

Transcript of Interview with Velvet Moore-Owen by Kit Heintzman

Interviewee: Velvet Moore-Owen

Interviewer: Kit Heintzman

Date: 10/21/2022

Location (Interviewee): Oak Creek, Wisconsin

Location (Interviewer):

Transcribed By: Angelica S Ramos

Some of the things we discussed include:

The importance of Black history, of learning the real history of the USA. Traveling in February 2020, and the sense that things were normal, but also a little different. Masking on planes pre-pandemic for health reasons; white men commenting on the behavior. Difference masking norms state-to-state. Race, racism, and masking; whiteness and the feeling of invincibility. Decipher “bullshit from truth”; following advice out of the Harvard Medical School. Refusing to be treated by certain medical professionals because of their COVID views/policies. Working in corrections and retiring in 2016; seeing colleagues die of COVID. Losing a colleague who was a few months from retiring to COVID, Sgt. Michael Binns; corrections officers threatened with retaliation for coming in sick. Having family members who refused vaccination (an aunt named Grace, an uncle named Tommy, and a cousin named Gloria) die of COVID; the death of family members one has little connection with. American entitlement, entitled to die. Shopping for a new home out of state during the pandemic; enforcing safety boundaries with contractors. Politics and COVID management: doctors Fauci and Brooks. Liars running for public office; white politicians not facing consequences for their actions. Daughter graduating from high school during the pandemic; oldest daughter doing law school online; spouse graduating with her doctorate from Harvard during the pandemic. Living with cats (Tiger & Juani); traveling long distances for veterinary care from Dr. Amy Rogowski. Working with children in sports who’ve had COVID; the impact of COVID on children. Regular COVID testing. Considering moving to Canada. The enduring legacies of colonialism and slavery and the impact of history on the youth today.

Kit Heintzman 00:00

Hello, would you please state your name, the date, the time and your location?

Velvet Moore-Owen 00:04

My name is Velvet Moore-Owen it is October 21, 2022. And I'm located in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. And it is 11:05 am here.

Kit Heintzman 00:15

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

Velvet Moore-Owen 00:32

Yes, I do.

Kit Heintzman 00:33

Thank you so much for being here with me. Would you just start by introducing yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening? What would you want them to know about you?

Velvet Moore-Owen 00:43

Um, well, once again, my name is Velvet Moore-Owen. Most people from the Wisconsin area refer to me as Sergeant more because everywhere I go, that's kind of what I get. Even though I've been retired for six years. I worked 28 and a half years with Wisconsin Department of Corrections, retiring in 2016. And then leaving Wisconsin, less than a month after I retired and headed off to Harvard, where my spouse was appointed or given a Dean's fellow for her doctorate in education policy. So and then I decided to take a couple classes as well over at the Extension School so that I could write my memoir, which is titled *Incarcerated: A Memoir*, and no, I've never been incarcerated. However, my experience with the department was such.

Kit Heintzman 01:54

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

01:57

Um, wow. Okay, so I'm going to take you back to February of I believe it was 2019. And I was getting off the plane and Chicago O'Hare from Bermuda. So on vacation, and it's seemed as though everything was normal. Yet, I had a feeling that something was amiss. So kinda like, didn't pay attention to it at the airport, saw some people coming from the International area wearing mask coming in here. And well, I thought nothing of it, because I wear a mask on planes and I have done so for the last three or four years, because when I would travel, and I traveled often, after I retired, I was always coming down with pneumonia. And so my doctor was like, you know what Velvet, airplanes are notorious, and a breeding ground for different diseases wear a mask, so I didn't think anything of it. So get my luggage, you know, go home, Everything's peachy. Right. Um, so the next month, my spouse received an offer for superintendents position at a school district here in Wisconsin. So, you know, prior to that, Chicago had announced in early March of 2019, that we were in a pandemic, and that COVID-19 was on the scene. And, you know, these were the, they had no idea, like, where it emanated from, but they were doing their due diligence to figure all of this out, blah, blah, blah, right. And so it meant that you know, you needed to wear a mask when you left home don't have people come over to your house, you don't go to theirs. And you spray disinfectant on every package that came to your home so well with the investment of, and I did buy stock in Lysol because I figured I'd ri you know, ring some benefits from that. And so we did that. And, you know, we needed to come up to to Wisconsin, for the interviews, and well, she didn't want to come up here by herself. So she's like, Hey, Velvet, you know, you've got a nicer car. You know, why don't you drive me and I'm like, okay, and then I can see family and friends because we're originally from, you know, Wisconsin. As soon as we crossed the line and stopped at a gas station, I swear to God, I thought I was in like the Twilight Zone where we're wearing masks. The people in Wisconsin, were so carefree. They were looking at us like we were aliens at the gas station, because they were walking around with no mask on and had this one old white guy say to me, what you got. And I said, what you may have and I don't want and that continued filling up my tank and he you know, he kind of like grunted, and you know, sputtered along. So that was the first, you know, transition from the Illinois area coming into Wisconsin. And Alright, so my spouse is offered this position in Wisconsin. Well, that meant now we had to find a home. Ah. So we're looking. And now all of these people who said that it was a hoax that we're believing in, I call him number 45. I'm sorry, I don't have a name for him. But number 45 kept saying, oh, you know, this is a hoax. It's going to go away. The other party is just saying this to scare you. And, you know, yet I'm seeing former co workers that are retired with dying from COVID. Six people that walked the stage with me in 2016

