

Transcript of Interview with Kara Montermoso by Kit Heintzman

Interviewee: Kara Montermoso

Interviewer: Kit Heintzman

Date: 06/08/2022

Location (Interviewee): San Francisco, California

Location (Interviewer):

Transcribed By: Erika Groudle

Some of the things we discussed included:

First hearing about the pandemic and feeling like it was so far away, having a 12 year and 15 year old child and their reactions to the pandemic, mental health, waitlists, insurance and financial inaccessibility, the dangers of seeking out healthcare during COVID, normalizing mental health needs, exercise and mental health, lost milestones for younger people. Wondering about what the future will look like for children, climate change, abortions and choice, attending the 2017 Women's March, gender divisions in childrearing and other household labor pre- and mid-pandemic; emotional labor.

Kit Heintzman 00:02

Hello.

Kara Montermoso 00:04

Hello.

Kit Heintzman 00:05

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

Kara Montermoso 00:11

My name is Kara Montermoso. It is June 8, 2022 around 2pm. And I'm in San Francisco, California.

Kit Heintzman 00:23

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

Kara Montermoso 00:32

Yes.

Kit Heintzman 00:34

Would you please start by introducing yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening to this.

Kara Montermoso 00:40

So I'm Kara, I'm in San Francisco, and then native Californian, although I spent about 12 years living on the East Coast, eight of them in New York, where I met my born and bred New York husband. And we had a daughter, and then came back to California, because my parents still live here, and then had another baby. My kids are now

15, and 12. So there's been a lot of life changes in the decade or so. I also worked full time. I've been working full time, since I could work. And definitely during COVID. Some interesting tidbit is I've been working remotely for the last 15 years. So all the new things that came about in COVID, with remote work were not new to me. It was very interesting to watch, a mass movement of people sort of like walk into that into that life and into that lifestyle, albeit under very different circumstances than I did. And I, what I do for a living is not really the career I fell into working sort of administrative HR, Chief of Staff sorts of things at a nonprofit is not really where I ever saw myself. I never saw myself as a career person at all. And in light of that, I do a couple of things on the side. We're in the gig economy. So you know, that's the thing and these days. So I do a lot of youth sports coaching. That's really like where my passion is. I'm a yoga instructor. I studied massage therapy. At one point, I was a massage therapist at one point. I have hopes of writing a book at some point in my life. I don't know that's about it.

Kit Heintzman 02:39

Tell me a story about life and the pandemic for you.

Kara Montermoso 02:43

Can you repeat that life?

Kit Heintzman 02:45

Life and the pandemic, tell me a story about it?

Kara Montermoso 02:49

Life in the pandemic is long. It it feels endless. I think in the beginning there was a panic mode about how much like how can we possibly go undergo so much change and with no warning in such a short amount of time, and I can't believe the stay at home for two weeks, and they kick the kids out of school. And now it feels like this endless managing of expectations. Where I just want to I want to still find a way to feel like life is still worth something and has meaning and purpose. But at the same time. I tired of being disappointed. I think or having expectations, having reality sort of fall short of expectations. I think it kind of a lot of different moments where I'd hit home but my daughter missed her eighth grade graduation, she graduated in 2020. And so that was that was heartbreaking as a parent clearly like you, there's this milestone that you've been waiting for, for a lot of time, you know, your kids been waiting for for a long time. And then it just the whole thing got like just like, pulled out from underneath for, you know, not a good reason but a good reason. And then having to start from freshman year in this very convoluted manner of at home and then hybrid and cohorts and you know, all those sorts of things. So I think that's, that's where I just got really sad. For I think that's I think where most of my sentence was was like watching my kids miss these things that felt very quintessential to a childhood and quintessential to these rites of passage that we've constructed, you know, for ourselves. And, you know, they would just have different clearly such different stories to tell, you know, their kids or their friends, you know, down the line. And my daughter also she has she had the depressive tendencies previously. And the COVID factor really exacerbated it went into a very, very deep, dark place. And I definitely went into panic mode of sorts, like, how do we get out of this, and what a village it took to get her out and get her the help that he needed. But also realizing like, how privileged I am, that I sort of had an inkling of what to do, I knew where to reach out, I have insurance, I had money to pay for medication, have a very understanding employer that, you know, gave me flexibility to take care of what I needed to and that contrasted with like, all the devastation and despair and death that was happening at the same time, because her episode happened in like, January of 2021. And that was like, you know, the second big wave and

vaccines had just been released, but really weren't available to everybody. And so it was very strange to feel like I was doing what I, what I could do, and what I needed to do to protect my little bubble. But very helpless, looking at it in relationship to the sort of many other people's lives and what was going on sort of on a grander scale. So when I think of COVID, I just think of yeah, a loss of innocence, a loss of milestones. loss in general, you know, on so many different levels, personally, that that's, that's what I, when I think back, there are certain moments with my kids that I'm definitely gonna, like, be like, oh, that was that was not, that was not fun.

