be an expert about things that I don't study, and haven't I don't have training in. So I shouldn't act and speak as if I am. And when I share what I've, what I've found, in my research, people kind of tend to mock me, and they're like, Oh, look at the expert. And I say very clearly, I'm not the expert. This is the source. These are the sources. You can do whatever you want with those sources but this is where I'm getting the information from and this is how I interpreted that data. Or whatever you know and this is how it's been interpreted. So I think, there there's been a kind of, I don't want to say an attack, but there's been like a movement of disparaging public education and higher education. And I think that the government at the time really kind of took that and ran with it at the beginning of the pandemic, and I think it would have been okay-ish if it hadn't been so deeply, so deeply, ingrained and like what we were doing and all of the actions we were taking, medically speaking, and if all of these different aspects of daily life hadn't been infiltrated by that

kind of rhetoric, I think it would have been a lot easier for us as a nation to prevent a lot of the deaths that happened, a lot of the infections that happened, I think it would have been a lot easier for the Biden administration to enact meaningful policy. But again, I mean, and we're not even a full year into the Biden administration, and we're still doing damage control. And this isn't just misinformation and like Donald Trump tweeting out of control, this is literally like, people's lives are at stake. This literally, the very fabric of what our nation is founded upon, is being questioned: constitutional rights, voting rights, and right to life and healthcare. And all of those things are being questioned and either mocked or being politicized or whatever, and a lot of it isn't even political, it's just been turned into this kind of monstrosity, that we think that everything has to be political, because of course it is right? So yeah, so I think as far as like the government's handling of the pandemic, I definitely don't agree with a lot of the actions that were taken a lot of the things that were allowed to happen. But I also recognize that we were in a really weird situation, there was a lot that was happening. There was things changed every day, it seemed like in the first couple of months of the pandemic, because we didn't know what we were dealing with, like we had no clue. And the people that probably knew wouldn't tell us anything. Because I mean, there is evidence that of course, it was developed in a lab in Wuhan, which is, that doesn't make it evil or whatever. It's just it's a virus that got out of control. And so it definitely made a lot of the other things that were going on exacerbated because now we weren't only dealing with like, public health issues, we were dealing with political issues, we were dealing with social issues. And no matter who we talked to you and like, even if they were on our side, they were like, ah, because you didn't agree, right? Even if you did agree, but they had these really weird ideas about like, what social, social care, social services really mean. And, you know, oh, yeah, I support unemployment insurance. That \$600 a week is great for me. It was great when President Trump did it, but when President Biden was talking about expanding it, or continuing it, even at a half rate, it was like the end of the world. This crazy socialist, communist president. Like, okay, like you're you know, anything about the global political scale? Biden is on the conservative side of moderate? So there's that, but anyways, I digress. But yeah, so like, the government's handling of the pandemic was definitely I think there was a lot that should have been done to quell the spread of that misinformation. And instead, it fell on the media, like I said, to do all of that damage control. And there was like, nobody was gonna stop anybody from saying the stuff that was obviously not true. And people believed it. So.

SM 2:01:48

real quick, I know you said you were only available till three o'clock. Are you okay to go on for a little bit more?

CP 2:01:54

Yeah. A little bit. Yeah.

SM 2:01:56

Okay. Okay. Yeah, I don't I don't want to keep you past any later than you have to really have to be. Um looking to the future now. Um, obviously, we just recently heard within the last week or two, that there's this new variant that's now I think made it to the United States? I think there

have been confirmed cases. Kind of what are your thoughts on that? Are you afraid like, we're gonna kind of go back into what we were dealing with, like a year ago? Or do you think kind of with the vaccines, you know, maybe it won't be as bad I guess, kind of what are your thoughts and maybe fears now that that's coming around?

