

Transcript of Interview with Vanessa Green by Kit Heintzman

Interviewee: Vanessa Green

Interviewer: Kit Heintzman

Date: 08/30/2022

Location (Interviewee): San Diego, California

(Interviewer):

Transcribed by: Angelica S Ramos

Some of the things we discussed include:

Coming from a family of community organizers. Surviving domestic violence; different trauma-responses in one family. Being a mother of two queer children. Starting the first chapter BLM Hudson Valley, after the death of Michael Brown. Founding Call BlackLine in 2016, a crisis line from a Black femme lens. Newly learning selfcare from younger Black femmes. First experience being called the n-word as a child. Noticing when your child's dreams get deferred. The Trump presidency's emboldening racism; Joe Biden's history of supporting incarceration and criminalization. Living in a predominantly Latin/a neighborhood. Being more vulnerable to COVID death/complications. Medical racism and Black people have preexisting conditions in the first place. Catching COVID recently: body aches, sore throat; worries about anti-viral rebounds. Inequitable vaccine distribution at a global scale; vaccine wastage in the USA. Keeping the peace in the household while different family members had different safety expectations. Poor access to mental healthcare during the pandemic. Being newly exposed to anti-science/anti-vaccine narratives during the pandemic; addressing misinformation with crisis callers; myth busting. Call BlackLine became overwhelmed during the pandemic; demand exceeded capacity. As crisis call volume grew, so did the volume of hate calls; listener burn out. High volume of racist harassment and hate calls to the crisis line; looking for technological solutions to phone line abuse; contacting the family members of people committing hate calls. Supporting the volunteer listeners who are taking these calls. Crisis line listeners offering multilingual services: English, Spanish, Haitian Creole. Putting together an app for Call BlackLine. Living with a cat, Princess Marguerite. Doing pandemic mutual aid work in the community with grocery deliveries; food apartheid. Medical racism and the denial of Black pain, personal experiences of chronic and undiagnosed pain; fatphobia in medicine. Medical advocates. The importance of funding services in under-resourced communities. Schools that allow guns but have no social workers. Billionaires, poverty, and classism; environmental racism. Policy-focused activism not reflecting the urgency of crises; that the pandemic proved that change could happen as a response to urgency, eg. homeless people getting hotel rooms.

Kit Heintzman 00:00

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

Vanessa Green 00:04

Hi. My name is Vanessa Green she/her/they. It is August 30. And it's 8:03am here in San Diego, California.

Kit Heintzman 00:17

And the year is 2022.

Vanessa Green 00:19

Oh, my bad. Yes. 2022.

Kit Heintzman 00:24

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

Vanessa Green 00:33

Yes, yes, I do.

Kit Heintzman 00:35

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

Vanessa Green 00:43

Um, yeah, I'm, I'm a longtime activist, boots on the ground organizer. I'm originally from New York. I started the first BLM Hudson Valley Chapter outside of New York City. And that was when Mike Brown actually died. And I am based on going to Ferguson when Mike Brown was murdered. I started called black line, but a bunch of black femmes and Call BlackLine has been really live since 2016, but really became official in 2017. I'm a mom of two queer children. Nayisha and Haquin I came who are my, my joy, you know, my reason that I do live and do organizing work. I moved to San Diego four years ago, and was lucky to do some civic engagement with organization in San Diego, and then secured a county job recently, about a year ago when they created the newly Office of Equity and race of justice. So that is kind of in a nutshell who I am. I mean, my both my my mom was the organizer. You know, she was a I call it professional organizer and my grandmother, I think I got a lot of my spirit from my grandmother, my grandmother was a bomb, really a community organizer. So I always want to lift up those two Pearly Mae Height and my mom, Jean Grey.

Kit Heintzman 02:20

Tell me a story about your life during the pandemic.

Vanessa Green 02:25

Um, I was lucky. I say that a lot. Because, you know, I had a job with Alliance San Diego. And as soon as they even it was an inkling that this was going to be a deadly virus. We immediately shifted to working from home, I think we started working from home more than a lot of folks in San Diego, like we started working from home in March. And it was, it was hard for me because I'm, I'm more of a social person. And so I was and I think black people in general social people, we are a connected community. So it was hard. You know. And I was trying to navigate. But I also realized that I had the opportunity that Call BlackLine would really blow up and it actually did blow up. It was very busy. We were overwhelmed. We went from maybe 100 calls a month to probably over 1,000 a month. And so it was I was busy doing my civic engagement work with Alliance San Diego, dealing with calls and dealing with my listeners who had difficult calls. And so it was it was isolating, but it was also a opportunity to grow. My organization, which I think is very important.

Me and my daughter and my son at that point were living together. And he was an essential my son was considered to essential work because he worked for a real a realtor he was he worked for a company, a retail company, I'm gonna say it Target and and so he had to go in and out which made my daughter very anxious. It was a lot of anxiety in the house because she was concerned about me catching COVID she was concerned about you know, because I have, we knew that black people were really dying from COVID that, you know, especially if you had a pre pre existing condition, and I do so she was very concerned. Her and her brother got into a few arguments. And so it was it was contentious and I've never lived my kids. I've never been contentious together so it was a it was difficult for me to navigate to understand. She's she her background is in public health. So I understand her concern. But I understood that he had to work right he didn't have the option to stay home. So it was a mom trying to navigate you gotta love each other. We could all die tomorrow and they just looked at me like she something wrong with her. But it's okay. So it was that piece that happened and then luckily, we survived it not survived it. But we, you know, I was able to get them to talk, right let's talk and still doing the Call BlackLine stuff still doing the civic engagement stuff. And I realized while the home during the pandemic that I think civic engagement is a very important, it's very important, right? I think that people should be civically engaged. People should know about politics, but I realized I don't like it. Like, within the staying at home for the pandemic, I was like, I don't really like doing civic engagement. I understand as an organizer that policies are important, right? I understand that in my heart. And in my head, and in my mind, but what I don't like is that it's almost like you're trying to teach organizers people who want to dismantle this crap. How to navigate in a slow way to change the system. And I'm really, I mean, when when the county hired me, I told my my now boss that you need to understand that I was talking about burnin this shit down, you need to understand that I was the personnel side job builders with signs going on. And if I had a Molotov cocktail, I throw it. I said we because I have an urgency to save black lives and, and trans lives I have this urgency and policies and change is so slow. And I always feel like people are dying. And I need county governments and local governments to understand that dismantling racism is an urgency. It's not well, it's take time, it's because of your policies and your procedures, we die.

Vanessa Green 06:47

And so I realized that civic engagement wasn't for me. Um, so it was more of just doing you know, I did redistricting. And let's be real clear redistricting is not something that people they want people to know about, because it should not be as complicated. I was like, I told my boss, this is bullshit like this. You don't they want to redistrict to have the power and redistricting is crap. It's just crap. So I realized that I wouldn't, you know, they knew I was looking and I was honest about that, I was looking for another job. Because in my heart policies and procedures, [inaudible] the county, right. But policies and procedures and doing it slowly. doesn't work for me. And so even with the county now that kind of like, you know, I say things, and I you know, and I know the process is slow, I've been blessed to get this job. But I still have these comments like, you know, people we have, you know, San Diego currently has third, as a high homeless population, and 30% are black people. But our numbers are only 6%. So we have 30%, Black homeless, black people and only 6% of population. So I'm like, make that make sense. But there's no sense of urgency to end homelessness here. There really is no sense of urgency to end homelessness anywhere in United States. But it's no sense. And I'm like this, even now I'm still like, you know, I you know, I tell my boss, you know, if I got a nice grant I would quit this job and just do Call BlackLine. Totally, like totally, you know, full time so. So, it's not like, I don't like this job. But once again, the county works slower than

probably probably like city and local governments. And so it's it's a sad thing for me during the end, I don't think the pandemic is over right I because I just got COVID I just I'm recovering from COVID That's why I have a funny voice. So it's not over. So I get I get nervous about you know, we believe that we've come out of it but I remember that my daughter during the pandemic they created a mutual aid program and I remember going out a few times to deliver groceries to mothers with kids, you know my daughter screaming her head off, but I you know, I had to explain to her, this is who I am, I am I am a community organizer. The community is needing help. And as long as I can stand up and walk I will help people and so they utilize Called Blackline to help them even reach people who are older who might not be able to who didn't might not have cell phones because you know, I realized since I moved to California that broadband is a thing that a lot of people don't have it so this was shocking to me. So I was able to utilize Call BlackLine to help people get food, money, etc. So that was one of the things I you know I stayed busy during and people's like, you know, it was a time to relax and just work from home and I was like really I was very busy during the pandemic because in my life has always been about organizing in the community. So you know, after she was really had a meltdown, I kind of stayed isolated for a little bit. But I would always when she was, you know, in the bathroom, I would sneak out and be like, I got to drop some food off, I'll be right back, you know, I'd masked up and everything, but she was always afraid for me. And I had to tell her that even if I get COVID, and even if I die, right. One of the things that I've known since I was 16, and started getting to organizing is that that is the rent I pay to be on this earth is to help community to help community be home to help community feel like they're valuable. So I might have been a risk, but it's to me, it's what I do is what I live for. So yea the pandemic was something else. So pulled the covers back that in the United States, there are so many gaps, you know, we have the safety net of, you know, some public assistance, etc. But there's a huge gap in what people need and what people don't get in this country. huge gap. Like mental wellness services, a huge, huge gap. You know, we had some free and some free counseling during the pandemic, but all of it wasn't free.