Kit Heintzman 07:00

How much do you think your children understood about what was going on?

Kara Montermoso 07:09

I think my kids were young enough, where they still had general trust and faith in institutions and systems and in adults, you know, like we were, we were doing what they needed to do, and this is how it had to be. But, you know, sort of, kind of briefly also old enough to recognize what they were missing, and where things were really twisted. You know, like, why was the President saying certain things and, you know, like, why were policies going in certain directions? And why were some groups of people like, having it so bad? While other people got to go on their yacht, and run away from everything. So I think that, that that that was a challenge to try to explain that, like, yes, there, there are systems and we are supposed to look out for one another. And, you know, there is sort of a safety net and a protective thing. But like, this is what happens when you don't check on those things, you know, regularly to make sure that they're actually going to operate under moments of crisis. And the way it was so- Oh hi Dug [Laughs]. So I think that there was my I think, so my son was, I guess, about to turn 10. And my daughter was 13. And so I think for that particular age group, when I look back, like the under fives had, it's so hard, right? Because they didn't understand anything. And then their village went away in terms of like health and childcare and all those stresses. And then I think like the older like the teenagers, like the high schoolers and young adults coming out of college, they have this other perception of they already had, like some perspective on the world and could see like, how messed up it was, but this particular age group of this, like, you know, I feel like eight, eight to 13 year olds got trapped in this very sort of limbo place of having enough ability to understand, but not enough world perspective, to really like, absorb it, and sort of, you know, kind of accepted, there was a lot of like, why do we have to stay home again, like, why can't we just, you know, like, they never fought me on masks, which was great. Like, they understood the science of it, and they believe in that stuff, which I'm grateful for. But, you know, it was like, well, if everybody's masked, why can't we do this? Or if we just meet up with this one person, like, why can't we do that? You know, what if we stay far enough apart, you know, being things like that were, I think it was the everyday thing. That was really tedious. And it still feels kind of endless, right, we're still masking under certain conditions, and we still mask under conditions where other people tell us, we don't have to, you know, and, and school is still weird. And there's, you know, yeah, there's this time that that you can't make up, you can't make up, you pass through childhood, once, you know, like, I was in my 40s. Like, my, the difference between, you know, 43, and 44. And 45, like, doesn't feel as significant as it does when you're like 13 and 14 and 15. Like, there's, there's just stuff that, you know, supposed to happen expected to happen anticipated to happen. That once you miss it, you don't, you don't get a, you don't get to do it again, you don't just you Don't postpone your graduation. You know, until next year, all those people don't come back suddenly and into that particular emotional state that they were in, you know, had everything been normal, you can't you can't recreate that stuff. You can suspend a vacation or whatever, and go later. But yeah, there are certain milestones that you just, you can't make up. And that's, I feel the loss of I feel the loss of that, for sure. I feel like that's gonna, that's gonna follow my kids. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 11:34

In what ways were reaching out for resources for your daughter and her depression different because of the pandemic, then in circumstances where you may have had more mobility.