succumb to COVID-19. And two had underlying issues. And, and you know, before I go there, it's kind of like, alright, well, it was told that all it's affecting the black community, let's pay no attention to it, let them all die, but the hell right. And so in the you know, the white community was like, lalalalalala, still walking around with no masks. So the out of the six co workers, like I said, two have underlying conditions, from what I was told, and the other four did not, um, the two that had underlying conditions were white, they died. Another white guy died. And so that makes three. I had one Hispanic guy and two blacks that retired with me in 2016, that passed away to COVID-19. Okay. So then people are talking about, well, some of my family, you know, they have a cold, but you can come in and see the house. And my spouse, and I were like, That's okay. We appreciate it, you know. And so we were talking with our realtor. And then, you know, as time progressed, we needed to be out of Chicago by June of 2020, so we could not find a house, the housing market went nuts. Another thing, everything started going up, and then houses were having contingencies, put on it quickly. Now, mind you, most people weren't letting you in their homes during COVID. And some people were very generous when they allowed you to wear little booties, and they had hand sanitizer at the door. And they required that, you know, signs in their homes that said, Please wear a mask, I respected those people. However, as soon as we found, you know, we find a house that we wanted to put a bid on, it was already already contingent. So we went through that for three months. And finally, our realtor said, You know what, I just found this house that's partially built dont don't bother driving back, you know? This is what we'll do. I'll just FaceTime this house. I'll walk through it. And I'll show you what the what the builder has in mind. And if you have any, you know, changes or whatever, blah, blah, blah, let us know. Well, we were in a pickle. Um, people were starting to wear masks here in Wisconsin. People were no longer looking at us like we had three green heads attached to us. And so we just said, Yeah, you know, we'll, we'll get the house. Now, mind you. When we closed on it, the builders still wanted to come in and do some things right? They were showing up at the door without a mask. Ah. So I supplied them with masks. And I would say, as a black woman, I'm in high risk. Because I was born with autoimmune disease. I need you to wear a mask. And so a lot of the white men that were at my door, they kind of scoffed. And I'm like, You got a choice, dude, bro, or whatever it is, you want to be called? In, you're going to wear this mask. Or I guess I'll just have to write on your page, on your web page about how your conduct is. I like to write, check out my Google reviews. And they were like, Okay, I'll take the mask. Wonderful. Life is great. So I guess you know, my experience with COVID has been a backlash from people that don't look like me. It's unfortunate, because I am biracial. And my dad is white. And this past last December 21st. I lost my Aunt Grace. To to COVID. She didn't believe in the vaccination. She swore up and down though, that if she got past this while in the hospital, she would get vaccinated, and that I wasn't completely nuts. When I told her she needed to get vaccinated. She called me a dumb kid. And I'm like, in my 50s, but whatever, you know, I'll guess I'll be a dumb kid. And, and so her younger brother Tommy, my Uncle Tommy passed away from COVID on January 15, of 2022.

Velvet Moore-Owen 12:12

He too, vowed that if he got past this while in the hospital, he too would get the vaccine. Uncle Tommy passed away. On January 16, his youngest sister, their youngest sister, Gloria, also had COVID and was hospitalized. Her and Tommy were in the room next to each other. Oh, Gloria passed away from COVID 19. Because she too, didn't believe in the vaccination. They died a day apart. three siblings died less than a month apart from one another. I have no emotion with that. Because ignorance is bliss. And I worked in a field for like I said, 28 and a half years, wherein I had to decipher, you know, excuse my language bullshit from truth. And so I knew that what 45 and company were trying to tell me was bullshit. And everything that I was reading coming out of Harvard chan medical school, was saying otherwise, I didn't really follow the CDC as much as I did Harvard Medical School. Because I had met some really great people at Harvard that also attended the medical school. And I'm

like, you know, what, the things that they're doing are above and beyond what, you know, some institutions were practicing that I knew, and I know a lot of doctors I hang out with a lot of doctors. Um, so like I said, it was I just meet people now where they are kit. So that has been my experience. On a broader scale of COVID-19.

Kit Heintzman 14:19

Would you tell me a story about one of the family members Grace, Tommy, or Gloria about just who, who they were who they were to you?

Velvet Moore-Owen 14:33

You really want to know that?

Kit Heintzman 14:35

I do.