Vanessa Green 11:11

They were overwhelmed. These mental health workers were overwhelmed. So I realized this, this huge gap, this is huge gap or even accessing good medical care. And I tell people all the time, I have been privileged to have always kind of had insurance, right. But I haven't gotten the best care even though I had insurance. And I worked for jobs that had good insurance. Because understanding or even acknowledging black people's illnesses and pain is something that a lot of doctors don't get and don't do. And so I noticed like people will call me and be like, I don't feel good, but they didn't test me. You know, I don't feel good but they didn't, you know, they don't care. So they sent me home and I can't breathe. And I was just like, shocked. Like, I know it inherently, this is how this country works. But when you hear people call, and they're struggling to breathe, and they've been asked to leave a hospital, it boggles my mind. But what the pandemic revealed is that we have so much to do and then now that people think the pandemic is over, we hold all those even the some of the more safety net type of stuff we have we vaccinated, like got rid of it. And I'm like, if anything the pandemic showed us, the pandemic showed us is that we could do stuff immediately. Like it was like you just get it just do it. Well, you know, I had organizations say, Yeah, we got money, and we just do what there is none of this all this policies and procedures, you got to fill out applications. I mean, I know the county said they gave over 5000 people like food, like to get an EBT card. So immed like within an hour, right? So we know we can do things with an urgency in United States. Some of our homeless people, hotels, they like secured hotels and put people because we realize we need to get

people off the streets. And I'm like, if we knew that during a pandemic, why does this the services not continue? And nobody can give me an answer in a county, not just am i I'm keep shaking my head, like I don't get it. Because the pandemic showed us that we could be a better country, that we can care for people. And then if you ask those who are most impacted, you can even do better. We can say, well, the doctors don't really trust us. They need some training. You know, so we could have done stuff to me to make the United States such a glorious country that it could be but we didn't we weren't. It's almost like we're going back to business as usual. And I'm frustrated right now because I'm like Jesus Christ. Um, the pandemic was showing us that we could be a better country, and it didn't last, but that's okay. I'm okay. No, I'm not. But um, that's what the pandemic you know, you know, navigating the pandemic, I just was more so collected research on myself, like, oh, well, that worked. We did that with a quickness. And so I call people now on behalf of people and go, Well, you know, two years ago, you did this. So what happened? So now I'm challenging people with systems like, Well, you did that two years ago, you did it quickly. So it's almost like you shouldn't have done it. Because now I have like I have, I have, you know, I tell people, I have the receipts now and you did that for that person. So now you should be able to do that again. So I'm lucky that I could do that. But I just I just shake my head that the pandemic didn't care. It almost seemed like not that it didn't get like keep telling people this is a plague I'd looked at as the plague and I said a lot of us didn't live through it. lived through a hear horrible stuff. Right. Um, I lived in chickenpox crisis like everybody I had to have my legs wrapped. So I I've lived through when a community everybody got chickenpox and didn't realize, oh, it could. It could get real bad, right. So, um, people have been lived through a lot of stuff and I think we kind of like almost thought it wasn't real. Oh, like this is just oh my god. Well, you know what, what is this and, and I also never lived to people who didn't believe in science I I think that was the strangest thing for me when people were fighting that if you have a vaccine, we don't want it its poison. And so for me, I was like getting shots in a gym gymnasium. Like, that's how they were vaccinating us back in the day. So when, when people kept talking about, oh my god, it's full of stuff. And we its poison and I was so shocked.

Vanessa Green 15:32

I said, we don't believe in science anymore, because I just remember my mom making sure we line up all the shots that they were given mumps, rubella. I mean, I so. So when I hear that, like people, there's polio cases, I just, my mind is baffled. And so that that was science deniers for me didn't exist until I say the pandemic. I know they did. But they came out of the woodwork for the pandemic. So that was another thing to deal with, even on our on Call BlackLine was some of the misinformation. So you know, I got pamphlets and my listeners got trained on just giving them as much information as they can. But we got a lot of people who were afraid to have you know, that this is the you know, this is the government's way of killing black people. It was created to kill Black. So we spent a lot of time just dispelling myths. So it was, it was an interesting time during the pandemic. And I have to say, I'm glad I survived it because I think if I had gotten the maybe the first strain when it when it did it that I might have not had lived, right. So I always say I was blessed that I did. I was able to avoid getting in for two years. And so, and I have to say I don't care what it is, I'm vaccinated and boosted right and I'm looking forward to the other shot that's gonna come out for these for these all these berries. I don't really give a shit. I tell people, I'm gonna be the first one on line. Okay, thanks. And some of my friends who are who are anti vaxxers. I'm like, I don't really care. I can't deal with y'all and you'll be the one to kill me. But you're you patient zero. So I but I come from eradicating some of these childhood illnesses. So I'm okay, so I don't really care. So that's the so that was me during the

pandemic, I stayed busy. I was exhausted when it was over. We lost listeners after the pandemic, one of my mom's died, you know, one of my listeners died during the pandemic because she was sick, and then got COVID. And so it's been rough we've been trying to rebuild. But you know, people don't realize that when you have a crisis listening line for bipoc Folks, black Indigenous and People of Color Queer community. It takes a lot of the year mostly. And then we also had to deal with you know, we also dealt with hate calls, you know, we Call BlackLine probably gets 30% of our calls or hate calls. And, and then I realized too, that United States is in a sunken place. I've never in my life. Would of thought that so many white people would call a hotline just to use the N word, just to call us black bitches. So I always tell people, when people go, Oh, we're on the right trajectory. I'm like, you're not. Because we get a lot of calls. We know how the hate is the United States, because we get we get, we get a lot of calls. I mean, I had people actually call them and say you don't want people talking about we don't wanna talk about history. In school, I have young white men who call and say, what my people used to own your people. It's like, so they know about slavery. So you can just teach it because they know but then they use it against us. So you know, when people say, Oh, we don't want our kids to feel bad, but your kids don't feel bad that wallowing in that in that stuff, you know, so it's been interesting to those type of calls and hearing what how people feel about everybody under the sun except white people and I'm like, Oh, my God, like queer people that hate them. They hate black people. They hate everyone. I was like, Oh my god. So we still get those kind of calls, but they became really a lot during the pandemic. And I was so surprised because I guess maybe the isolated googling hotline numbers, I don't know. But it was it was that also took a toll. I think that's another reason I probably lost so many people because one girl, woman told me that, you know, in essence, some days, you get sick of being called the Black bitch. You said some days it's just overwhelming. So I understood that so I know that when I lost people, it not just from the emotional toll of just talking and supporting other bipoc folks but also then you got to deal with the hate calls.

Vanessa Green 19:51

So that was that was a hard thing during the pandemic too is that people are dying people are sick people don't have what they need and you're calling a crisis line to spew hate, so that was weird for me, but it is what it is. But that was that was hard part of even just continue not and a lot of times during that time I thought of shutting it down. I you know, I had to talk to my listeners, should we shut it down? Should we? And they will be like no Vanessa, because, you know, out of the 10 hate calls that one call up somebody who just feels so alone and isolated. So, you know, they constantly will tell me, No, it's needed. But we just didn't know how to get rid of the hate calls. So it's it's been an eye opening experience about the hate and United States. And so I'm like, wow, okay. And not even the hate but also how emboldened people would be with the hate because I ran called I ran hotlines when I did rap crisis and mental health services. I didn't get those type of hate calls. And I think, and I want to put it out there. Having Trump as president really emboldened a lot of people to just speak, the hateful truth. And so. So I blame that on him. And people keep saying, let's go to know where they stand. And I'm like, No, I really don't give a shit about where they stand. I don't want to hear it. So you know, because everybody keeps thinking, it's a good thing that you get to hear how they feel. And I'm like, No, that's not a good thing. Because imagine, if me as a black person to a white people, I felt about white supremacy all the time. It just doesn't work. Like it's not a thing. So when people say that to me, I was like, No, that's not and this is this is a hotline. It's not. It's not everyday people. You're not calling a friendly line. It's a hotline, we want to listen to people we want to affirm and support people in these, we got to navigate through calls, just singing the N word. Like that's frustrating. I said, and

so yeah, so it was that was hard to deal with and trying to keep my people, you know, debriefing with people trying to keep my people upbeat, and the listeners upbeat. But I knew I was gonna, I knew I would lose people. And I did. And now we tried to replace him, but it was hard it was. And now I have to also give, you know, when you train people know, you have to give this whole big warning. This is really a good and useful line. But you might get some hate calls. Like I you know, when I used to train we never trained about that we always trained about this is what we do. And now I'm maxing now giving a whole hour or so long about the hate calls and type of hate calls. I, I don't want to do that. I don't have time to do that. And it's frustrating that I have to do that. So that's, you know, and it really, and I want people to know, it, Trump, asshole that he is and I don't care. Now, this is my truth I'm speaking my truth. And as all that is has, you know, people now are so emboldened that they, they just are embracing the hate. Let me put that way embracing the hate. And without any understanding or comprehension about even why they hate this just, I can because he did. And so it's it's it to me, it's like a little phenomenon, like, really? And so, you know, that is kind of what happened during the pandemic and kind of happens now.