Kara Montermoso 11:47

Oh, so clear. So we saw her decline. For a few weeks, I just didn't recognize it until after the fact that that's what was happening. I couldn't tell if it was just like, teenage angst, sort of not going to school, like not seeing your friends sort of normal, normal things, or if it was like super. But it clearly got a lot deeper. And so, you know, by the time I came to that realization, and like, I almost took her to the ER one night, and I think, possibly under normal circumstances, I would have taken her in. But COVID, right. I wasn't sure that that was the smartest thing. And I was very afraid that if I took her in one way or the other, it was going to be traumatic, right, she was going to have this memory of going to the ER, and one way or the other, it was going to be traumatic. And if I was wrong, if I had like, overreacted or something to that effect. I felt like I was gonna break this trust with her that I would never be able to rebuild. And that scared me because I think that mental health issues might follow her her whole life. And so I don't want to sort of have this one bad traumatic experience as a kid sort of color, her ability to find resources like in the future, so I didn't but the next day, I called her pediatrician. And I was like, I need a referral, like ASAP to psychiatrists. And she's like, of course, she, you know, I connect with the psychiatrist office, and I explained the story. And the nurse is like, of course, we absolutely should see her. And I said, great, how can we make an appointment, you know, and she's like, well, our waiting list right now is six months long. And I literally my eyes were tearing up, like, I almost broke down on the phone, because I was like, my kid doesn't have six months. Like, I'm not, I can't manage the situation like this, by myself for six months. I was like, put on the waiting list. And you know, I sort of wrack my head. And then I started reaching out to my friends. And I said, does anybody have a psychiatrist or know of another place, because I just felt like, you know, the hospital system, we were in whatever it was gonna be the same at all these big places. And we were gonna have to go private, you know. And so that's what ended up happening. I got a recommendation from a friend whose daughter used somebody and I called and explained, and she's like, of course, we'll see her in two days. And I said, great. But the visit costs \$750. Right? And, of course, you know, I'm in a place where I could be like, of course, you know, like, I don't care, like the help is much more necessary than anything that \$750 can buy. But I know that there were kids that were in the same boat families that were in the same boat, that in no way in hell could have afforded themselves that to take advantage of that. That moment, you know, and again, just this contrast of like, feeling like it I can protect my bubble. But like, I couldn't protect, it couldn't really help other people, what am I going to do, like send every other, you know, to the psychiatrist, like, that's not realistic either. So that was, you know, really, I, you know, if there's like a silver lining in that story or something that's good that's coming out of it. And it's probably true, even in mainstream media is that my daughter, and I had already been talking much more candidly about mental health issues before COVID. And so when I explained, like the difference between her current counselor who was just like a behavioral therapist, and like a psychiatrist, and the, like this potential need for medication and so forth, like we had a little bit of a foundation already, like a little bit of an understanding where it wasn't so scary that she was going to, like, push back. She's there, I think, because we had a little bit of background already, there was an acceptance for what had to happen. And because of how well gratefully she's done, since that time, talking about mental health is is much easier, but it's much easier also, because it's out there, right? All the news articles that are out there, they talk about it in school, they have like a wellness counselor, and things like that. So, you know, if anything, that's been good, I think, for society to realize that. Yeah, everybody's, well, not everybody, but many people are really good at hiding their mental health issues.

My daughter included, it wasn't until she sort of like, almost went off the cliff that we really understood what was happening. And so I think that's, you know, it is brought to the forefront, like many other things that COVID brought to the forefront, like working parents are burnt out, you know, like, that's the thing. Well, they were burnt out before COVID, you know, they didn't have any support structures before COVID. But now, everybody really sees what happens when you don't have that, like people can only cover for so long. And then once sort of like floodgates open, you realize, like, how actually critical a lot of those would be if we had had them in place before.

Kit Heintzman 17:29

Who was supporting you while you were going through this?

Kara Montermoso 17:31

Oh, that's such an interesting question. Because I am that personality that hides it so well and keeps everybody else together. You know, in some ways, you try to protect those around you, right? Like those, you don't want to burden anybody with your stuff. And so I definitely took that route. I think the one place that I really leaned was with my own therapist. So fortunately, I have had a therapist, pre COVID. And so I really had an established relationship with somebody. And I don't know who they talk to you to take on everybody else's stuff. And then they got to, like a circle, right? All the therapists are just talking to each other. But I definitely, like kept up with my therapy appointments. My employer was really great at, you know, recognizing, like, we do important work, but we don't, you know, we're not neurosurgeons we're not like saving people's lives in that way. And so really how important is work, given all the other things that that people have to balance, so it was nice to at least have that responsibility. And that sense of accountability, but not necessarily like this end all be all stress, like, I wasn't a nurse, you know, like, I wasn't a doctor. But I was the director of HR for my organization at the time. So there was a different level of stress. Just given my role, right? This, like, your job is to take care of people. And so now I had to, like sort of take care of people in this way that I had no playbook for. And it was sort of like, flying by the seat of my pants trying to figure out like, how do you check in with people that feels like authentic and comfortable, but not too intrusive? But also where you're getting enough information? You know, where they feel like they can be candid with you and you know, all those things. So the stress at work was really was really different because I had never had this. I'd never had a crisis like that before where you are like taking care of people on so many different levels and realizing like how interrelated they are. You know, my therapist was one I think I tried to, I think with my parents and my in laws, I think we tried not to have them worry. There was that sort of thing. I had, you know, I had text like a text thread with, like my two best friends from high school, and we would pow all the, you know, just a place to vent, not necessarily, like problem solved, but just a place to vent and not feel judged. But I think it took a while, for my husband and I to figure out how to how to lean on each other in a way that felt like we could take care of each other, but also take care of ourselves, and then sort of like, ironing our way out through all of our own emotions about what was going on. And, you know, there was like, COVID, and there's an election and our daughter's depressed, and school is crazy, you know, and we're both trying to work and everybody's in the house. And, you know, so that, that took a while, I would say that, it actually probably came to a head about what was that like, eight or nine months, and when my daughter's depression hits that, like that peak, where, like, the priority became so crystal clear, about, like, what we needed to do as a family, right? Like, everything else was like secondary, it was like, get the kid this help that she needs and support her through that process. And, you know, definitely our, our son like, bore the brunt of that he definitely became like second fiddle. And we sort of had to, you know, in my own ways, I felt like I had to make it up to him later, like a little bit more time, like a little bit more attention, and to having to explain her episodes to him was really confusing.