Velvet Moore-Owen 14:36

I didn't really know. My dad's side of the family. My dad was Sicilian. And when they when my dad's family found out that my mom wasn't Swedish and Irish the way she looked because she had red hair and she was your complexion. And they found out that you know, she was also half black. Well, there goes the party dogon it. So I really didn't know them. Because they didn't like me. Because I had black in me. They didn't start liking me until I found out I had money. And then they were liking me. It was like, oh, Velvet, you should come over. But no, I should not. If you need some money, I'll give you some money. But my time is very precious. So I was raised that if you see someone, no matter who they are, that, you know, need some food, they need their lights turned on or something. Money is expendable to me. I'll give you the money. But my time, I will not spend time with people that are not deserving of my time. My time is very precious. So I didn't know them. Now I can talk about some of my co workers like Michael Ben, Sergeant Ben's, he had his deep voice and he sounded like Barry White. And he was so funny. When I first met him. I was a training sergeant at at the Academy. And when he came through as an officer, you know, he thought it was like it was a big, dark skin handsome brother. Look like he you know, lifted weights. And you know, yeah, well, he did, because he had really he had a spelt body. And he'd come up to me. And he's like hey Sarge. And I just had to turn around and tell him dude I like what you like, so don't even try it. You know, but hey, you know, we can we can do this thing together. And he thought, and after that it was funny because he and I became, you know, really pretty tight. And he was a good sergeant. And he was less than, like, four months from retiring. And from what I understand, he had worked a couple double shifts in a row. Because in Wisconsin, we had former Governor Scott Walker who, who, who basically abolished our that basically, He abolished our union. So seniority didn't matter anymore. And so Ben's was ordered to work these double shifts, and he kept telling him, man, you know, I'm not filling Well, this is coming from his wife, mind you. I'm not feeling Well, you know, and it almost became corrections here in Wisconsin is like cutthroat. If you call in sick, then they'll retaliate against you. And so they were telling them, Hey, if you call in sick this, this, and this is gonna happen, it's gonna affect your retirement, which in all, actuality, that wasn't true. They were just, you know, they needed they needed bodies, because bodies were unable to come to work because they had COVID. And Wisconsin corrections didn't care whether or not you had COVID. They wanted you to come to work. Whether you wore masks or not, it wasn't mandated for a long time. So if you wore them, you wore them. There were a lot of inmates that too that that passed away. But, you know, like his wife said, he was ordered the shifts and well the shifts cost him. He ended up immediately. She said his oxygen dropped, like during the night from like, 90 something to 60. So they rushed him to the hospital. They put them on a ventilator. And the last thing is when she

said I told him that I loved him. He squeezed my hand and that was it. And Ben's was towering he was 6'3/6'4 perfect health, worked out everyday ran every day was looking forward to retirement and hanging out with his grandkids. You know, but that didn't happen. So.

Kit Heintzman 18:54

When you. Oh, sorry.

Velvet Moore-Owen 18:56

No, go ahead.

Kit Heintzman 18:58

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

Velvet Moore-Owen 19:02

Yeah. Um, I was in Chicago, living off of North East Lake Terrace on Rogers Park, right across the street from Lake Michigan. Because I used to run over there. And I was like 10 feet from Evans, Evanston. So I was like, literally on the border of Evanston and Chicago. And it was just wild. I mean, here we're having scientists say we have this, you know, we have this pandemic, that was basically kind of talked about and prepared. Back in Obamas presidency said, hey, you know, scientists are telling us if we don't, you know, act on certain things, you know, we're going to get something here that is going to take out a lot of people. And so I started going back and reading arc, you know, various archived literature. And then you see the television with number 45, debunking all of this with no proof. And well, I'm the kind of person that I'm not like a Jim Jones follower. You can't just tell me you got some kool aid for me, and you want me to drink this because it's nutritional. For me, I need to know the total ingredients of all of this, I need to know what type of water was used, you know, was it you know, faucet water, was it spraying water, I need to know the total breakdown of everything. So with that being said, listening to him and then listening to Fauci, you know, and then Fauci was silenced. And then you had, you know, Dr. Brick, or Bricks or whatever. And then he's talking about drinking bleach and you know, it. I just really thought that I was in some sort of sick ass sci fi movie, honestly, excuse my language. I really did. And I just continued to read I continued to read what was coming out of Harvard. And that's how I lived my life.

Kit Heintzman 21:40

Pre pandemic, what was your day to day looking like?

Velvet Moore-Owen 21:48

I was a private basketball instructor in Linkin Park. I was also coaching over Alcott middle school, their girls basketball team. I was also coaching with the British School of Chicago. Um, wow, I had a lot of clients. I was very busy. I made great. I call it shoe money. Because I love shoes. But I mean, my my retirement really takes good care of me. But I mean, it's nice have shoe money, right? And so I did a lot of biking, I was still playing basketball, and I'm closer to 60 than I am to 50. I was, you know, I was having fun. Oh, my God, I was traveling. I was in Greece. I was just, you know, it was like, I'm retired life is good. I'm like, I've got this money. The kids are, you know, are adults now. My daughter was getting ready to graduate from law school. I'm like, you know, life is good. And, you know, my spouse was getting ready to graduate from Harvard with her doctorate. And, you know, I was working on my my, my memoir. Um, yeah, I mean, I was like, wow, it was good. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 23:22

What did your day to day look like when locked down hit?