Kit Heintzman 23:22

It's so many.

Vanessa Green 23:25

Oh, sorry.

Kit Heintzman 23:26

No, no, thank you so much. Oh, gosh, what do I want to prioritize? All right. When did you first hear about COVID-19? And what were your early reactions?

Vanessa Green 23:41

Okay, yeah, I was at work. And I think my work kept keeping us apprised. And so we I first heard about it, probably beginning of March. And I did my first response was, you know, silly me. I thought Black people won't get this. I actually thought, we're going to be okay. The goddesses is not going to put this on us black people, we're going to be fine. And then. And then I realized people were like, oh, black people getting real sick and dying. I'm like, Oh, God, but I really in my heart thought that we would be that we would get pass that for once we would get a pass. But it didn't work that way. So that was that's funny that. Yeah, so that's where I was, luckily, ally in San Diego had to post because I don't do kind of news as much. So I was just in. And so alliances kept keeping us updated. And I was also like, It's not that serious, right in my head. I was like, you know, we're gonna be at war and they kept saying we might have to shut down, and we're not. And then when they were like, This is our last day in the office. We're going to set you up at desk. I was like, Oh, this is serious. So I think that's why my daughter was more concerned because I didn't beginning I was very lackadaisical about it. And she had more at my daughter had more information about the deaths. And so I was kind of lackadaisical because I also being an older person, you know, we think we survived a lot as kids, I got those shots, I'm good. And so I was more lackadaisical than her and and she would yell at me like, You got to stay home, we can't be out that be magic, a double masking. I've just like, it's not that serious. So when I realized that people were like, the amount of people who started dying, then I was like, Oh, this is serious. But in the beginning, I think I was in my mode, like, my mother was kind of my mother was kind of one of those people too. I lived through it all. And I was like, and I, you know, I was doing the same thing,

because my I'm a little older. I was like, I got shots. I'm good. And then it wasn't that so yeah, I was I was a little naive. And I thank God thank the goddess I didn't get it, get it. But I tell you, because I was silly as hell, like, yeah, ain't gonna get black people were good. That's not true.

Kit Heintzman 26:01

To the extent that you're comfortable sharing, would you say something about your experiences with health and healthcare infrastructure, pre pandemic?

Vanessa Green 26:13

I know that healthcare here is not good. Because as an organizer, I knew that that's why I was always organizing that, you know, there were a few black women who were kicked out of hospitals even before the pandemic and then wound up dying on the street. So I knew our healthcare system is flawed. We put that way, and we don't have universal health care, right. So you know, basically, people who have a lot of money, get the best care. And I still say that's, that's not true, either. Because we have to change that white people with a lot of money, get the best care, because let's be real clear, Venus Williams. I mean, Serena Williams, right. She had a baby. And she had to like advocate for herself that she was having a blood clot. So she has money so I'm like. Even she so I understood that piece that there's there's inherently something wrong, like people don't acknowledge our pain. I live with pain in my in my, they took up my gallbladder, but I had severe pain. And I mean, I had it for three years. I mean, I couldn't I mean, walk the floor, I'm in pain, oh, my God. And the doctors was so you know, then, you know, you're getting old. And then I'm like, Yeah, I don't know about this whole thing. It was very severe. And I went to numerous doctor and numerous till I went to one young, they want to cut my gut to do to do to just do exploratory. And he says, gut surgery is difficult. It's a long recovery. He says, I don't want to cut you if I dont have to. And he says, did you have the most least invasive procedure? And I'm like, Well, what is that it goes, you just do a allergy test. You like drink something, and you have a response. And I was like, I've been to this, you know, digestive place for over a year. And they never did that. He just shook his head. And he was like, well, that's the most the least invasive, they should have started with that first. And of course, when they did that, finally, based on him ordering it. I found that I had a lactose intolerance severe, like, I can't cheat. But I three years I suffered three years, I walked the floor, my daughter, and I've always had insurance, like I've kind of been blessed to kind of, you know, I had a gap a few times because of leaving an abusive relationship. So you know, women, women, you know, we don't have money when we leave abusive relations. And my daughter even she, she suffers with digestive problems. And she's so an a and she's poo pooed and she cries to me and you know, because it seems like nobody cares. So she has insurance and so there's a there's a thing in United States where we just think that black folks just don't get sick or don't feel pain and and so I I'm constantly luckily at the county, they have an advocacy number and I constantly call them about this happened at this because you pay for the insurance so and so they always felt like so shocked when I say yeah, the doctor kind of you know, have a I don't really like the doctor I have now and she constantly blames everything on my weight. And what we learned is that that's not true, right? There's healthy heavy black folk that healthy healthy white folks who at all, all races who exercise who are heavy, and they're healthy. So she just and I kind of told this doctor off a few times about stop saying my weight, you know, I have a very I have a bad back and my back pain is not because of heavy I have I had a husband who was physically to the point of trying to kill me abusive and I remember when he hurt my back so I know where the back pain come from. It's not because I'm heavy is because I was abused back in the day so she doesn't want to hear that piece so

I think that with the healthcare, it misses the stories of people who are marginalized, of what is going on in their body and that we know our bodies. And we know this is the pain. And if you get a history Well, you know, let's talk about your history. When did your back start hurting? Well, you know, my husband pushed me against the couch and really hard, like, but they don't want to hear that. They just, you know, I have calcification buildup and so I have migraines. I used to have migraines, the doctor never only one doctor said to me, you had a lot of blows to your head, only one and I almost fell off the chair because I was like, she says here, that's the only way you could somebody like you who is not a laborer would get something like that. But no other doc. Oh, you know, it's just stress. And you're and this one doctor was the first one who said a lot of blows to your head. And so that's what we need. And in the healthcare here sucks, because it's the haves and have nots, and it's in the doctors just not good, like not that I'm not saying that they're good.

Vanessa Green 31:10

They don't see us as, as living with pain, they don't see us as somebody who could be hurting and in pain, and that's what's sad to me is that. And so I've learned from my mentor [inaudible] Phyllis who was a, she's this tiny Jewish white woman, but I always tell people, she was seven foot tall. She always said, You never go to the doctor long when I was in New York and I got sick, real sick. That's when I finally my first time I had high blood, she went with me to the hospital. Like she drove there. And she sat with me and she was like asking. And she said to me, Vanessa, you never go out without somebody with you have somebody with you. And so I learned from her that you have to almost have a medical advocate. And so that's what I do now. And that's what I also tell people who call Call Black

Kit Heintzman 31:58

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

Vanessa Green 32:18

Oh, prepandemic that was Alliance. I day to day, I went into the office, I went to a lot of meeting, BS meetings, but this meetings, and I did the best part of the job is community forums, that was the best. So we had community forums probably once a week. I also got to travel to Los Angeles for for a lot of training. That was good. Um, before I had a job online because I didn't work for a long time. When I came out here, I don't think I worked. I worked didn't work for like a year. So my, my day was really just I was covering a lot of the Call BlackLine calls, I was trying to do different kinds of policies. We don't have a lot of policies, for Call Black man, but I like to create policies or credit subpar policies, you know, was also trying to promote it. When I did wasn't working and training, I did some training, I did some racism training, some anti racism training, I would do. I connect it with the Pride Center here. And in San Diego. So I got on that black Advisory Committee, you know, I was doing more so some luckily, I'd like not working, I'll be honest with you. Because I was able to do a lot of community organizing and connect with a lot of community agency organizations out here around our trans brothers and sisters around anti racist, so I liked doing that. And then when I started working, I had to work I was like Jesus Christ, gotta get a job. And luckily, and the only reason I got a job in Alliance in San Diego is because Chris Wilson knew my daughter. And he was the one who said, I'll create a job for you, you know, us and he craves the job for me. So I really was blessed that he did that. And so when I started working at Alliance, it was interesting in the beginning because I was learning a lot about just political history that I didn't like I have a kind of vague pieces of organizing, but I

didn't have a lot and so he they Alliance, really gives you a history about the political peace United States in the climate of politics, United States. So it was interesting. In the beginning, it just said, like, I'm like, This is not me. I don't I don't really care. I'd be you know, I'm like, I know for a fact we need to get rid of too partisan. Right. I think that we should have about five different you know, I want a feminist line. Yeah, I mean, I want feminism line. Vote for that. So I can't stand two party. I like two party suck and so on. Um, that that's what I learned. And I'm thinking the two of them, and I want a feminism line I want you know, you know, so working party, that's fine, but I just want to feminism one. So I realized that but um, my day to day was more so of really a lot of freedom because I was also driving, trying to like, there's a lot of beaches here. And I would drive to the beaches and sit and look at the water and, you know, destress. So it was I had a lot of freedom. And then once a pandemic, and I didn't have that I didn't have the liberty to really travel the way I wanted to travel safely, because also, what was also amazing was seeing people who didn't have masks score. And so I knew that I wouldn't be able to navigate and go out as much as I wanted to, because there were, there's a lot of, I keep telling people, you know, anti vaxxers and anti maskers were created in San Diego, it just seems like San Diego is the hub of idiots. And so I was like, you know, it's just you go when you see people that I'm like, oh my god, they don't have masks on. So I realized it wasn't safe to to be out the way I wanted to be out.

