

## **Transcript of Interview with Lars Wolfshield by Kit Heintzman**

**Interviewee:** Lars Wolfshield

**Interviewer:** Kit Heintzman

**Date:** 03/21/2021

**Location (Interviewee):** Austin, Texas

**Location (Interviewer):**

**Transcribed By:** Angelica S Ramos

### **Some of the things we spoke about included:**

Representations of pandemics prior to 2020 and associations with an extinction event and coming to see it as an experience of trauma and isolation. Purchasing health insurance and life insurance for the first time in response to the pandemic, especially as the primary earner of the household. Vegetable gardening during the pandemic, veganism, and the importance of healthy food access as an equity issue, and sobriety. The government's failure to impress the severity of the pandemic on citizens. How having had Swine Flu impacted early reactions to this pandemic. Getting the first vaccine shot. That failures in federal policy meant individuals had to make their own decisions. Anti-racism is not optional. Homelessness in Austin TX and the importance of welfare programs. Safety procedures for music recording during the pandemic. How the "obliteration" of the music industry as it was opens possibilities for new and more equitable systems for artists

**Kit Heintzman 00:00**

Hello.

**Lars Wolfshield 00:02**

Hello,

**Kit Heintzman 00:03**

Would you please start by telling me your full name, the date, the time and your location?

**Lars Wolfshield 00:09**

I am Lars Wolfshields and it is March 29 2021. And it is 10am. And I'm in Austin, Texas.

**Kit Heintzman 00:22**

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

**Lars Wolfshield 00:31**

Yes, I do.

**Kit Heintzman 00:33**

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

**Lars Wolfsheid** 00:43

Um, I am a pansexual, and gender fluid artists and artists manager, and I work primarily with black and queer musicians and bands.

**Kit Heintzman** 00:56

I'd like to start by asking what the word pandemic means to you.

**Lars Wolfsheid** 01:02

Um, it's really, that's a an interesting question. I think before I experienced a pandemic, I thought it was something that would never happen, because it just seems so universal and global. And it was a very haunting term. And it to me, it seemed like something that would wipe out the human race if it ever happened. And now since I've actually experienced one, it just seems like a very isolating frightening thing that has affected us all. And I don't think we've all really even been able to cope with the trauma that it's caused the entirety of humanity, and it's just something I think we'll be dealing with and trying to understand for decades to come.

**Kit Heintzman** 01:54

I'm curious to the extent to which you're comfortable sharing, would you say something about your experiences with health and healthcare infrastructure prior to the pandemic?

**Lars Wolfsheid** 02:04

So, this is the first year I've ever bought myself healthcare, using, you know, what we call Obamacare, the, you know, government programs. Before that, I just kind of was out there. I bought myself health insurance this year, I mean, life insurance, rather. Um, so I never really gave much mind to it. I just kind of floated through thinking everything was gonna be okay, I'm young, and I'm healthy and, or so I thought. And I've seen young, unhealthy people get sick, I've seen them, you know, being incapacitated and having now health problems that they're going to be dealing with for the rest of their lives. So I got myself insurance, and got myself an annual exam just to make sure everything was okay. And, yeah, it's definitely affected my perspective on health care.

**Kit Heintzman** 03:00

May I ask how you came to that decision?

**Lars Wolfsheid** 03:04

Um, to get health care. Um, I, and especially with life insurance, yeah, I was afraid that I could get sick and die. And people who depend on me would be in really big trouble, you know, especially since I'm the I'm the main earner of my household. So yeah. I took it a lot more seriously.

**Kit Heintzman** 03:28

Pre pandemic, would you say something about what your day to day was like?

**Lars Wolfsheid** 03:33

Pre pandemic, the artists that I manage had shows, you know, pretty much every weekend, we got to tour a lot. I got to travel a lot. The year before I had gone on tour throughout the United States in 2019. And I toured in the

UK. I traveled every year, traveled all the time, and I was very busy. And of course, that all completely just changed dramatically when the pandemic hit.

**Kit Heintzman** 04:08

What are some of the ways that you've been adapting your day to day living? Post pandemic world or mid pandemic world?

**Lars Wolfsheid** 04:17

Well, um, I, I have started gardening a lot more. I've started sewing again, which is something I did you know, in my early 20s, I actually studied fashion design and when the pandemic you know, hit, you know, everything that I had planned was completely canceled and I didn't know what to do with myself. The one thing I knew I had was fabric and elastic, and I started sewing masks. So that was a big, I cleaned up my studio. This is where I am right now actually, and just created this art space and started sewing again and started gardening a lot. Now I've been growing more food than I ever have in my life. I didn't have to buy lettuce or broccoli or anything all winter. And all summer, we were eating zucchini like every day. And so I mean, that has been really, really cool. But at first, I just didn't know what to do with myself at all, and had to completely restructure my days.