Because she would just like, cry for no reason, she wouldn't come out of a room or she stopped eating, or she'd come to the table, and then she burst into tears and leave, you know, and to be like, you know, you can't go so deep into all the things with a 10 year old, but you have to give them something because they're, they're watching it, right, they're seeing it happen right in front of them. So my support system, I think, was pretty tight, it was pretty tight knit, it was very personal, it was very intimate.

Kara Montermoso 22:35

You know, I saw lots of things on social media and people, you know, different groups coming about and, you know, commentaries on people's instagram and facebook or whatnot. But I've been a fairly private person my whole life. So that was never really that was never really a platform for me to to go find support.

Kit Heintzman 23:00

What's marriage meant to you during the pandemic?

Kara Montermoso 23:02

Oh, what a good question a marriage is definitely the the concept of the partnership in marriage has been so much more apparent. Because as, as the work from home parent for so long, and my husband works an in person job, like it has to be in person. I was already the default, primary, primary over giver, I would, you know, I was already doing 80% of the work of like, the physical work probably, and 95% of the emotional work because of the emotional labor because, you know, I was socialized in the 80s when, you know, the examples for what, you know, women's roles in marriage were definitely like the silent emotional labor person so I've been working my way through that part. But you know, it sort of took a crisis to realize that like, I can't do this, I can't do this. I can't do this by myself. I can't do this in the same with the same MO of just put my head down, work harder, sacrifice more be more selfless, like, it doesn't, it can't work like that. It's not sustainable. To be in that survival mode for months on end. Is not realistic or healthy? Or anything so it you know, for me as that people pleaser over giver personality type This crisis was really helpful in that strange way where I had to be like, actually, I can't help the kids with Zoom school and do their homework with them. You know, like, I can't, I can't do it or not one thing that came up, I'm not doing dishes anymore. I mean, it sounds like a little thing. But like, I'm the one who cooks dinner, right? I'm the one who plans the menus, and I cook dinner, and I used to clean up. And I was like, this is nuts. This is bananas. Like, why am I doing this? So had to, you know, realize that I should not be here just to serve my family. My family must have been, so I don't do dishes at night anymore. And I leave things in the sink all the time. And somebody else folds the laundry, like, I'm not going to do that anymore. So it's been, you know, this odd place of like, trying to reclaim what could have been mine to begin with in terms of giving myself the space to ask for that space. You know, it just it just really highlighted.

Kit Heintzman 26:16

Do you remember when you first heard about COVID-19?

Kara Montermoso 26:21

Yes, it was. sometime in February. It was in January, when like China went into lockdown mode, maybe even like, in December. So it's like came through the news. But it was like that, that far off thing, right? It happens. It happens over there. Right? It's never gonna, we would never let that happen here. Right? Like there was a lot of that perception. And then, interestingly, two weeks before everything shut down. So I think it was like that last weekend, in February, I held a dinner party at my house for like, 10 Moms from my son's class. It was just like a