Kit Heintzman 36:09

What were some of the other ways your day to day was looking different after the pandemic hit?

Vanessa Green 36:13

it after it hit it was okay, I gained a lot of weight to it that pandemic 20 is a it's truth. We gained a lot I gained a lot of weight. gained a lot. It's weird to like you don't realize how much you move, even if you don't exercise a lot that how much you move as a human being. And so I gained a lot I gained 20 pounds, probably more than that. I ate junk food. It was weird because it wasn't really healthy, right? They want you to be healthy, eat healthy, wash everything well, but I was more bad food eater. We live in we live in city heights and City Heights has Uber DoorDash. And there's 1000s of restaurants in city heights. It's like it is I really don't I don't live there anymore. And I miss it. And so we Uber to lie and it was all crap food, you know, you can get a salad with that hamburger, but it's still as nasty as hamburger. So I didn't eat well. It was just weird being which is weird, because when I came out of the pandemic, I didn't feel good. And I know it was from the bad eating habits. And so it was it impacted because again, the way I was sedentary right more so than ever so my back really hurt a lot. Luckily, our my job bought our desk and our chairs, but it didn't help. I laid around a lot. I looked at a lot of TV. And so I always say coming out of the pandemic, I didn't feel good. I actually felt really bad when I came out of pandemic physically. And I know it was from crap on so and not you know, people was like just exercise. Ooh, we all have you know, you did with exercises online. And I was like, I'm not doing that shit. I'm depressed. I don't want to because I needed people in my life. So people was like, gotta get the exercise fuck you I hate it. And so I know I during that time, I was surprised. It was flooding because I think my daughter was two so when to depress people when they got their grandma's house. I'm like, That's not helpful. So I was depressed. I was really missing people in New York. Those are my the people I organized with for many years. So I hit the bed isolated, I didn't have them. And so I was depressed. And that was like funny. So I can't call Call BlackLine like who do I call so that was hard. It was hard cuz I didn't feel like I had anybody to talk to you know, me and my daughter. My kids were very close. But it's as a mom, you also don't want to feel like I feel like a burden to

my if I say to my Hey, I'm depressed, right? Because she's, she lives with depression. So as a mom, I am depressed too. That's not how I want to do that as a mommy so I just kind of dealt with it, um, a lot of wine drinking. Lots of delivered by wine. So, but I was it was hard. And people when I tell my good friends that they get shocked because everybody thinks that I'm like this strong, powerful woman and I don't. But I was like, you know, that myth we have to dispel about strong, powerful black women. That's bullshit. We suffer. And we hurt too. And so my friend was like, Oh, you're right. And so I was honest, and it was hard for me and that I tried to be the strong person. For my listeners, my friend and I was depressed. I was really on that binge of shit. This is sucks And so I'm glad I made it through but it was hard and it was hard because I felt like I went through it alone. You know, so that's why I, I tell people all the time, I am a therapy promoter like you need to go to therapy you need to go therapy regularly stop, saying this myth, the black people are strong they dont need therapy they need church. No, we need therapy. We can go to church too, but we need therapy. So I am a strong proponent, because I was really, I really struggled during the pandemic, but the isolation and answering calls and dealing with hate and, and I just tried to keep that I got this we got to be okay. But it was, it was rough. And I know that's why I put on the weight. I know it's widely junk food because it's junk food is so it's so soothing. You know, McDonald fries is just like, you know, and but it's, it's also a mask of, I'll eat this crap food and I feel bad and you don't because McDonald's will make you sick, but I didn't. I you know, I was struggling because I was sick of being the strong black woman. And so yeah, it was rough during the pandemic.

Kit Heintzman 41:10

What's motherhood meant to you?

Vanessa Green 41:14

Motherhood, um, in the beginning, after I had my son, I have two children my daughter's first, motherhood meant a lot to me. And but in the beginning, I was resentful because he was so horrible. So I felt trapped, right? Because I felt like I didn't have options to take the children and run and flee because I didn't have money. You know, I dependent you know, he was he wasn't really a good provider. But when he did provide we had so. So in the beginning, when I gave birth to them, it was it's beautiful. But as the violence escalated, I felt burdened. Right? And felt like, if I had to do this over again, I wouldn't have them. You know. But now, as we gotten free and liberated from my daughter says this all the time to like ma totally, life is so different metalhead, right? It's been a joy, right? Because they are two very different children. With their own personalities who I love immensely. And you know, and we've always had, because of him, we have such a close relationship because we united for peace together. And so it's been I tell people, if my children were not with me, or like just like me, and oh, you stay with, I would have been hard for me. But we actually united against his violence, we actually realized that we had to work together to survive him. And so we're closer that way. We don't, you know, we don't have like some people I don't like my kids, I will say get the hell out. I was more so when my son moved just recently moved on his own. I was like, What are you going? Why are you leaving? You can stay forever, people look at me, I'm like, I like my kids. I say because me and my kids have been through some shit. And so we are united front with each other. And so motherhood has been that your your kids could be a reason to go on. Because I know that, you know, as violent it is God, I knew that I had to survive. Because there's no way in hell, he could raise my kids, like, I would go, No, I you kill me if you want, but I'm looking back at my kids. So it was it was more so that they need to I need to be here for them and make the best decisions for them. So it's, it's been it's been like a

burden. And it's been a beautiful thing too, at the same time. And people get shocked when I say that, but I'm like, you have to live a situation where you just don't have any options. And then you go, and I mean, at one point, I actually said to him when I got pregnant with my son that if he was the same way, and that was stupid on my part, I know a lot more now that I will put him up for adoption. But of course, he didn't change, violence escalated. But okay, but I was really clear, I was gonna put my son up for adoption, but it was like a way of cannot control with the kids realize. And now he didn't really he didn't love me and he did love the kids. So, but it's been it's been a beautiful journey, because I did take the journey and people are honest with people. I was like, No, at one point, I didn't want these kids and they were like, oh my god, I'm like I didnt and I was in a situation that was horrible. And that is how shit is so but I like talking about it because you know that other women also disclose their truth about how motherhood can be so conflicted, like you want it you know, and I also don't believe that people have been you know, people love to say you have an innate thing your mother and I'm like us bullshit. You know, you have children. But based on your support networks, right, because you don't raise these kids in a bubble you know Yeah, I mean, in a in a silo, like right in the bubble really? You raise kids with everybody. And if you have people who are horrible, how do you mother them? How do you mother pick, you know your kids and people around you are horrible. I said that's that's not. That's hard. And it was hard because he was horrible. And so I have to own that. And my kids even tell me we have long talks about how horrible but that doesn't say I was horrible, she said, but I was doing so much to survive that I was just mean to them. And you know, hearing that, like impacts me. But also I tell people that being able to tell me that is okay. I don't get mad at it, because I'm quite sure I was a raving lunatic when I was trying to survive. And so my kids know that because I've always been honest with my kids, that relationship shouldn't be this way. This has nothing to do with y'all. I mean, I've always said that. So my kids now are able to like they have these long talks. And I go, Oh, I said that everyone would go like, Oh, my you were just psychopath, like you were. But they could tell me that they can tell me that was their experience. And I don't negate it, my mom negated it. You know, we all we grew up.

Vanessa Green 46:09

My father was very violent to my mother as well. And so we would talk to I talk to my mother before she passed about some of the stuff. And she was saying, it never happened. And me and my sister looked at this too, I have two sisters, and we would go, are we all having the same dream? Because my mom was never able to deal with how violent he was. So her way of dealing was it didn't happen. And so we all knew the illusion. We all had this moment, we all had the same dream. I mean, then I realized that told my sisters, we have to stop talking to her about it, because that is how she's surviving. But let me do that. And so I'm okay. I know my reality as a kid and what happened. So I just, but that was my mother's way of dealing. She just denied it. And that's, that was her way of dealing with it.

Kit Heintzman 46:55

You've touched on this a little bit, but I'd love to hear anything else you would share about the sort of origin story of Blackline. And then what sort of changed and looks different over the course of the pandemic?