Velvet Moore-Owen 23:27

Ah, well, we were in this tiny little condo. And everything was one floor. And so we had like a little parlor, where my spouse who's working for Chicago International Charter School System was having zoom meetings in that room. The cats were in the other room where the fireplace was, because they wanted the heat. And that's Tiger and Lonnie. And I, my routine went as such, I got up at about 7:30/8 made coffee. checked in on my spouse, hey you need coffee you need anything you want any breakfast, blah, blah, blah. And around 8:00/8:30 one room was a gym. So I would work out two to three hours a day. And then I had a hot tub that I would get into afterwards and I'd relax in there afterwards. And then I would read I started planting flowers in the condo area. My next door neighbor, Tom Hanuman would split his plants. Now he and I, we would talk via text. And so he's like, Velvet, I know you need to get some fresh air. So this is what you need to do. And so he was split his flowers with me. And even though I didn't own the property, I'm like, I'm gonna spruce this up. And that gave me an opportunity to get outside. So he would split these flowers, and then he texts me, he's like, Hey, I left you some tiger lilies downstairs, you know, and he was always leaving me something whether or not there are hostas, blue hostas, you know, is the asiatic lilies, tiger lilies, he was leaving me something that was just pretty awesome. And so I would take my time, and I would literally play in dirt. And it was kind of therapeutic for me, because, you know, just feeling with my hands, the, the soil in the dirt. I felt like I was connected to nature. So I did that too. And then when five o'clock hit, it was wine time. So, yeah, I'd go up on our deck, make sure nobody else was up there. And that take a bottle of wine. And that set up and watch the not so frequent planes anymore. Come pass that we're coming into O'Hare or Chicago midway because we're not too far.

Kit Heintzman 26:31

I'd love to hear about living with your cats.

Velvet Moore-Owen 26:37

Um, well, the cats didn't understand what was going on, groceries were being delivered. I joined what was called GFR, which was a vegetable company that used to or still does in Chicago. Um all of their veggies are for restaurants. So they had, you know, so because the restaurants were shut down. They were now selling these boxes to people, and they would drop them off on your doorstep. And so I kind of got into that little Co Op because I love you know, fresh vegetables. And so with all of the deliveries, the doorbell is ringing all the time. They became very, very skittish, and they're still skittish. I'm my little Lonney, I call her I call him the Wonster, you know, kind of like, spillstir from American Pie. I'm kind of a yeah, anyway, so I call because he's like, he was always in the stuff even when he was a little, little bittie kitten and Wonster get sick. Now we didn't know, like what it was. So we were taking him over to Hyde Park Animal Hospital. And he stopped eating. And they were like, well, his liver shutting down. Now we don't know what's going on. I can cut him open and do some exploratory surgery, but he may not live and I'm looking at vet like Excuse me. You want to do what to my baby. And so I'm like, Well, can you put a feeding tube in? Well, you know, I'm not really and I'm like, okay, so I talked about with my spouse and there was a vet clinic here in Wisconsin prior to us leaving that was like an excellent place. So they were in Brookfield, so I gave them a call, and I told them what my cat was going through. I'm like, you know, I don't live in Wauwatosa anymore. I literally, I live in Chicago. And I'm like, but you know, my pastors. Mom lives in town so that I can stay with her if I need to. And so they were like, well, yeah, bring them up. So I'm gonna say her name the vet that saved his life. Her name is Dr. Amy Rogowski. She is now with

community vet veterinarian in Bayview. This woman saved my cat's life. It costs us \$6,000. So we spent 6,000 for the cat, and still was in the process of building a house too. So, um, but yeah, so they don't know what happened to him. But I will tell you, there was a significant amount of mold in this in this condo. And the dog that lived right below us had the same issue as Lonney had. At the same time. He had liver failure. He also had a feeding tube that and he was bringing his dog up to Wisconsin to which was crazy because the vets told him the same thing that they told us. So I call him I call Lonnie our pandemic 6,000 boy, or the pandemic \$6,000 boy.

Kit Heintzman 30:18

You were wearing masks in a pre pandemic world. How did people react to you when that was happening? Did people notice?