CP 2:02:35

I think as long as those of us that are vaccinated and are gonna continue to get our boosters and stuff, as long as we stay diligent, and we mask when we're out in places, especially when they're unsafe. I think that will help. I think it will help. I don't think it's going to get as bad as it was before. Simply because we are we do have about half of the population taking some kind of measure of protection and being fairly proactive about it. So I think that will help. I think that if we try to do any kind of lockdown on a serious level, like we did in the beginning, that there will be riots. I genuinely believe that the right wing, the far right wing, especially that has been empowered through the rhetoric of Donald Trump is going to take things like January 6, the insurrection at the Capitol, Kyle Rittenhouse and his acquittal and things like that, I think they're going to take that as an excuse to be able to do kind of whatever they want and wreak havoc. And I am a little concerned about that. Because I don't want to raise my family and be in a society where violence against humanity is not only condoned but encouraged and not aptly punished. So that's, that's disconcerting for sure. But I definitely believe that I think that we're probably past the very worst of it. I don't, it's not gonna go away. That's not how viruses work, that it'll just die off in like five years. But I think as we continue to work through a lot of that damage and start to actively kind of combat some more of that misinformation and hopefully slowly disband these infiltration groups like QAnon and things like that through just by just by sharing facts with sticking to the facts and doing our due diligence, I think that will really help quell a lot of the people that are not fully convinced of those conspiracies and of that misinformation. And I think eventually, it will shift towards a more positive future and more people being willing to take real steps to protect their their fellow man. So.

SM 2:05:39

Yeah. Um, uh, and I guess, how has this experience in general in the past year and a half, almost two years now? How's it kinda changed the way you think and view the world and those around you? For better or for worse.

CP 2:06:08

Yeah, I definitely have more empathy and care towards other people, I think I do genuinely believe in the intrinsic value of human life. But I also have lost a lot of faith in some of humanity. And I used to be like, the never ending optimist, like, oh, yeah, everything's gonna be fine. It's all gonna work out like everybody is like, inherently good. I've come to realize that that's just simply not true. And that's really, really like scary. Because I'm like, of course, everybody cares about people as much as I do. But they don't see it that same way, they see caring about other people as making sure that they have guns and making sure that they're allowed to say whatever they want to say they don't care about other people around them. Right in that same way. And I think a lot of it just kind of comes from them not really having been exposed to the knowledge to understand what life isn't what it means and how valuable it is, and what what is required for

that. And a lot of them are quite privileged in many ways, and not just trying to have as like a rhetorical, like, oh, white privilege, or whatever. But literally, they have been able to do things and get away with it so they think that that experience is the same for everybody. "Well, I never learned that it's been a year and a half in the pandemic, and I've never gotten sick". And things like that, right? So and of course, once you start to deconstruct that with them, 9 times out of 10, you figure out where the where the lie. But they don't see it that way and I think that can be I think that can be dealt with most effectively by using the same tactics that my professors used with me. Just giving them the proper information and teaching them old skills of critical thinking at a young age, so that they're not blindsided by all of this information when they get to college, they know how to find sources, they know how to interpret data, they know how to do that stuff already. And spending, you know, just re-- readjusting that kind of educational mindset, and that instead of making fun of people who go to college, after telling them for years that if they don't go to college, they can't get a job. Yeah, I will never understand the logic there. But yeah, like finding those spots in it. I mean, it's definitely it's been a painful experience. But, and it's changed my view of other people quite a bit. But it's never made me and I still, even though I like I've lost a little bit of that faith in some of humanity, I still will deal with people on an individual basis. And if people who don't agree with me have genuine questions, I will happily answer them. I will never, now if somebody comes at me and is like, "Oh, what about this?" I'm just gonna be like, okay, whatever. You obviously don't want to have a conversation. But if somebody genuinely asks, like, "What do you what do you mean? Like, I don't understand where you're coming from? Can you explain this to me?" I will do that and I've actually, I did that with a friend of mine who is very conservative. She did not vote for Trump in 2020 but that was simply because she just really did not did not condone what he was doing, like as a human being like, she's like, No, that's not okay. Like, yeah, no, it's not. And she started to kind of deconstruct some of those ideas of really far right ideology that her parents have, and her stepdad has, and we've had some conversations, and she's asked me like, "What did you do? I know, like you were raised the same way and that you used to believe a lot of the same thing as I did. And I know you've changed and like, how did you get there?" and I've been able to have a conversation with her, and she got the vaccine. And she was surprised that she didn't get sick. And she was like, I feel better than I expected to. And I just really hope that I can have kids in nine months. I think you're, I think it'll be okay, I think it'll be okay. She's like, okay, and I've broken down a lot of that data for her. And I, you know, this, here's some sources if you want, but this is kind of what I found from them. And she's like, Oh, that's really helpful, that doesn't make me feel better. So just being able to kind of walk her through that process without having to be like, ah , that's encouraging. And so like, I while, while I may not have a lot of faith in like humanity as a whole, or at least part of it, I can definitely say that I can still look at one person, and I can help them in their journey and deconstruction and all of that. So yeah, that's, that's fun. I think the biggest thing for me coming out of this pandemic is learning how to deal with people on the individual basis, instead of just automatically equating them to part of a whole.