**Kit Heintzman** 05:24

I'd be interested in hearing about some of your initial reactions when you first heard about the pandemic.

**Lars Wolfsheid** 05:33

Well, it's, it's interesting. In Austin, of course, we have SXSW, which is a humongous music festival where people from all over the world come. And there's also a tech side of it. So you've got, you know, just hundreds of 1000s of people streaming into Austin. Well, they canceled that, you know, we plan for this for months, we're relying on it for income and for publicity. And, and so we were in denial, the first my first reaction was complete denial. I'm even on the local news station, talking about how, with a couple of co workers talking about how oh, we're gonna still have a local South by Southwest, we're gonna make it happen. You know, I didn't I, our government did not impress how severe this was to us. And I know better, but I trusted them, you know, I thought, oh, you know, this is probably just a flu like the swine flu or something like that. I didn't really realize how lethal it was, you know? So definite denial in the beginning.

**Kit Heintzman** 06:44

Would you I'd love to hear a bit more about how previous impressions of swine flu informed your reaction here.

**Lars Wolfsheid** 06:54

Yeah, I think we were all really scared that swine flu, h1, and one was going to be kind of actually a pandemic, like we're experiencing now. And, yeah, people did get sick. The death rate was lower than this, and it just kind of blew over more quickly. I think it was probably handled better by our government at the time. And, and I actually got it. So you know, it wasn't, and I was very sick. But it, you know, is definitely the worst flu I've ever had. But I didn't know anyone who died of it. And it just seemed like, you know, it wasn't that big of a deal, and that we'd all be fine. And maybe a few elderly people would die. And I mean, I just say I'm so naive and silly. Now. I just feel stupid even saying it, but it's just kind of how I felt at the time.

**Kit Heintzman** 07:50

I do want to validate that that's one of the most common reactions people bring up like this. Like, I think there is a real hindsight 2020 about this moment. I'm curious, what are so 2020 was a pretty big year. And 2021 is also shaping up to be a not small year. I'm wondering what some of the most significant issues have been on your mind over this period of time.

**Lars Wolfsheid** 08:25

Ah, lately, I guess I've gotten my first dose of the vaccine. I'm wondering how effective that's going to be, um, I'm feeling you know, like, I'm not gonna stop wearing masks for a long time. Here in Texas. Our Governor Greg Abbott has lifted Max restrictions, which Austin is still enforcing them. But all over Texas, you know, people have stopped wearing masks. And consequently, a lot of conferences have withdrawn from Texas. So his lifting the mask mandate has kind of had a kind of backfired on him, you know? But, uh, yeah, I'm kind of, I'm wondering where that's going to go. I wonder how long we're going to keep wearing masks. I almost always do catch a cold every winter. And this is the first winter I have it. So I'm like, Man, people are really nasty. I would like to continue this mask wearing thing. I mean, all over Asian countries, people wear masks all the time. And I always thought it was a little strange. I was like, oh, maybe it's just this you know, air has poor quality or whatever. And now I totally get it. I'm like, this makes so much sense. You guys were so far ahead of us and their handling of the pandemic has been so much better than ours. So

**Kit Heintzman** 09:53

Would you say a little about what health means to you?

**Lars Wolfsheid** 10:00

I guess what, before I would say health meant, you know, being able to sleep well at night, breathe well being, you know, physically fit, to be able to do the things that you want to do to not have, you know, to be at least actively trying to deal with pain in your body and take care of yourself, but I think I just don't I don't really know anymore what, what exactly health is because I've just seen people that I would have considered healthy. I'm not deal with getting COVID Very well. And I've seen people that I would think were not healthy people have, you know, very little reaction to it. So I think that as a society, we still don't really understand health very well. I think, you know, I think it's definitely important to maintain a healthy weight. But I think that a healthy weight is different from person to person, there's no set, you know, standard like BMI or things like that. I don't think any of those are real gauges of health.

**Kit Heintzman** 11:28

What are some of the things that you want for your health and the health of people around you? And the more complicated and how do you think we could get there?