Vanessa Green 47:07

Yeah, um, we actually we come back from Ferguson after Mike Brown was murdered and somebody [inaudible] in that time frame, I think maybe Tamir Rice, and maybe John Crawford, and one other person had been shot by the police, right? We were like, driving back home and stuff. I said, Damn, black people

need a hotline. And I was like, oh, kind of a good idea. So when I got back to New York, I hadn't created BLM Hudson Valley yet. And when I did, I was organizing in Newburgh and I told them about it. Newburgh is a city. And there was a man who had gotten killed when the cops came, because he had a mental illness. And so black men, so we were like, Let's, and so I was talking to the, you know, my Newburgh people. And I was like, Can we even talk about rapid response? And so what we were doing was we were actually present if somebody called and said, Hey, my son's having a mental wellness. And so we would go out. And then we realized that we didn't have the capacity, you know, to do this, and I get it. rapid responses are a big thing now, and people have money in this county pays county people and I'm so like, so County's paying for this shit. But anyhow, we decided let's just focus on just the line. Let's focus on listening to the lines. And so I worked with some of my queer folks to make sure that we were trans affirming LGBTQ that we wanted to, I wanted to make sure that we didn't mess up. And so we created this line. There's this one man, I have to give him a shout out he Gabe Berlin. Gabe is my internet person he has he's the one who pays for our website. He has always paid for the website. He designed the website. So I have to give Gabe a shout out because he do he's a comrade when I asked him, let me give you money. Like no Vanessa its my you know, I'm, you know, white, I can handle it. I got money. So Gabe us my internet. So we create a Call BlackLine. But as its evolved, we've done certain things to try to eliminate hate calls doesn't work. We are during the pandemic, I didn't think we would get that many calls. I'll be honest, I was just like, oh, well just keep the 100 calls a month. No big deal. I didn't realize that when people were shutting they call. The cause was we didn't have normally we just have maybe one to two people on a shift. Because that's all we need it. There was cause a rolling over I was backing up and I mean back and I thought but somebody but it was back to back. Teenagers who were isolated, moms, older people who were calling, I mean, and at that time I had two Spanish speaking and two Haitian Creole folks, because we they were calling like off, It was amazing that I mean, we're getting over during the pandemic for that first year, we got like over 1000 calls a month. We still get a lot, you know, a lot of people will say, hey, we want to promote you. And I always say no, like, we don't have capacity, you know, but we got shared over and over, we still get shared. I'm like, oh, when 988 came out, people started sharing. I'm like, oh, because people don't trust 988, right, because there's a government. So I was like, Oh, God, we don't have capacity, stop sharing. And people still share it. And so we we've evolved, but right now we're in, we're in conversation with a engineering group out here in San Diego that they create, I always wanted an app, that's been my thing, since I created Call BlackLine to have an app, I want an app. And so now this company has reached out to us to do an app for Call BlackLine, because they think that we can eliminate some of the hate calls, that you'd have to sign up to get the 800 number and they say, let me I'd be honest with you, hateful people ain't gonna go through all that, you know, they just they're just not. And so they really want to help us get rid of to decrease the hate calls. So. So Apple be coming out probably next year for Call BlackLine. And people always say to me, Vanessa you talked about an app in the beginning? Yeah, I did. But it was expensive and get somebody to design it was difficult. And this, this group, I think it's more of a school project, right? And I'm okay with that. But they designed it and everything for you. So we've evolved to where my listeners have gotten more savvy, right, because people call and pretend as well. And my listeners are very savvy. And they ask the ask certain questions where they know, it's, it's somebody who's pranking the line or, and so we've gotten more savvy here.

Vanessa Green 51:51

We are trading is different I, because what happens is, I was spending a lot of time training people, but then I train them and then they go away. And I was like, and I don't usually ask people for money, right? I usually train people for free. So I think they're gonna be a listener. So now we've gotten more savvy about who we train, like, because you have to give a commitment, like training is a lot of work, and you don't you're getting free training. We've been asked to train different hotlines on how to how we do what we do. But nobody, like I have a money, like you have to give us money. We are totally donation base. We don't get grants, because government won't give us grants cuz we won't work with the police. We won't and you know, whenever I put in a grant, and it says, no zero contact with police, that turns a lot of government and bless you [laughs]. That turns a lot of people to say no, because people always are, what do you do if it's an emergency? We work through it. But we don't ever, ever call the police. So a lot of people won't give us grants, I guess. Part of it is you have to call 911. And I'm like, No, we're not calling them. Because I don't care what anybody says in every area of the United States. If the area is considered dangerous, the police always present first, and people can tell me anything they want. But I know for a fact, certain zip codes, a cop is coming. So I tell them, those are usually marginalized communities. So I'm not putting people in danger. So I've had this going back and forth for people in different cities and states rudderless, and I'm like, you could tell me anything you want. But I know for a fact they do. And police tell me they do. They like yeah, but that's the brace in a certain area. We do go there. Before the rabbit response. I know. You don't have to tell me I know. So we are struggling not to because it's not that we struggle to keep because the line is a line and I always will pay even I pay out of pocket but I feel that my listeners who are poor, queer, I have a couple of indigenous in New York, they don't have money, right? They're not rich, I want to be able to pay my listeners. So my goal is that people give us money, right? So we could pay the i least want to pay my listeners because they should get paid. Because none of them are rich. None of them. None of them have even had a lot of good paying job, per se so I really want to pay my listeners. I also do through Call BlackLine we do a lot of teaching people how to community organized because a lot of times people call it is about you organizing I've had nurses harmed me girl organizing nurses and a like I said you connect with somebody who's had the same as me. So we do a lot of you know community like helping people to start to be community organizers because a lot of times people can think were BLM because I think somebody said if you put in BLM mental health we come up okay, and but I tell people when they tell me the story I said we're not BLM tell the story and they told me I'm like, you know Oh, BLM, wouldn't it help you with that and you should community organized. So we we give people ways, and I will text people like links and, you know, to become community on because BLM, first of all, could not do all the work anyway, let's be real clear, right and United States, so people, communities have to organize themselves and not wait for somebody to come in. If I, one of the things I do hope that we can do on the app is that we can list lawyers, because we got a lot of calls for just needing a lawyer, right. And so we want to be able to list lawyers who at least do a free consultation, so that people don't waste their time, like constantly calling them around. So that's one of the things that we know, we need, we need legal, and we need our free mental health services. So I'm hoping that once the app gets up, and I start reaching out to different organizations, about what does it look like for short term free counseling, you know, so that's one of the things I want to do, but the app is coming, and we're excited about it. And so we, you know, we, every once in awhile, I get aggravated, because I hate calls. And I'm like this is it I'm done. And my listeners are the one who really pushed me to say no, but I said, we got to keep discovering. So it is my goal. And it's my goal that my administrator, Jay.

Vanessa Green 56:20

She is right now dealing and this isn't a medical, medical, she can't breathe. She never could breathe like they should they tell her she has sleep apnea. And now they're finding out that it wasn't sleep, and she just can't breathe. So she hasn't been as supportive. But the line that she couldn't be because, you know, I have meetings with the app people, she has to only text her she has no oxygen to even talk. So I you know, my concern for her and she's young is why are they not giving you an oxygen tank? Why? And she's just like, you know, and so she's not getting the best care. She doesn't have good insurance. And so she's a wonderful person she's dealt with she using when we have suicide, she deals with them because she's a crisis, she came from crisis. But she can't even talk and she can barely breathe. So I'm aggravated because that's where the healthcare system has failed her because she's been dealing with this forever. So we don't have her like we could because she was really my east coast. person. So Jay is i miss Jay, And you know, every once in awhile, I'll text her. But yeah, so Call BlackLine is. I don't know, I don't know what the future looks for us. But I know that it was even if it's an app, even if it'll still be there. It'll it'll be here. I hope I answered your question.

Kit Heintzman 57:44

What's it been like being a support for your listeners, while all of this has been going on?