SM 2:12:11

There's, there's still good people in the world. And you know, not everyone's lost to like the extremes.

CP 2:12:19

Yeah, yeah. And I think I'm a great example of that, like, I was, like, all in for that crazy, those conspiracy theories and that craziness. And I learned how to deconstruct that and really take it apart and be like, wait a minute, that doesn't make sense. And I have the tools now to recognize that this information is not factual, and start taking that apart that way, you know, what do I know for sure is a verified facts and what is not? And how does that align with what I think my view is? And not being so rigid about what I feel is correct.

SM 2:13:06

So, knowing what you know, now, is there anything you wish you would have done differently through the course of the pandemic? And I guess, kind of what advice would you give to future generations that might experience, you know, another, you know, you mentioned how, you know, we had the 1918 pandemic and even going back to Black Death, like, we've experienced these large scale pandemics throughout history. So I guess like, what would you advice would you give to future people who might go through a future instance like this?

CP 2:13:42

So I wish that I had taken my mental health into my own hands earlier, that I would have been better prepared for when this happened. I think that's my biggest thing that I would change. But there's two things that I would that I would say to future generations, either currently living or in the future would be number one, follow science, figure out who the experts are figure out who actually knows what they're talking about, and isn't just saying things to say things. Twitter, Facebook, all of that they can be great sources to find information. But that's not going to be the whole picture. You have to dig deeper, and learn how to do that and be comfortable doing so. So that's my first piece of advice. My second piece of advice is take care of yourself first. Can't pour from an empty cup. You have to take care of your mental and physical health. You if you don't take care of your mental health, your physical health will be adversely impacted. If you don't take care of your physical health, your mental health will be adversely impacted you have to do you have to be proactive to take care of yourself. Don't be selfish, but you have to be able to prioritize yourself over obligations to family. And I guess maybe a third piece of advice would be the saying "Blood is thicker than water" is actually like, not what the saying is. So the full thing is, "The blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb" and that literally means that you can choose your family, and that your family may not always be the best thing for you. Their, you know, your blood family might not always be what is healthiest for you and it's okay to walk away from that. Because I know it took me 30 years to figure that out and I'm still trying to like, slowly further and further myself away from from that. But it's hard.

SM 2:15:56

Easier said than done to--

CP 2:15:58

Yeah, yeah, definitely. It's definitely not easy, but it's definitely worth it. When you learn how to set up healthy boundaries for yourself.

SM 2:16:09

Awesome. Yeah, that's definitely great advice. I guess just is there any other remaining thoughts you have on anything we've talked about? Or things maybe you had thought about and didn't get chance to bring up anything like that?

CP 2:16:22

Um, I don't think so. I think I kind of word vomited everything that I had on my mind. Things that I didn't even realize I was still thinking about. Yeah, be kind to each other. Put yourself in the other person's shoes it's important.

SM 2:16:42

For sure. Well, that is all the questions I have, so thank you so much. This was great. And thank you for staying a little past when you kind of said you could so.

CP 2:16:53

Yeah, no problem. No problem. It's my pleasure. I I'm really glad that I got to help you out with this and be on the other side of the camera.