fun, like, hey, let's do dinner at the house, and whatever. So they all came over. And we were all indoors without masks, eating together, which sounds like crazy. And at the end of the, at the end of the dinner party, one of the women came up to me and she's like, you know, it's so funny that like, went through this whole dinner, this whole party, and we didn't want to talk about the upcoming election or COVID. And I was like, oh, yeah, like, interesting. There, we were in our little bubble, just like so protected from everything that happened out there. And then the following week, I, my family went to go visit some other family. And we were on a plane. And this guy comes on with a mask, like a surgical mask. And I just remember looking at it and be like, Wow, that's kind of crazy. Like, what does he think? You know, and, you know, we that was like, the first weekend in March or something. And then by the time we got home, it was like March 10, or something like that. And the kids went to school on the 11. And then they were like, you're going home and you're not coming back for two weeks. And we were just like, what is happening? Like, how could they schools are all going to be closed for two weeks. Like, that's crazy. You know, and so that's what I remember. That's like, that's the chain of events that will stay in my head. Like, I heard about it, it was far away, never happened here. And then, like a mom mentioning, like, I can't believe we didn't talk about COVID. But it was so far off. It was never going to come here, you know, and then guy on a plane with a mask, which clearly I will not get on a plane without a mask out. And yeah, and then the kids getting sent home and you know, thinking it was just two weeks of like, this is gonna be two weeks of like, easy school.

Kit Heintzman 29:07

What were some of your early reactions?

Kara Montermoso 29:13

To so which parts? [Laughs]

Kit Heintzman 29:17

I guess to lock down, like what when things became clearly serious.

Kara Montermoso 29:30

You know, in some ways, I felt like it was almost just a little bit novel. You know, like, are this gonna we're gonna do this for two weeks, and there's gonna be lines at the grocery stores and somehow we're gonna find toilet paper, you know? And, you know, I guess we'll just play outside, you know, and take a lot of walks. Because when they said two weeks, it almost felt like, yeah, we're just gonna figure this out in two weeks. And then I'm not a science person like I didn't really understand like the chain reaction of events that were actually already in motion, but were not being fully disclosed to us to begin with, you know. So I think it was just kind of novel. And then I think, I think when schools like said, like, we're not coming back. That was like a whole different set of emotions. Because there had, you know, in the beginning, it was novel for everybody. You know, everybody was finding a way to make you everybody kind of went into their own survival mode. Everybody thought that there was an endgame. Right, there was like an ending like an endpoint. And I think when schools closed, that was a totally different signal. That, well, we don't know exactly when the endgame will be, and like, how do you, you have to like, reorient so many expectations, you know, we were heading into graduation, we were heading into the summer, and to just be like, well, maybe none of those things will happen. Or maybe they will. But some people right now are making various stupid choices that are making it impossible for us to know, you know, whether this stuff can happen or not. So a little incredulous. Definitely a little bit of just disbelief like the world can go into lockdown. I didn't know we could. I didn't know we could just stop, you know. And clearly not everyone was

stopping right? Like, police. We're not stopping first responders. We're not stepping hospitals. We're not stopping groceries. We're not stopping like not everything was stopping. But I think for the privileged percent of us who could bubble ourselves. It was- Yeah, a lot of disbelief.

Kit Heintzman 32:08

Beyond the pandemic, what have been some of the social and political issues on your mind over the last couple of years?

Kara Montermoso 32:16

Can you repeat that? Beyond the pandemic, so things that are on my mind, pre pandemic mode?

Kit Heintzman 32:26

No, during the pandemic, so-

Kara Montermoso 32:28

Oh!

Kit Heintzman 32:28

During there were still all of these other things going on? What were some of those that were taking up space in your mind and heart?

Kara Montermoso 32:37

I would say the issues related to my kids are probably the biggest ones. And I realized that may not be true for other 40 year olds that don't have kids. But for me, it was just this, like, how do you how do you start dreaming of a future when it's really hard to ground yourself in anything stable right now. I remember being in high school and thinking like I could, you know, I can do or be anything I could live anywhere I could have, you know, I could sort of like imagine this life of movement and motion. And the only barrier is sort of being like, my own ability, or my own energy or my own money, right, like to prevent you from doing whatever it is that you want to do. And I sort of can't imagine what that's like for kids now. Because I have a hard time imagining, like, what my own future looks like, you know, even 10 years from now, like, what are what are my options? Like? What are my opportunities? What will work look like, for my kids? In 15 years? Right? I mean, when I even think about remote work, it has worked for me. But that's only because I spent the first 10 ish years of my working life in an office or you know, in a place with people. So if they choose a career or choose jobs that are not necessarily like in person jobs, you know, what does that mean for their work life and how they and how they envision themselves in in a workplace. I'm really I'm very curious to see how even how this remote work, thing, movement, whatever, like, pans out over the next decade, because right now, we all think it works. But that's because the vast majority of us still operate with existing relationships with pre existing relationships, right? We all went into remote world knowing who We were going with that, I think as you know, in this whole thing, it was a great resignation and people losing jobs. And, you know, definitely like this whole cohort of young people coming out of college over the next, you know, five to 10 years. Without that base of what work, what being in a work environment is like. That seems strange to me, like I, I sort of can't imagine I do it now, I onboard people remotely, you know, but all of the people I've been, like, all the people that we've hired recently, have all are all coming from other workplaces. So they already have some, like some employment history, some sense of what, what work looks like. And I can't even imagine leaving my job and like going somewhere else where I'd be remote from ever like,