Vanessa Green 57:49

You know, I'm okay. I, during the pandemic, I got overwhelmed. I started disliking it. And, and as I was coming out of it, there was some. My daughter has, it's called black woman desert. And she has some really brilliant black femmes who was able to tell me that you can only do what you can do. And it's okay not to be 24 hours, and it's okay. If you don't get a call, because I would get like frantic oh my god, I was like, ah, and they look at me and I love young black folks, because there and black femmes are like, you know, you can always you know, and nobody ever tells me that because most older black women like we just got to do it learn you'll drop dead later. And so these young black femmes and even my daughter says sometime when I'm like, Oh, God, I just can't answer Call BlackLine she says, looks at me, but my that's okay. It's for me. It's like, letting go of that having to save the world that I have within me. And she just she's not like that. She's, she's young and black femmes are like, listen, it's our time. Now, we ain't got time for all that, you know. So I'm like, oh, so I've been embracing some of their stuff. I still get low anxiety. But my night person doesn't answer in the middle of night, right? But I know she's sleeping. But I'm like, I'm [inaudible]. I shouldn't do that to her. Right. So I still have that anxiety that angst that we have to be there for people. But there are my daughter's teaching me Mom, that's not how any of that works. She says you if you don't can't pay people and you don't have the staff. It is what it is. So she's been helping me with that. Um, I always say every time I get a hard call, who do I call down to debrief because I'm the debriefer. You know, I had a I had a mom who was I have a mom and we we chat regularly. She's nine months pregnant, but she wants to kill herself. Right? Because the father broke up with her because she wasn't the right religion. Right but that's not she's nine months dude. And so she really you know, we and I for people who feel like they don't want to be here, I will regularly chat or talk to them. That's just something I'll do. And she constantly tells me that without this line, she don't know what she would be. But she doesn't. She's feeling so lost because he just up and left because she wasn't the right religion. And she's about to have a baby. So she just feels alone and isolated. So I talked to her on a regular if I don't hear from her, and we're not supposed to do this, but I do call. We don't call that I tell people every time, but there are certain people like do call out to like, hey, just checking in. That's what I do. And so I tell my listener not to do it. And so I keep those calls. But it's a burden because

when somebody calls in, they want to they don't want to be here, you know, at first your your stomach drops. Because, you know, I always think if I hang up and something happens, but a psychiatrist told me Vanessa, sometime you could talk yourself to your almost blue in the face and people will still take their life so you can't feel obligated. They said you do the best you can. So this I have a psychiatrist who I check in with who helps me because sometimes I get people who have like, neurodiversity stuff, and I'm like, I'm not sure. So I always check in with the sidecar. Okay, Vanessa, you want to do this? Van has been great van is a trans trans man. So van has been fabulous. And and Van will check in on me like hey, Vanessa I haven't heard from you why how you doing? So van is my person that has been grounding me because I it is lonely for me because I do debrief on the debriefing from my listeners and they get horrible calls. But I never had nobody to debrief with I just internalized it. And so having Van has been helpful. And they check it. And they'll be like, what do you do? Like, ask me out? What have you done for yourself? Oh, so do for myself. And so Van is that pusher of self care and that you have to take a break you have to do for yourself. So I haveVan now and luckily, I'm glad I do because Van is a pusher of self care. So don't get mad. Leave me alone. I will save the world and like no. So it's it's it has been has been hard doing it alone. Put it thata way.

Kit Heintzman 1:02:17

The last two years have been so much more than just the pandemic. I'm wondering other than COVID-19 What are some of the other social and political issues that have been on your mind over the last couple of years?

Vanessa Green 1:02:35

That's funny, um, me and my daughter said this the other day. We're not voting for old white men anymore live and we're like we said she's like well, old white men. It's been frustrating. I'm I'm frustrated this country makes I keep saying this. If you

Vanessa Green 1:03:00

Give me reparations I'm leaving this country I have literally had it with United States I've literally had it. I've literally had it but people saying that the hate that people spew is their First Amendment right, you know, in other countries Swastikas are not allowed you get arrested. Of course they still do it right. But it's illegal hate speech is illegal but in the United States. I am so sick of the cover of they have a freedom of speech. I am sick and tired. So I want to leave. And you know, we had George Floyd, right. And I tell people, let's be real clear George Floyd. We it was taped I get it. But this has been happening to black people forever, right? 400 years plus. So I'm frustrated because we think we may change people. But we didn't make change because I monitor all the crap that happens to people that has never caught on video or is caught on video. And it's not doesn't become a George Floyd issue. We cops are still violent, horrible people. And we continue to feed into cop agenda, because now we do this thing about crime, right crime in this area. First of all, your crime has constantly consistently gone down since the 70s. But nobody talks about that because we have to keep this copagenda going. So I'm frustrated United States that we continue to feed into this bullshit that we need more police. You know, I had to tell the woman the other day, she's black, love my b, my people, but damn, you know, they cut the Criminal Justice says, I need you to tell me what criminal justice has ever been cut United States. We do not. We pour more money in the criminal justice system than anything else. Besides military, stop. And she looked at me I said, so you need to do your

research before speaking. Because that's a lie. And she was like, Oh, I said, so we have to be we get fed this thing about, you know, there's crime in the black neighborhood. And I'm like, Yeah, but how's this? If you give people the services and resources, guess what you don't have, you don't have crime. And we continue to pour money instead of reallocating funds into those communities that we have decimated. You know, here in San Diego, we have the worst jail deaths outside of Rikers Island, Rikers Island that should be shut down. And what did they do? Border supervisor, every candidate gave them more money. And I said, tell me how that makes sense that the only thing that we constantly pour money into that fails is the jails and prisons in this country. Nowhere else in the world would you be like, well, they suck, let's give him more money. But the United States, we funnel money into systems that fail. And I don't understand it. When if you give that money to the communities that are suffering. You won't have the young boy in a corner stealing because guess what, he ain't hungry. Guess what, he didn't need to get into a gang because he's okay. His mom is not on drugs, because she just so despondent about life. But we don't do that. And I'm like, Oh, me and my daughter, we leaving in United States give us a reparation, check. Matter of fact like I want cash. I'm out because I'm frustrated what we talk and we don't listen to these movements, these young moves that are saying, change has to come. And we just, I'm frustrated. And I knew for a fact that Obama couldn't do anything because he was gonna make sure black men could do shit, I get it. But Biden is a old white man who has a history.

Vanessa Green 1:06:36

And I tell people, I think he has a history of all this criminal justice bullshit. I said, so we think that people are going to change, because now they weren't, you know, they say they say things, but this is not what happens in the United States. And United States is just talking points. Were never action country, we talk a good game. But we're not gonna save anybody from the marginalized community. Because we're just a talking point country, and I'm sick of us. I'm sick of us. I tell people United States is a teenager, right? Because we're, we're new country. And so we're like the teenager who's out of fucking control. He needs a ritalin. And it's not because it's out of control. This is the United States. It's young, and it's stupid. And I'm sick of it. I am sick of it. And I don't even want to talk about what we do to indigenous and I'm in a state now where there's a lot of nations and different nations around me and I hear these stories and I weep. And this is like, what are we doing? Like so I am an aggravated I'm, I'm frustrated because I want people to live I want people to not be hungry. I want people to have mental wellness issues, you know that but the wellness looked at not just give a pill like what's going on and we don't do that and I'm aggravated like, most of the homeless I see. I have a mental wellness issue, so you can't just put somebody with a mental wellness issue in a home alone and be like, good luck with your new house. There has to come some some support that has so I'm just. I just tell the United States if you will listen to a black trans woman with a disability, you will be better but we're never going to I get it. But I'm just frustrated that we don't center the most marginalized, we don't center to our indigenous population. Most marginalized center black trans women with disabilities don't center them and they when you go to I go and listen to them. And they have so much wealth of knowledge about what this country could be. And I just go ehh United States welcome. And so I'm, I feel like I do a, a band aid when people call Call BlackLine, it's like, I just want them to get through the day. Just get through the day, because I know tomorrow's gonna be the same shit. And you know, I tell people, I don't want to just do that I want to be more, but I just think that we're just kind of that anchor in their storm for a little while and you talk to us for an hour and you maybe you'll feel better. And that's okay for me. But I'm frustrated that people have to constantly even call us or feel that their life is not

valuable. And that's where my frustration comes in. Because, you know, you know, we I've had teenage girls call and I said, I don't see you, you know, I can't see you. But I know for a fact you're beautiful. And they just sob because they like nobody ever told them they were beautiful. I'm like, I can't with United States like you know, or teenager quote. And I said, you know, if we lose you, we lose so much of our culture. And nobody's told them that all they've ever told us probably is that they're just useless. And I say you, you're valuable. You're valuable to our future. And so these kids will cry them like, oh, shit, but that's the thing. And then their parents don't believe in therapy. So it's like, I'm trying to work more with schools, that least these kids get some therapy in school, but it schools like, they don't have money either. So it's like, they're like, yeah, now we got we got a school resource officer. I'm like, yeah, he's a cop. But um, even the schools I talked to don't even have money for therapy. And so I you know, there's a few schools that I call because I get kids to call and say I get called the N word. So I call the school I tell people I have called the Walmart I've called schools. I don't care. And I said what is do you have therapy? They said, We don't even have money for for social workers here anymore. Like we've taken even that kind of safety net out of schools. I my mind is boggled that we don't. Okay, but you could have a gun though. So you could have a gun in the school. That's good. I don't know, frustrated, I'm frustrated. You know, I just but I will continue to do the work because it's the right thing to do. But I'm just like, and when I get a reparation check them out. Right? Um, I don't know where I'm going. But I'm going somewhere. Because I can't I I United States. I don't get it. I've lived here. I'm six I'll be 61 and I don't get it still. I don't get it. I don't get it. And I just think that they because this our political system is so patriarchal, you know, they don't. Why would we listen to women.