Velvet Moore-Owen 30:27

Oh, yeah, um, every time I got on the plane, I'm gonna go here again. Um, most people, you know, kind of gave you a little look, but it was quick, like, Wonder if she sick? You know, going through chemo, you know? But then you always have some white dude. You know, Mr. privilege, that I'm just gotta say something. And like, I tell people, you know, you hear people saying, you know, I'm not the one. No, really, I am the one. Please give it to me. And so, you know, every time we would fly, always have one guy, always one white dude. Oh, what's wrong with you? And I'm like, you, you're my problem. What's up, like, we're in a mask? I said, because I don't know what kind of disease you have. And then they will turn around and now look forward. It's like, if someone is wearing a mask, they must be trying to protect either themselves, or someone else. And I used to try to tell people, you know, in those small settings, you know, it doesn't hurt to be kind. You know, and there's a way in which you ask someone as well. You know, I'm not your dude. You know, I'm a woman. And if you have an issue, and just because you're just nosy, just ask the question, say, Hey, why are you wearing a mask? And I'll tell you, but you know, the looks the grunts and then you know, the comments. It was I was always met with that on a plane. Except, when I went to Europe, when I went to Europe, just about everybody's wearing wearing them on the plane. Um, but in the US, you know, we're entitled. And I'm not included in that, but we're entitled, in the US, you're entitled to die if you want to. That's how I kind of look at COVID-19 You're entitled, you don't have to get the vaccination. You don't have to wear a mask, you have the option to die if you want to. And so when people you know, would say to me, Oh, if I died I die, I'm like, and I'm sure you won't be missed. But hey this is just who I am. It sucks sometimes. But this

Kit Heintzman 33:10

Other than the pandemic, what have been some of the issues on your mind and heart over the last couple of years?

Velvet Moore-Owen 33:17

Um, how people have just gotten so mean Kit. People are just there are some good people in the world. There are some really, really good people, and they're not being talked about. However, the bad people. They're glaring. I mean, some of the rhetoric that's out here, I'm like, Jesus grab the wheel. Like what's going on for real? Um, some of these people. Let me talk about Wisconsin. Let me talk about Ron Johnson. How can you still support somebody who tried to overthrow an election by hiring fake electors to come in? And because it didn't work, turned around and said, Oh, well. It didn't work. He was only in it for five minutes still vote for me. And then these people were still voting for him. And I just, maybe I'm wired wrong. I don't know. But the lies I've never seen so many lies being spewed and it's acceptable. And how I grew up. You couldn't lie. You wouldn't be you wouldn't be, you know, held to almost like being ostracized from every decent place for being a liar. And it seems

like like these people are, it's okay to lie. And I'm just not cool with that. I don't like all the anger. I don't like how kids have suffered with COVID You know, with the pandemic and being shut down, they've, you know, kids have lost years of a being a kid, actually. Um I look how, when kids have gotten COVID, I've got a kid right now on ninth grade, she just told me she's got her mom doesn't believe in the vaccination. So she just got over COVID for the second time. And I had them just doing some wind sprints. She's 14 years old and couldn't run half the court. Her mom doesn't want to send her to a cardiologist to see what's going on they have the insurance, she just doesn't think she thinks that this is a man-made, whatever that is stoking fear in people. Um, so the kids are the biggest thing for me. And I'll be honest, if I die today, I'd be fine. You know, because I've lived a great life. I have done more things in my lifetime, than most people have ever done in theirs. And I'm blessed to say that. And I would like this younger generation to be able to live freely, to have fun. If they get caught up while in college, and they get pregnant, to go somewhere, if they choose not to have that child and for the betterment of themselves, to be able to take care of that. I want young people to be able to enjoy their lives the way that I was able to enjoy mine. And I think this pandemic has really, really, really affected our children more so than anybody.

Kit Heintzman 37:25

I'm wondering, with your experience in corrections, what are some of the things you've noticed about COVID in the prisons, even though you were retired?

Velvet Moore-Owen 37:31

That the inmates were dying from it every day, left and right. Um, and because now this is coming from former co workers that I talked to, because a lot of the inmates that who were getting sick and dying were black. Um, it wasn't a big deal. It was like, Okay, let's call their family back and come pick up the body, whatever, you know, um, but the stress level on the officers.

Velvet Moore-Owen 38:17

I'm wondering how they're doing really, mentally. Because when you walk into a prison, it's not guaranteed that you're going to walk out after eight hours. They'll call you and say, Oh, we're jamming you for another eight hour shift. And by law in Wisconsin, thank you, former Governor Walker, you can work up to 20 hours. And so some of the staff were having to work 20 hours and then have to come back within four hours. Yeah, and started all over again. So I don't think it was a real happy place. And I think most people that could retire did retire. And I also know that the Milwaukee Police Department had to shut down their detectives bureaus unit, because that whole floor had COVID. And they were out for like two months. And so crime kept going up. And no one could work on those cases, because they were home sick with COVID or in the hospital with COVID. And that was before the vaccine was available.

Kit Heintzman 39:38

I'm curious, what does motherhood meant to you?