**Lars Wolfsheid** 11:39

Oh, gosh, um, well, I, I see a, you know, a lot of fast food and things like that in poor neighborhoods. And I know, I can tell, you know, everyone talks about this, who, you know, who I discuss things with that, um, you know, these, that we are not being given healthy options, you know, from in, you know, in our day to day lives, because, well, I'm a vegan. And I, you know, I see people say all the time, oh, I would be vegan, if it were, if it were the same price as being a carnivore, or you know, an omnivore. But, um, you know, there's so many subsidies on meat, that if there were the same subsidies on plant based foods, it would be just as inexpensive to be a vegan as it is to be a meat eater. So I see a society that's been pushing all these, you know, unhealthy options for the sake of

profit. And also just oppressing people in general, like, you know, saying, Oh, well, you know, you're poor, so you have to eat this. And it's really it's a really, really bad, bad hierarchy of health. And yeah, you said, how, how could I get my, how could I help my friends and people around me how you know what I want to see them have, I would like to see them more educated. I think children need to get better education's on healthy food, we need to stop letting the meat lobbies you know, dictate how and dairy lobbies, like dictate how, you know, we should eat food. And I'm not saying everyone has to be a vegan, but I think you know, that if we can start using smaller farms and treating animals better, treating our environment better, and treating our own health, like not treating our bodies like garbage disposals from a young age, you know, everyone will will be healthier in the society, you know.

**Kit Heintzman** 13:55

May I ask what safety means to you.

**Lars Wolfsheid** 13:58

Huh. Yeah, this is an interesting one. I think being safe means freedom from from fear of oppression and from oppression. And I know a lot of people who have never really felt safe in their lives. I know people who have been affected by the by the the justice system, who were convicted of petty crimes like petty theft when they were young, and because of their race, they were running their whole lives from something that they did as a as a kid, you know, um, and, you know, safety is knowing that your family can protect you and will protect you. And the people you know, and love can and will protect you, and that they are protected and in a position to protect you. And I, you know, I want to feel safe, and I want the people around me to feel safe. So I want and I want to government, and then systems within our government that allow us to feel that way. And a lot of people just don't

**Kit Heintzman** 15:34

would you say a little bit more about what those systems might be?

**Lars Wolfsheid** 15:39

Um, well, there's a there are, well, there's poverty, you know, I, a lot of people experience poverty, many people experience poverty at some point in their lives. And I think we need more structure social structures to help get people out of poverty, we need more stimulus for people we need, you know, we need to, you know, grow our welfare programs and programs for people who, you know, are struggling to make ends meet, no one should have to wonder when their next meal is coming. You know, we that's just a basic necessity that our government should provide us and I think, you know, we have this fear, we have this fear that we're going to end up on the street, the we have a horrible homelessness problem in Austin. And, I mean, it's just, it's so out of control, and it's something that's fixable. And we, you know, we spend all this money every year on our military budget. I mean, that's really the only thing. The only claim to greatness that our country has anymore is that we have this ridiculous, humongous overspend, military. You know, it's just almost it's fascist. You know, it's, it's frightening that that is our priority, where our, you know, everything else in our country is suffering. We are one of the only developed countries without universal health care. We don't take care of our citizens, we have this kind of like isolation, like every man for himself mentality, that is not common in developed countries. And these systems are in place, and we take them for granted. And I think at least some people this year, this past year, have are starting to wake up to how really brainwashed we are and how fascist our government actually is.

**Kit Heintzman** 17:47

I'd love it if you would be willing to share a bit more about what you mean by fascism in that context with the United States?

**Lars Wolfsheid 17:55**

Um, well, yeah. Well, yeah, Donald Trump came in and has, with all these beliefs, open, you know, openly racist and xenophobic. And I and it just seemed wild to me that someone who said the things he said, could could gain the following that he gained. And he has a massive following. Most of them don't actually believe necessarily all of the outrageous incendiary things that he says, but they agree with him on just a few points that they're unwilling to compromise on. And so, they will still vote for him and allow a dictator to control to control them and that is, I mean, he is manipulating them, he manipulated them and continues to do so. You know, merely because they are unwilling to compromise on these couple of issues. And he uses those issues, like, you know, like, not having people come in at our borders and abortion rights. You know, to to get these people to follow him and then he can pass through all these racist agendas that he has, and everyone just kind of goes along with it. And you see liberal people you know, getting concerned and saying look, this is racism, and then all of a sudden those liberal people are targeted as you know, terrorist basically and you know, called called fascists by the actual fascists. And yeah, you have people you know, mass arrests and and people being pepper sprayed in the street and you've got buildings burning and then we're taking the blame for it. Um, you know, the the Anti Fascist schists and Black Lives Matter. Protesters, you know, get the blame for that, when they're there, what they're doing is a reaction to the way we've been treated. I mean, during the Revolutionary War, Americans reacted to the way that they were treated, and nobody calls them, you know, terrorists, you know, they were the heroes that created America.

**Kit Heintzman 20:27**

I'm gonna return to the question of safety. So under COVID-19, we've had a very particular narrative of safety, and what that means is tied to the body. I'm wondering how you've been negotiating those kinds of safety precautions with the people around you.