Vanessa Green 1:11:21

Even I don't even listen to women. Why would we listen to women? I, I don't and it's all and then taken away the whole reproductive justice. I cant. I we'll be back in stone age's with the United States. Because I don't. And the fact is, it's not even about the politicians, but it's about the people who vote for those folks who make those policies that are so invasive. So that fucks with our privacy, that to me, I tell them, it's not even those politicians. I said, it's the people. What scares me the most the people who vote who want us to, women not to have rights women. I want to know who the hell are those people? And are they my neighbor? Because that's my problem is that there are people in this country who believe who pit people like DeSantis and them in power, who believe that rhetoric, and that's where I get most concerned about the ignorance of the United States more so than anything, the ignorance of the United States, and we kept me constantly maintain it by banning books. You can't teach to this. You can't teach to that. And I'm like, that's why we're stupid now. Thanks. And so that's the thing that frustrates me not just the politicians in general is people who vote for those idiots that are saying and getting this policy suit. That's where I get more nervous about those people.

Kit Heintzman 1:12:39

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

Vanessa Green 1:12:44

Oh, health is everything right? It's big health is for me, my mental wellness as well. My I have a safe home. I have a school that's supportive. I have a community that's supportive, because I think for me health deteriorates. When you when you don't have all that right you don't have good food to eat, you don't have

so for me health. And that's why I tell people about health in general is that it's bigger than just the mental like this bigger than the health care system. Because it's huge, right? If I don't have a good like, I see a black woman every day, some days she has shoes on some days she doesn't have shoes on. And I'm thinking about her walk around San Diego with no shoes on. Like, I'm like she's gonna get sick after a while. So for me health is safe home. And I've been I say safe. I mean, your home has to be safe, you can't just be safe that you have a nice house and [inaudible] because it could be violence in your home. So a safe home, schools that love and support and care and affirm you right? A job that doesn't stress you that hell out. Right. And one thing I say is good about what happened and pandemic is that now businesses know, some of us can work from home, right? Which is good, because then it becomes a whole big childcare issue that stresses people out. So even my job has been more flexible about, you know, telework if you need to. So we do. And so it's that kind of thing. Being happy in just who you are right? And in loving yourself, which is a health thing, and a lot of us don't. And I think sometimes more burden is put on women and anybody you know, you're not you're not cute enough? You're not. So that. Um, so I put health in a big, big, you know, I say this all the time, both my parents died early because of not good medical care, right? Nobody didn't think they were valued. And my dad had he had he needed a triple bypass. My dad died young die like 58 for massive heart attack. Why, why did he get triple bypass? They were doing that back then. So he didn't, then he died. And so it's that kind of thing that happens that we don't you know, it's health is everything. Health is just feeling good health is good food. We have food, apartheid in this country where the worst communities don't have grocery stores. And they do and the ones they do the produce and the fresh food is horrible, right? So and I tell people because people like say food deserts ain't no such thing. A desert is natural. We got to talk about what's going on. It's called food apartheid. We don't have good food in these areas, because supermarkets don't feel that valuable. They, you know, that those communities are going to steal and so silly. But okay. And so that's where, you know, to me health means is that we got we got the we need. Right. And, and we're and we're okay, like we're, you know, one thing I hate is that, you know, right now, instead of thriving, we are just surviving. And you know, and I think that's across the board, right? I think not just black people, but just marginalized community in general, we don't thrive. We just were like in survival mode. And that's not healthy. To stay in survival mode, you know, the all that cortisol that builds up, that's not healthy. So I want to see us were we at a point where we're thriving instead of just surviving, so but health is, is key in that to having good health. And let's be real clear that they said if you had a pre existing condition, and most black people died, and me, I take antiviral medicine because I had pre existing condition. So why do I have that? And why do I have high blood? And so people want to ask me, but the doctors looked at me like, why? And she just looks at me. I said, there's no reason but but I know what it is, but you're not gonna say it. But why do I have high blood pressure? So it's that kind of thing? That is scary to me, too. So yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:16:50

What are some of the things you want for your own health and the health of people around you? And how do we, how do we shape the world so that that's possible so that you have easy access to those things?

Vanessa Green 1:17:00

So we got to reallocate funds, that police budget, military budget, into the community and the community will have. And this is one thing I tell people about Panthers Panthers had these clinics, right? I knew they're gonna shut Panthers down. They had clinics, they had schools, we need that type of care in our

communities. We need clinics, right? They had addiction clinics, they had, they had everything kind of in the Black community. And that is what I said we do a blueprint on what they did of clinics, and you don't have to call them you can call them care centers and you can call them, you know, addictions, whatever you want to call them. And if we had all those resources in our communities, schools that had the necessary stuff right, not just because the tax base dollars, the school and schools that have the necessary stuff, more social workers get those police at our school we don't need them. Because if a kid has a problem, we don't need a cop. We need social workers anyhow. That kind of thing is what our communities need. And because people always ask me, well, if you want to defund the police will look like, well, it's like reallocating funds into communities. Right? Those communities get to decide what to do with that money. So if we have a gang problem, which Calif which our area does, right, but the gangs created because of drug selling drugs and, and gangs are created for certain reason, right? Biggest gang is police. But anyhow, if we had the resources that, you know, you think about it, I know, I've talked a few times about their moms, you know, just can't get together to get whatever but then the mom is only working two jobs, she's worked three jobs in our home. So we need where we can give people a livable wage, right? A livable not 15. I appreciate the fifth try 15. But that's not livable, livable wages, right. So then you don't, and also the nine to five United States doesn't work either. Right. So that's, that's not a thing. A mom told me one time, people always think you want to be home when your kids are young, right? And she says not true. I need to be home when my kids are teenagers. So it's that card, because the community knows, right. It's like oh, accents, you know. So that is the thing about what we need. And also the access to stuff you know, mom's you know, my daughter swam, right. But I luckily, was blessed at where she swam, they paid like it was \$1,000. And I was they they like granted her in. So she was able to swim, she was able to be involved in stuff, she was too tired to hang out. And that was fine with me. So there's things that can be done to make our communities hold, but we just don't we continue to pour it into more policing. And policing is not the answer, my child, I'm be honest with you, I hate PL police [inaudible]. I don't want my child to play with the popos. That's not the police's role. And I tell people in a white community tell me where the police play with kids. And people look at me they don't, because white people get a policeman for protect my property and keep it moving. So why is it that we it's almost like you introduced them to the person that's going to lock them up in the future. I'm like, we have to stop doing that. Because that's not police's role. So I don't like Police Athletic leagues, I hated them always hated them. And I don't think that pouring more money into community discus, they see cops is a good idea. We need to make sure that our kids get more of what they could be like, you know, I don't I've never done like, I hate scared straight I've always hate scared straight. But also why we take our kids to colleges for to see what colleges are like, or you take them to, maybe they might want to be a mechanic take them to a mechanic place, take like we need to give our or even our youth. What did this look like, outside of your community. And what you could do. You know, why is it that we don't get journeys back to Africa, like take kids back to Africa, like this is where original man is from, like, we don't do that. So our kids viewpoint is United States, the United States sucks. It sucks. It's built on devastation. So I want our communities to be these mechas of artist you know, spiritual leaders, you know, and not organized religion, because organized religion makes me sick. But spiritual leaders like people who are doing you know, my friend Jay who can't breathe, she does her spirituality from from Haiti, which is beautiful waterways. That's beautiful. That's the kind of thing rather than an organized religion, which is constantly about just, you know, when you die, you'll see the Jesus. I'm like, listen, I ain't trying to see Jesus when I die. I want peace on earth now, fuck that when you die, so I've always been that people like, oh my god, oh my gosh, she's totally you know, I need to I need to feel peace here. You know, I don't need to have

peace in heaven. Right? I should have peace here on earth. So it's that kind of thing that I you know, that I know, our communities could have. But we just when something works I notice in United States they like end it, you know, this, like, it was working. Let's, you know, let's be real clear. The pandemic pull back the covers, but there was a lot of good stuff that happened. Those work, why didn't we continue to fund those? Even the Child Tax Credit worked, why don't we? Why did we Okay, we're done with that. No, it worked. It put people out of poverty. People could do like, I just, I always see a future of what it would be like to have be in a community that is so cool. Like that everybody has what they need, and they're, you know, if we're happy where community, you know, we see something we see a little bit of strife because some people have that, that somebody steps in, we don't videotape it and put it on YouTube Twitter, like now it's like I always look at videos and go. So they're fighting. And y'all are taping like, my, my mind is blown. Like, why did somebody step in and stop it? Like, that's what I wanted to community where we go, Hey, that's not what we do here. You know we talk about it we work it out. So I just I just see better for us, but I don't know we see better for us.

Kit Heintzman 1:23:29

What is the word safety mean to you?