Velvet Moore-Owen 39:42

Um, well, I'm not an actual mother. I'm a mother by marriage. So I'm seeing you know, our oldest daughter now she was dia. She was diagnosed with COVID. In March of 19 she attended an event with the governor. And that whole panel up in Madison, Wisconsin, and some of the senators and well, she came home with COVID along with the rest of her Marquette Law school chums. And she started going to school virtually Marquette gave her a hard time and said, You can't stay virtual. You need to practice law in person. And she fought it. She won. So she

was able to complete her, her third year law school all virtually but but Felicia got really sick. And we had to drive up quite a few times to bring her food. Because she was unable. And I mean, she was living in a studio apartment didn't have very much she was living off of, you know, financial aid, but yet she was working. But of course, everything shut down once Wisconsin really realized, you know, we are in a pandemic here. And it's not a hoax. And well, yeah, it is real. And so we would come up and put a whole box of food at her door, ring our doorbell, we'd wait for her to come down to get it. And then before she'd open up the door, we would wave to her and tell her we love her. And then we'd get back in our car, because we knew she was still sick. And so we didn't want to get sick. So but we just made sure we brought her everything she needed. And we would do that like every two weeks. And our son Jeremy was in the country with his dad. And all he was doing was fix working on his race car. So Jeremy was like, I'm not going around people. So he just stay underneath his car. So

Kit Heintzman 42:21

What does the word health mean to you?

Velvet Moore-Owen 42:23

Health? Being healthy. Health means mental health, physical health, because if you don't have your mental health, how are you going to take care of your physical health? Okay, um It's you come this way you have this one body, you have this one mind. And you only come this way one time as my grandmother would say. And so you have to make sure that you water your mind as well as your body. And so that's how I look at health what you would you put in it that's why I workout every day. That's why I meditate that's why I do yoga. I try to live a very sound healthy lifestyle

Kit Heintzman 43:28

What are some of the things that you want for your own health and the health of people around you?

Velvet Moore-Owen 43:38

I want people to be happy I love happy people. Um I want the people that are that that I surround myself with that that are in mind these people that that are in my life I want them to love themselves enough to know when they do need help that they can always either come to me for help or that I can come to them for help that we can rely on each other to stay healthy. Whether it's mentally and or physically. And to know that we're not fighting this, in this world alone, that you always have someone

Kit Heintzman 44:30

What does the word safety mean to you?

Velvet Moore-Owen 44:33

Haha. I won't go to my college days but I will say safety means that you're able to live in a space where you don't have to continue to look over your shoulder to see whether or not someone is coming after you. Safety is also in your workspace where you don't have to worry about your supervisor making unwanted sexual advances to you. Safety is being with a partner who you don't have to worry about beating you, or verbally abusing you, because that's also abuse. And safety also means, you know, you looking out for other people as well, if we're in a pandemic, well, now we're in an endemic because the pandemic is over. And now that we're in an endemic, pay attention to the scientists, you know, stay safe. By wearing a mask, you know, I see this, oh, you know, we want these people to, you know, these women to carry these kids to full term birth, you know, regardless. But you don't

want to wear a mask. Wow, I don't get the mother's dying, but you want to say what you want to say for us to do whatever we want to do? Yeah, anyway, I have a lot of opinions, but that's what being safe is. For me.

Kit Heintzman 46:22

You've shared a lot of this already. So feel free to say I've answered that. But I'll ask the question anyway. In the narrow confines of biomedical safety related to COVID-19, what are some of the things that you've been doing to keep yourself feeling safer?

Velvet Moore-Owen 46:40

Um, well, I've had my fifth COVID, shot, October 3, if they tell me that, I need another one. Tomorrow, I'm going to get it. I haven't died. As you can see from it. My arm didn't Yeah, my arm didn't fall off. I am not being tracked, because they didn't put like a little sensor in me. Although I am being tracked by this [shows cellphone] novel idea. Um, um wearing a mask, washing your hands. Um, and it's funny because I shake hands all the time now with people. And I keep hand sanitizer in both my pockets. It's in, in my car. And in my gym bag. You know, I'm constantly, you know, I think that's the biggest thing. Um, and if I'm, if I don't feel well, I don't go around people. You know, I have at least 10 COVID kits. So if I'm feeling rundown, I'm feeling like crap, I take a test before I allow anybody to come around me. Or if I go around them. And you even the church that I attend, we have a lot of elderly people. I took a COVID test in the morning to make sure I'm safe, even though I still wear a mask to church. But I still take a COVID test before I go to church on Sundays. And I still wear my mask. Because I want to make sure that I'm doing my due diligence to keep other people safe. I don't want my conscience to ever say Velvet it was your fault that, you know, Miss Suzy contracted COVID From you and died. That would not be a healthy place for me, mentally. So that's what I do.

Kit Heintzman 48:47

How did you decide to get vaccinated? And then once you made the decision, how accessible was the vaccine to you?

Velvet Moore-Owen 48:54

Um, the decision was easy for me. Um, I've been getting vaccinations ever since I can remember. Um, I remember being in line. I think it was kindergarten or something where they gave me this shot with this big old gun. And they left a mark on your arm and my arm hurt for like, 10 days it felt like but it was really only a day. Um, you know, because as kids, we exaggerate everything. Um, I was getting the flu shot. Yeah, I've just been and then working in corrections. You had to get a TB test every year. You know. And so we had to go through that and then the, you know, so it was a no brainer for me because I follow science and I believe in science, and I don't believe in the National Enquirer given me information or through social. Yeah, it was a no brainer for me. I was looking forward to it and the accessibility. I called you know, we were back here in Wisconsin, I had my same pharmacy, which was like a mom and pop, you know, pharmacy and it's like, Oh, hey, what how are you doing, how's the family? Call them up. They're like, Hey, come on in. And so they're like, hey, you know, you got to come back. You know, during the first time, it's like, you got to come back. And on such and such date. So such a such dates came back, I have a second shot. When it was time for the booster did the same thing. And any my physicians who did not believe in COVID-19 I sent them into the sunset. And then I said, I need to write something. So you no longer have a medical license. Because you're scary.