that seems like strange. So I think the world of work and how, like, how what that even looks like in the future is, is there. Definitely issues of, you know, parenting and working parents, and that sort of safety net has been there forever. For me. Having lived through that era, of where my employer has been pretty generous with, like, my parental leave, like, when I had my two kids, I got three months off paid, my job was protected. No problem. My husband got two weeks. And in his first job, he was a freelancer. So he got nothing. He just like he took, I was like, you can't take more than 10 days, because we can't afford that for you to take more than 10 days, you know. But that was crazy. Because it was like, of course, he should have been home. You know, like, of course, like, or he should have been home after I went back to work, like there should have been some trade offs. So I think that safety net component is and how we support parents is going to be so critical moving forward. Recently, I've been reading a lot of articles in the New York Times about climate change. That I say that seems so devastating, which almost like seems like a slap in the face to climate change. Because I think I'm overwhelmed by the potential repercussions, we've entered conditions that we've created. Like, like, we're just going to implode really soon, you know, like, we're gonna run out of water, we're gonna burn all the land, and we won't be able to breathe. Like, I feel like all those things could all happen very soon. Maybe not quite in my lifetime. Maybe my kids lifetime, which seems like, Whoa, that can all happen like within the next 50 to 80 years. And I think some of these models that are out there are basically showing like we could really wreck significant parts of the world. And we could be, you know, certainly in disrupting, you know, food supply chains, and all sorts of things and that time, so I think there's, there's that component. There are many other definitely, like worthy and worthwhile issues that pass through my mind. I could name all the social ills that are out there. But I think when I think like, most immediately, I'm basically looking at what is the future of my kids lives look like? Like, and that doesn't even you know, we're not talking about, you know, income disparities and wealth inequities, or racial issues. My kids are biracial. Like, what does that mean? I'm not even talking abortion, I would say that was huge for me, as a woman, as someone who has a daughter as someone who had friends who had abortions, when they were young, like, you know, in their high school and college days as a matter of necessity, and choice, but I was like, you know, I walked through my teens and my 20s knowing that I had that choice. And that was, I wouldn't say like, liberating per se, but you know, it comes with it, of sort of peace of mind, right. And to think that, you know, my daughter's 15 She's about to enter that era, or that like age, you know, period of like, the next 15 years, you know, 15 or 20 years even of like she should decide when she if and when she wants Have a child at any moment, you know, in the next 25 years, and to think that maybe that choice won't be available to her, or will be very difficult to obtain is pretty scary. Hopefully, so this stay in California for ever and California will continue to be a place that protects that kind of thing. But you know, I just think, in general, like women just bear the brunt of so much crap. That to think that we're going to lose more ground, or any ground it's kind of heartbreaking and overwhelming to the point where you almost don't want to think about it, because it feels like we wouldn't ever let that happen, right, we would never let that happen. And here we are, we are like it is happening. And that's crazy. I took and I think about this also, because I took my daughter to the women's march in 2017, in DC, and we went with, like, my best friend and her daughter, because I thought like, you know, after that election after the 2016 election, you know, so much uproar, and I was like, we're gonna be part of this, like the beginning of this thing where we don't let like crazy things happen, especially to women. And it's like, what has happened between then and now feels almost backwards. Like, I don't I don't know that we've made strides in the in the direction in the hopes that we had, we've, in some ways lost a lot of ground. on a, on a public front, have we made up ground, you know, on these more individual relationship things, you know, are women are feeling more empowered, they're, you know, they're more women, businesses, people or women are finding their way out of bad marriages and so forth. So maybe there is something to be said for that. But when I think about like, as a matter of policy, like we haven't been helping, I don't on on a really momentous scale, I don't think

Kit Heintzman 42:31

what does the word safety mean to you?