**Lars Wolfsheid 20:47**

Um, so you mean, like, wearing masks and, and social distancing? Um, yeah, I'm, I'm fortunate that most everyone that I work with, has been very, very serious about wearing masks and social distancing. And, I mean, at first, you know, we really weren't, we didn't know how this virus spread at all. I mean, so we, you know, we'd be wearing gloves and standing like, you know, 15 feet away from each other, if we even saw each other at all, most of us didn't even leave our house. I mean, most of the time, we really don't take unnecessary risks as much as possible. So we will zoom, even if we're, you know, in the same city, and it's totally convenient to meet up, we'll still do zoom meetings. And if we do meet up, which I've we've had to do some recording, because you know, the show must go on somehow. When we're recording, we all wear masks in the studio, people go outside or into different rooms, if, you know, any time is basically just like harm or risk reduction, you know? So, yeah, and of course, I've experienced people who are not respectful of these rules. And it's really, it's interesting, because sometimes you want to just get in their face or but of course, you can't get in their face. But you want to say, what are you doing, but you don't know how, how out there this person is, if they're, if they're not respecting these laws, you really don't know what kind of reaction you're going to get. So when I see someone who's not wearing a mask in public, I just avoid them. You know?

**Kit Heintzman 22:34**

I'd love to hear a little bit more about the recording process on how that's changed under COVID-19.

**Lars Wolfsheid** 22:42

Yeah, it's, you know, of course, we're having to do a lot of sterilizing and sanitizing because when you record there's a lot of body fluids that happen like using microphones and things like that. Um, we you know, we're we do that we make sure we do a lot of sanitizing, keeping windows open, airing out the studio. Everyone wears masks at all times, everyone just spreads out. I think everyone's gotten kind of adapted to being further away from each other, it's just more natural. Now at first, it felt strange, it doesn't feel strange, it feels normal. If someone gets closer than six feet, you have this new radar that you're like, what what? Well, in the bubble, you know, and we just adhere to that. No matter how good friends you are, your your best friend can still give you COVID So yeah, a lot more outdoor activities for sure. Which is great, healthy.

**Kit Heintzman** 23:49

What does touch mean to you?

**Lars Wolfsheid** 23:53

Touch. Um, I guess when you say touch, I just think, you know, kind of, when you're talking to someone, you know, we used to kind of touch each other's shoulders or something like that, when we talk. If you're close to someone and know that they're okay with that. That's something I don't do anymore, even if maybe it doesn't actually spread COVID It already, it already has gotten out of my mind. Um, I also am a licensed massage therapist. So touch and I had already kind of been on a hiatus from that practice when COVID struck. But I've been thinking about kind of reopening my practice before COVID hit and that was one of the things that really went down the tubes. And yeah, I've been very scared to make that kind of contact with people since all this happened. So touch you know really was is a big part of my identity, and healing through touch. And it's, I feel like out of practice now with that, and I feel like touch is an important part of the, you know, it's like the tactile form of communication with people. And we've definitely lost that we've lost a lot of ways to communicate. Since all this happened, you know, we only see half each other's faces. So it's weird.

**Kit Heintzman** 25:30

How are you feeling about the immediate future?

**Lars Wolfsheid** 25:35

I feel a lot more optimistic. I felt extremely terrified all of last year. So you know, from march onward, all of 2020. And I think it started to ease. When we got a new president, I started to suddenly see a future. Um, I started, I realized how much fear and trauma that I had. And I have not, I have not felt like genuinely happy, you know, in a while, and I think recently, I've actually felt genuine happiness, because I actually see a light at the end of the tunnel, now that we do have a vaccine. That seems to be, you know, at least somewhat effective. And, you know, we're talking about reopening the country. Um, you know, I can talk about touring again, it's gonna look a little different. But I mean, that's my life, I love touring, so that traveling is just so important to us and performing. And all of that, is, I finally see that it might happen again, in the immediate future or in the near future. So the future finally looks less bleak.

**Kit Heintzman** 26:57

What are you what are some of your desires for a more long term future?