Kit Heintzman 50:52

What was that process like?

Velvet Moore-Owen 50:54

For people that did for doctors that didn't believe in it, um, there was only one and he was a he was my chiropractor. I'm like, I just told him you're done cracking my back. I'm good. He no longer is even in Wisconsin anymore now because I think everybody left. So, I mean, you meet a nut job where they are, you know, if you don't have any clients, you don't make any money. So we set we put him you know, we set his cell already where like, see you later. Bye. So that's pretty easy.

Kit Heintzman 51:36

How are you feeling about the immediate future?

Velvet Moore-Owen 51:41

I'm waiting for this next election. The midterm. Yeah. Um, even though I cannot have children. I do not want to have children. I'm too old. Number one. I've been fixed since I was 33. But I don't like the state that the US has gone to. I'm not going to be a Handmaid's Tale for anybody. If things don't go back to some sort of realistic normalcy, I will be living in Canada.

Kit Heintzman 52:31

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

Velvet Moore-Owen 52:37

What are my hopes? Velvet, don't say that, okay, I'm saying that people get their head out of their asses, and start to think rationally. So we can get back to the real business of saving our world. And that includes with climate change. I have never seen like a fall like we're having it's 50 degrees here in Wisconsin, and it's October 21. I'm used to having some sort of dusting on of snow on the ground and the weather a little bit more chillier. We don't get as much snow that we used to not that I want snow, but it was fun to play in. And it's beautiful to see. Horrible to drive in but, you know, advantages, disadvantages.

53:35

We have some real issues. Especially with women's rights. I mean, there there's a plethora of things that I wish we would take the time to delve into a little bit more. Systemic racism. Why can't we talk about what happened during slavery? Why can't we talk about why I will not call my main bedroom, the master bedroom? Why can't we talk about Christopher Columbus not discovering America? Why can't we talk about, you know, how all of this impacts our youth on a daily basis? Why can't we talk about the use of the N word no matter who says it is not a nice thing to say, you know, why can't we have conversations across the board without people getting into their feelings to listen to you having an Indian mascot at your school and how it affects indigenous people? I mean, there's other things that we need to talk about, except, you know, Herschel Walker in his line about, you know, paying for abortions. I don't care about him. I don't care about him. As a person, or the abortions that he's paid for. What I do care about, though, is, why are we allowing people that you know, are lying to run for public office? And we surround ourselves with that nonsense. And why is number 45 still walking around? Not in prison? Because I'm gonna say God dammit, if it was Barack Obama in a tan suit that did the same things that this orange person, I mean, what number 45 has done, he would have been up underneath the prison. Why are there let's talk about the two sets of rules. I've seen them. I've seen the two sets of rules, I worked in the prison system.

I've seen a black guy and a white guy come in for the same crime, same crime. The, the black guy gets 10 years, four months, the white guy gets probation. I've seen that in Wisconsin. And the darker your skin, the more time you get. That's a fact. So that's kind of where I'm at. Let's talk about some real issues. Moving forward. In our America, let's talk about some real things that are happening. You know, let's talk about the next pandemic that may hit. Let's talk about that. Let's talk about real science. You know, instead of, you know, some of the rhetoric that, you know, that is being talked about.

Kit Heintzman 56:50

When you're in need of support, who have you been able to turn to all this has been going on?

Velvet Moore-Owen 56:58

I don't know if you read my book yet. I'm pretty strong. This was nothing compared to what I've been through. This was a, COVID was a cakewalk for me. In comparison to what I what I've gone through with the Wisconsin Department of Corrections. Seriously.

Kit Heintzman 57:20

What are some things you do to take care of yourself?

Velvet Moore-Owen 57:24

I work out every day. I run every day, I play basketball every day. I read every day. And I make sure that I tell a little kid that you're a great human, and you're gonna go on to do great things. That's what I do every day.

Kit Heintzman 57:57

Do you think of this pandemic as a historic event?

Velvet Moore-Owen 58:01

Oh, God. Yes. Definitely. Definitely, yes, I do.

Kit Heintzman 58:10

Thinking back to your own education when you were younger, what are some of the things you wish to learn more about in history?

Velvet Moore-Owen 58:23

I wish I would have known about about Black Wall Street. I wish I would have known about Walnut Street in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where I'm where the black families had their own bank, had their own grocery stores had their own clothing stores, their own shoe stores. Their own clubs, their own library, they had everything. And one day, Mayor Meyer said, I want to build a freeway over here, we're just gonna tear all this shit down. I wish I would have learned that prior to being an adult. Because we had to move you know, I would think I was to was two years old. When we had we were forced out of our house and had to buy another house. Um, I wish I would have known more about the segregation in Wisconsin. I wish I would have known more about Boston. And that being one of the hubs, you know, for slavery.