Kara Montermoso 42:42

It safety means I have a place to go. If things get too complicated, and I say that is like a psychological safety and emotional safety. A physical safety, for sure. But when I think about what, they're all related, in some ways, right? Like when you don't have the physical safety, then the emotional psychological safety kind of go out the window to like Maslow's like theory of whatever that pyramid thing. Like, you need a roof over your head first before like the other things come. Yeah, I and I, I do think of myself as wanting to protect that to the extent that I can. So where I started is like the physical safety. So you, you put the money under the mattress or in a bank, or something, you know, to build a little bit of physical safety. And then the emotional safety is all about the village, right? It's about figuring out how to build that village who you want in that village where you can turn. And that's, you know, I think there were lots of stories about the pandemic showing people like who the real friends are and who was really in their community and so forth. And I have to say that, for me, it was I didn't gain or lose any friends in the pandemic. Actually, no, that's not true. I think I gained a friend. I didn't lose any friends in the pandemic, but I had a very tight circle to begin with. I'm an introvert so it wasn't hard to have a small circle. But I did gain a real friend in the course of that pandemic and sort of like that, living through that like shared experience. So yeah, for me, the Sci Fi is about the ability to get out of some, you know, to get from a place of overwhelm to a place that feels more stable. Even if it's momentary, you know?

Kit Heintzman 45:07

Would you share something about how that new friendship emerged?

Kara Montermoso 45:11

Oh, yeah, so, um, my son's best friend in grade school, changed schools at the start of fourth grade, which was like in the fall of 2019. So he moved away not moved like half an hour, like across the bridge, so far enough, where they weren't seeing each other every day for sure. But not so far that we couldn't get to them. And then in the pandemic, I would say like after, I would say, starting maybe like June 2020, after we sort of like had some established protocols, and people were like, emerging from their bubbles to make their little pods of people that they were willing to interact with, under certain conditions. We made him and his mom, part of that sort of safety safe pod, right? Like, we'll go with you, because we know that you're not out with 100 people every day, they were keeping their family pretty bubbled also. So we were willing to share this like little bit so that the boys could see each other. And that mostly involve like hanging out at the park and playing basketball or going on hikes. Everything was outdoors, never went indoors or anything. And his mom and I were, yeah, we were like, sort of friends by circumstance. Prior to COVID, you know, it's because our sons were friends, right? So coordinating lots of playdates, and then that's hanging out that sort of thing. But because we started having to make this very intentional effort of keeping the boys together, then we had to see each other. So we started spending more and more time together, because we would go on hikes with the boys and so the boys would run off, or they trailed behind. And lead ended up converting a lot. And finding, finding that it wasn't surprising that our boys were friends, because we clearly had so much, there was so much shared space between us that it wasn't surprising that the boys had this connection, because they sort of came from the you know, the same, a similar kind of environment for for that friendship to brew. And so it just, it kept. Now we went from seeing them once every other week to train to see them every week. And once they were out of school. And you know, there were no

summer camps or anything, we were trying to make it twice a week. And so it just sort of like snowballed, and then even once things like opened up, and the kids went back to school, and, you know, they had after school activities and so forth. We were still trying to make this, like, every weekend, you know, once on a Saturday or on a Sunday or once every other weekend trying to find them this snippet of time to get together but realizing it was really just for us. You know, it was like, we found a lot of camaraderie with each other. So that and then it's turned into into sort of more than that, you know, like we we communicate on things that don't involve the boys at all right? It, it sort of morphs out of like, oh, let's get together on Saturday. And then suddenly, I'm like, texting on Tuesday, I was like, I had this terrible thing at work, you know, or whatever. And then, you know, and then sort of like building from those those like small connections. And actually, it's interesting that you ask because next week, the two boys are going to the sleepaway camp, and we have to drive them a few hours. And someone's like, oh, man, we had to like drive all the way there and like drive all the way back and one day, and she's like, it'd be really nice if we could just like, stay there for a couple days. And I was like, yeah, that'd be so nice. And she's like, do you want to stay there for one night? And then like, we can, like go do the outdoorsy things that they do, but not with them, obviously. And I was like, yeah, that'd be amazing. So you know, I haven't done you know, I felt like I felt like I got a friend you know, like this person wants to spend like real time with me not just time that they have to spend with me because like we're schleping the boys around. But other times so that's yeah, that's kind of how that one came about.