**Lars Wolfsheid** 27:03

I would like to, since we've completely obliterated the way we experience music. I mean, it's just, we could build something new and better. I would like to see better funding for the arts in our country. Our our current arts budget is beyond pitiful. I mean, there are countries that are, you know, like France, that are a fraction of our population who have art budgets that are similar to ours. Australia, like I mean, there are arts budget is terrible. So I'd like to see more public funding of the arts, I would also like to see more, you know, more grassroots organizations that support the arts, and I'd like to see venue owners pay musicians better. And I really don't like this argument, I'm really tired of people saying, well, you get paid, you know, based on how good you are. And I really don't think that that's fair at all, I think a lot of people who are popular these days aren't that good. They just happen to have the right funding. And you can you can create an image, you know, now and create a sound with the help of a big team. Of course, if you have, you know, 20 musicians writing your songs for you, you're gonna come up with something that people like, you know, I think it's unfair that artists have to be categorized, I mean, you know, just have to be stigmatized as starving artists. I don't think there's any reason that artists should starve. And I think that we see a lot less mental illness in this country, if we gave artists the support that they need them stop acting like, we're just freaks or lazy, or whatever, you know.

**Kit Heintzman** 29:02

So self care has been a nother sort of dominant theme of 2020. And I'm wondering if you'd be willing to share any of the ways that you've been taking care of yourself over the last year?

**Lars Wolfsheid** 29:15

Um, well, I am two years sober from alcohol. So that,

**Kit Heintzman** 29:21

congratulations.

**Lars Wolfsheid** 29:23

Thank you. Thank you so much. It's been absolutely enlightening. So self care was a huge part of my regimen already. And if that is definitely deepened, I've found that I have a lot more rituals, little important things that keep me grounded. keep me sane. And yeah, I, I mean, I take a lot more baths. I really just enjoy a good soak. Now, I'm just like, look, you know, you're working from home. Like you can take a little extra time take a bath. Take care. Have Yourself, I've done a lot of yoga, I've been working out more than I probably have since I was an athlete in high school. So that feels good. I can't I, you know, I've at first wasn't wearing you know, makeup or doing my hair or anything. And I, myself respect just kind of started going down the toilet. And so I really had to, like, realize the actual reasons that I did these things to take care of myself. And I'm not saying that everyone, you know, some people, it's really good for them to like, go without makeup for a while. But for me, I was it was for me too. But um, you know, for me, I'm just like, I like adorning myself and just realizing why I do things that is not just for a public appearance that it is actually just a matter of like how you see yourself how you perceive yourself, how you create yourself. So I realized that a part of my artistry is literally just self presentation, even if I'm only presenting to my own self.

**Kit Heintzman** 31:09



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

**Lars Wolfsheid** 31:27

Um, what we could be doing people in the humanities and social sciences, um, I would say that it is, it is kind of difficult to study human behavior, when we are so isolated. So I think these interviews are definitely important, you know, gathering people on Zoom and recording our thoughts, I think it's really good to encourage people to continue to create and write, and to study the art that is happening during this time, because people are still making art. And yeah, I think just looking at what people create, and how people are adapting is going to be really telling about, you know, our real about our nature, of how we deal with things, of how things will happen in the future, and of how we really should start to try to shape society around how people how people have functioned in this isolation. You know, it is it's a really interesting study to see how we've either thrived or not in this, in this weird isolation we've been in.

**Kit Heintzman** 32:58

And this is my last question. So this is an oral history interview. And I come to it with some assumptions based on my position as a historian, and one of the sort of values for historians of my moment is to care very deeply, or take very seriously what my historical actors thought was important. And so I'm wondering if you could speak to a historian, 50 100 200 years in the future, what kinds of things you would tell them should not be forgotten, and what kinds of stories you want to make sure get preserved?

**Lars Wolfsheid** 33:36

I think it's really important that we not forget that after just a little moment of reflection, we suddenly realize that systemic racism was an incredibly pervasive and horrible issue in our country. And that caused a paradigm shift that, you know, took anti racism, the act of being anti racist from being a suggestion or a dream, to being a requirement for being, you know, a productive and aware citizen, I think it's really important that we do get time to reflect on what what has happened, you know, we are caught in a hustle and bustle of day to day life. And I don't think it should take a pandemic for us to realize that the fabric of the society that we have been living in was built on the backs of oppressed people. So I think we really can't forget that we need to do better by the minorities in our country, by women, by people color, by queer people by indigenous people. We just really, really can't forget that. It can't all be performative. It needs to be a real lasting change.

**Kit Heintzman** 35:02

I want to thank you so much for everything that you shared with me today. And at this point, I just want to open some space. If there's anything you'd like to say that my questions haven't given you the space to say, providing it here.

**Lars Wolfsheid** 35:19

Um, yeah, I just want to I just want to reiterate, you know, that our government really messed this one up, they kept passing the buck down, down lower and lower until it was left on local people to really make decisions for ourselves businesses to actually have to decide that they were shutting down and then not receiving enough support. I've seen so many businesses go under small businesses, and yet you see companies like Amazon, just thriving, and that's disgusting. And we we need to do better our government