Velvet Moore-Owen 59:54

I'm a history buff too, by the way. I wish that I would have learned more about Henrietta Lacks. And, you know, her, her cells being used to combat cancer, and how the family was not told about it. Nor asked permission, nor was given any money, you know, or anything to use her cells, her family wouldn't have minded but they would have liked to have probably gotten some recognition. You know, what about I didn't learn who developed plasma, you know, in, in high school or college, I didn't learn who created the stoplight, you know, all of these great inventions by my ancestors, I didn't learn about. And so I think, you know, younger kids of color, I think would fare better if they knew what was before them what was laid down before the things that they had to fight. I mean, who would have thought we had to fight to read a book. I didn't even know that. I wasn't taught that in high school or college. I, once again, I'm going back to, I didn't realize how mean, people were. And then to find out that American history was taught. What we learned was so that the white people of America who stole this land, who has the nerve to tell indigenous people and myself to go back to my own country. Number one, you're on stolen land. Okay, so this is not your country. And number two, you brought me here. So I can't because you were too lazy to do infrastructure here. Because you didn't like the heat. So you brought us here, because we can handle it's like. So, in essence, what I'm gonna tie this all in, I wish I would have learned more real history instead of the history that was blown up my ass. So other people would look bad. Hell, we all look bad. We've all done things in history that we're not proud of. But hell, let's just be transparent. And let's be honest, let's just lay it all out there. And let you know, let the chips fall where they may, you know, but at least you know, you've given people that information. That's what I wish I would have known.

Kit Heintzman 1:02:44

What do you think scholars in the social sciences and humanities should be doing to help us understand the human side of the pandemic?

Velvet Moore-Owen 1:02:52

What you're doing right now, I think what you're doing right now, is getting the the human side of the pandemic, and how people actually had to live. You know, a lot of people weren't blessed with with a pension. And so you know, you've got money coming in every month. I know that there are a lot of people out there that had to quit work, that didn't have your basic essential needs, which is food, water, and shelter. I know that. And that bothers me. And that's why today, when I go into a restaurant, and if my server just comes around once and asked me, Hey, are you enjoying your food? I tip them. And these are the little diners, mind you. I tip them whatever the year is. So if it's 2022, their tip is 2022. Last year was 2021. So this is this is my way to say thank you. You don't have to do this job. But I thank you for being here.

Kit Heintzman 1:04:04

This is my last question. I'd like you to imagine speaking to a historian in the future, someone far enough away that they have no lived experience of this moment. What would you tell them cannot be forgotten about COVID-19?

Velvet Moore-Owen 1:04:17

How many people lost their lives because of a lie? How many great people and I mean great in terms of just an awesome human being lost their lives believing that what their president at that time was telling them was true and real and trusting in that? Only to find out that your president at that time was a mean vial individual who was only trying to garner more money over people, and when you garner people over money, nothing good ever comes out of that. And even the Bible says that, I'm not a Bible [inaudible] that bad money is the root of all evil.

And so appreciate the people and surround yourself with good people. You could never go wrong with that. Because people matter. All people matter, everybody, green, blue, yellow, purple, whatever their skin tone, whatever colored hair they may have, they matter.

Kit Heintzman 1:05:54

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

Velvet Moore-Owen 1:06:13

Um, I think I think I pretty much hit on a lot of things. I will say to athletically, this pandemic, had our kids on a couch for two years. And so their conditioning is horrible. Most of these kids can't run. Not even a quarter mile. Most of these kids have self esteem issues now, even more so than prior to. Because when they came back to school, a lot of them had to wear masks. So if they had, you know, acne or something, they were okay with it. It's like, Hey, I got a mask, but I can't see my acne. And now they have to pull this off. And now they're met with, Oh, my God, I didn't know, your face was that messed up because kids have no filter. So I'm seeing kids, you know, suffer athletically, they're softer, they don't want to get hit. They don't want any body contact in football, or basketball, rugby, or, you know, or anything else. They just want to be free to do whatever. And I tell them play golf, or tennis or something. Because if you don't want to get hit, this isn't the sport for you. But then in another context, I also look at young people really just having a low self esteem and very unsure of themselves, and then finding groups of people that accept them. And those groups not being positive groups for them, and their well being. And so I think we need to take time as older people as adults and reach our hands back to pull some of these young people up, to let them know that it's okay. We know you've been on a couch. And educationally they're behind too. Because it's hard to learn on a computer eight hours a day with no social interaction. I think that was the hardest thing for me to see. And now to be out of that this pandemic. And being around kids, they are so unsure of themselves. So that's one of the things that that will that weigh heavily on me right now.

Kit Heintzman 1:08:49

Thank you so much.

Velvet Moore-Owen 1:08:50

You're very welcome.