Kit Heintzman 49:38

What are some of the ways you've been taking care of yourself over the last couple of years?

Kara Montermoso 49:46

So many different things, but I've always been like a, an athlete slash exercise person, lots of different things. But um, running has probably been the most constant for like the last 20 years, and my running has taken on different levels of intensity and reason and meaning over the years. But it became really critical, I think, in the, especially early in COVID, when it was like locked down, San Francisco still allowed you to go outside, obviously. So, you know, it wasn't, for me, it wasn't enough to just like, walk with the kids like, actually, like needed to run it. For me, it helps whether it's real or psychosomatic, I don't know. But running has helped me manage my own depression. And that I feel like that has been true for the last, like 10 years, when I sort of made that connection, because there was a time when I stopped running. And I started and I just feel bad for probably a host of reasons, but I attributed it to the running. And so I make sure to run every day. And sometimes that means like half a mile a mile. Sometimes that means four miles, like, I don't really, I don't really go out with like, oh, I gotta like beat this time, or I gotta be out for X amount of miles or anything, it's more just like, I gotta get my feet moving, because there is something for me about my feet hitting the ground. And it literally grounding me, there's, for me, there's like a connection. And it's something that I, I made that connection when I was in my yoga teacher training, about just how, you know, different types, sort of manage their emotions and their psychological states, and that there is something about your feet hitting the ground that is different from walking. That can be grounding. If you're too, like, not flighty, but if if you, you know, if you can get if you get emotional very easily, if you get a little like scattered or overwhelmed or panicky, and that way, hitting the ground supposedly is supposed to be very good for you. So I've taken that to heart and I keep running those that's definitely like been the constant. And it's the, and then, in some ways, making sure my kids got out and did something every day, and didn't just sit at home and eat Cheetos all day in front of their screens. Five hours of school followed by five hours of you know, PlayStation, making sure that they got out to was like really important in it. Again, it's many different forms over time. But that was one thing that I really used to make sure that I stayed okay. I'm in

journaler. So I also like use my journal as a way to vent stuff. I saw my therapist over zoom, of course. For you know, different levels of intensity over over the time. Yeah, one point it was like weekly, and then it was like, every other week, and then it was like monthly and then it was like, I'll just call you when I need you to schedule. So it's gone, like, back and forth. And I think much like my exercise in general, but COVID definitely had, yeah, it made me more flexible. And it made me like, be more present, because I had to stop anticipating what could or should happen, because it kept changing, right? They would say one thing one week, and then three days later, they would say something else. And you know, the vaccines are coming out, they're coming out, you know, in three weeks, and then I was like, no, they're coming out in six weeks. And then they're like, yes, but not for under 15. But like not for under 12. You know and so, you know, you just got to be like I started just telling my kids I was like when they would ask like do you think that you know X Y or Z is gonna happen? I'll be like, I don't know we'll just wait until it happens. You know, instead of like, be like well yes and then when it happens we'll do this or if it doesn't happen then we'll do that it was more like when it's real we'll deal with it and until it becomes real unless you think you have like real influence on it happening or not. We're just gonna let it go. Cuz why we're going to expend our energy in a direction that is really very hamster wheel esque, you know, instead of like running yourself in circles about all the different all the different ways it can turn out because he you Don't know. And so just hang out. I would say the other the one other thing we did last spring. So it had been like a year is when the kids got to spring break. We did like a little staycation. We just like we did like a little Airbnb rental on the coast for like three days. And it wasn't like a big thing. We were like an hour, you know, from our house or whatever. But I was like, I think we all just need to change the scenery. Like we need to sleep in different beds, we need to wake up somewhere else. Like we need to get pizza from a different place, like, whatever it is, like we have just been in here for too long, without enough, you know, without enough stimulation, really. And so I think that I think the kids really appreciated that even though it was like, you know, it was like a fairly small gesture, but I think I could see that the, the tediousness of the sameness that was happening was yeah, it was kind of grating on all of us. It still does sometimes, right? Like there's still we still are limited in certain ways. Not in as many ways but in certain ways.

Kit Heintzman 56:20

I want to thank you so much for the generosity of your time and your answers. Those are all of the questions I have for the moment but if there's anything you'd like to share that my questions haven't made space for please take this chance to do so.

Kara Montermoso 56:36

Um, no, I don't think so. I think that was a lots of parts of me there.

Kit Heintzman 56:43

Thank you so much.

Kara Montermoso 56:45

All right. Thanks Kit.