Vanessa Green 1:23:34

I dont know, because I never feel safe. So I don't know. Me and my daughter's bought a house we got a bunch of cameras outside I looked at [inaudible] why we don't feel safe. I don't know. So safety for me with me like not feeling this way. Right. And as a black person, right? I never feel safe in communities where people don't. And we're in a community where people don't look like us, right? And it's not white, they're actually Latin a, Latina. Now that's the word to the latinx but okay. You know, we get nervous, me and my daughter but nervous because they don't look like us. So where we get a little nervous. Safe for me, is that I can drive. And if I see lights not feel almost have hardhat safety is my kids are safe, right? I have a son you best believe he's not, he's not good at checking in. So I get very nervous because he drives a little far work. And I'm like, Oh my God, a black man driving in the car. Okay, so safe to me as my kids are safe. And my son can be free to be this six foot two black man without the thought of somebody hurting him. Safe to me is feeling safe in your home. Like if your partner that your partner understands that you need autonomy that they don't, you know, people like to say we like to argue but there's argument and then there's argument, right? Don't raise your voice. Don't call me at my name. Don't hit me physically. So I'm safe. Safe is having enough, you know, not being hungry. Safe is being able to go to school and not getting shot. Safe is not having I don't want police in my community. But I know some people feel less safety with them. But I don't want to because they don't make me safe. I feel very unsafe with them. Um safe has been walking down the street not being called the N word. And safe is really having the ability to go anywhere United States and being safe. But that's not true for a lot of us. So safety is important. But I don't know if I've ever felt safe. So I'm not sure I felt safe as a kid because we lived in a predominantly black community. And so I could walk to the store, etc. And be okay. And then I never forget at seven, somebody some white boys drove by in a car and he called me the N word. And I had to go home and asked my mother what it was because I lived in a community that didn't happen. So I was like, what does that mean? And she had to explain it to me. So that's what safe for me means it looks like is that it's an you're in a community where people support you and love you. And you don't and you're not terrorized by other folks. And even if it's a mixed community too like, I think that community should be totally these these monolithic communities are horrible. They

should be totally just sprinkled in with everybody. And so I think that's what safe means to me. And you know, I saw this meme the other day, and I kind of dug it, it said lets, excuse the language, fuck every race until we become one [laughter] was like, that's pretty cool. And it was like, I thought that was pretty cool. I was like, that's pretty cool. Like everybody just brown. I was like I dig that. So it was really cool. I thought I liked that meme. And so that's what it looks like. And I don't know, like, like I said, From the young age, I was safe.

Vanessa Green 1:27:25

And then as you get more out in the world, people hate you for your skin color it becomes it becomes a thing. And I think that's what we miss in this country is that our young black kids internalize it, and then they they devalue themselves. And so, and that's my thing about a gang, too, and that's my thing about anybody who kind of commits a crime. There's a devaluing that has happened to them, that they don't even value other life. And so, you know, I always tell people we have to start looking at when our kids dreams differed. All right, cuz I know nobody grows up says, Oh, when I got old, I want to be in a gang and kill people, right? That's not what people say, that's not what our kids say, you ask a kid at seven like, oh, I want to be a nurse. I wanna be a fireman. And then I said, Where's does their dream get deferred? That then, it's not that. And so people look at me, and I said, but because our kids don't, none of our kids have ever said that even Tamir Rice at twelve. Didn't think he would get murdered by police. And he might not have wanted to be a cop, you know, I'm saying. So he didn't even get to even live his dream. But that's my thing is that we have to have where our kids have the dreams and when and, and make sure that even if they can't meet that dream, that they continue to keep dreaming, not dreaming about dying, not dreaming about killing somebody not dreaming about being the best thug like, where, like we meet dreams that are saying, I want to be able to keep my community, make my community whole. I want to be able to dream where I go to college and come back and help my community. You know, that's what I want for our communities all communities. You know, I tell people all time, you know, white supremacy hurts white people to go, oh, yeah, it does. Because your kids are just as fucked up as ours. You know, because they're dealing with is this right or not? You know, I even sometimes, parents have called me back when I you know, I send a text out when it's a Hey, call, and I get there, right? The kids are young, I've gotten 11-12 year olds, and I said, Your son, and the parents are appaled, my son was, I don't know where you get it from. And I said, you, let's be real clear. He's gonna become a Nazi. And you need to do something, because some parents have lil literally, like don't call the police on my child. Oh, my God we would never say that. And I bet they didnt. And I said, but there is something that's impacting your child that he's calling this numbering using the N word. So I don't get, I don't be like, I'm calling the police. That's not my thing, because we don't call the police. But I need the parents to know there is something that's impacting your child that you're missing. And so I want, like, you know, people say live in harmony, I'm pass harmony. Like, it's not about harmony anymore. It's about that we have true relationships with each other. You know, Phyllis, is the first white woman I've ever had a true relationship with, I consider her my surrogate mom, you know, I and I was at first like, oh, you're white lady, and didn't realize that she in her heart, anti racist in her heart and her soul. And so and listen to me, like, first of all, don't ever listen to me, like I, you know, I was like, Oh, shit, you're different. But I tell her, I'm gonna bring her out here to California cuz I said, y'all need to hear this woman. And hear what it really means to be anti racist and do this work. And so that's what I want is that we just have relationships with each other that it's not so vanilla you know, we do a lot of vanilla stuff, you know, I like Vanessa a little bit. But then when I talk about racism, I'm intimidating. So I'm like, I shut up. So yeah, it's, I just want this to

be. And I think that if we have relationships with everyone, in our communities, you do feel safe. But right now I got, you know, my daughter, we were surveilled, because we have cameras. But I'm like, we're surveilling the community, because I don't know this community and I don't trust them. They don't look like me. They might not want us here either. So it's, we put the cameras up. Sorry. But yeah, because I don't feel safe. You know, and I still don't have nightlight because it's too dark. So and we move on into kind of suburb type area. So I felt safer when I was in the city, because it was more people who looked like me. And we talk to each other. So it's so it's a difference from being in city heights to Spring Valley. It is a difference. As far as my safety is concerned.

Kit Heintzman 1:31:56

There's been this really microscopic narrative of safety under the pandemic relating to the virus in that teeny tiny framework. What are some of the things you've been doing to keep yourself feeling safer?

Vanessa Green 1:32:10

Nothing, I got the virus I can't I apparently I wasn't doing anything like caught it. So I I did too um, I even still not I will I will wear a mask at work. Not inside but when I go through the building because we were in the one of the most busiest buildings cause people come get there [inaudible]. So I wear masks in the hallway. If I go and get like nails done, I wear a mask and that's to protect them as well as me so it's not even about it's, you know, workers in nail salons as we all know, nobody gives a shit about them. So if I get my hair done, I wear a mask because I don't also know people have it. So I tend to be more safe for myself for them. The only reason I caught it in New York is because I really did not wear my mask in New York and I was hugging people. So that was on me. And I own that. My daughter even said that every picture you didn't have a mask on, I was like, hey, alright, shut up. So that's why and I noticed that I caught it in New York, I know it because I didn't mask I do better here in California because of my work and not wanting to infect people. I try to eat better, we are less Ubering here. I try to eat better. But as you know, when you're when you're working, and you're busy, you might you know make lunch so I try to be as healthy because I know a lot of it has to do with health to like, and feeling good because I a lot of times I just don't feel good right? Um, but I try to be in any spaces of large people I'll put my mask on. Or if there's a space a lot of people are not masks. I won't go into that space. I just won't

Kit Heintzman 1:34:13

what was it like for you when you can't COVID?

Vanessa Green 1:34:19

Thank God I was backs and boots because I felt horrible. My body first was aching. I said, Oh, my and my sister was a nurse said let me call because we were in New York City. We call up on my cousin because they had she had some kits, some testing kits and she said, Vanessa, you need to you need to test she said because body ache is one of them. And I was like nah, no. And I took she took the test. She did all the things. And it came back to two lines. [inaudible] She's a girl. I knew what she was. I had an idea that you that she said because body ache is more because she had it before. She's from South Carolina. She caught it as a nurse. And so I I felt so sick. But I was honest. I called the American Airlines because I was flying back. And I said what is the protocol for me I have COVID And they said they appreciate that I'm calling because they said nobody don't call she said we believe people getting on that plane that's COVID positive and know it.

So I had to wear the I 95 masks, there was a young boy in front of me who was severely handicapped. They moved his seat to the front with his dad and put so I and I didn't take my mask off the whole time. But like the flight I was on didn't know that. They just was like just and I just said when I saw him, I said could you change his seat? I don't feel good. I didn't say I had COVID they just moved him. So I flew back because I wanted to be home and also my job my Kaiser I have out here I had to get blood work in order to get the antiviral medicine because my kidneys are failing. So they need to know if I should have the higher dose of antiviral medicine or the lower dose so I got the lower dose because my kidneys are failing. So I took that for five days. My job was good. I got all my all my time back because the county has supplemental but I don't know. Once again, I told him I'll take it I don't know what you're talking about. And I did that and I stayed home and my voice still comes in and out and I'm nervous now because everybody who does antiviral rebounds president Biden and his wife, like Oh, damn it so they're finding now that so now I'm testing myself a little bit more to make sure I don't because there's a woman at the job who was nine months pregnant and God forbid I didn't want her to get it. So she tends to mask up around me which is okay I don't feel upset about it because I think she's thinking the same thing but have you rebound but I felt bad. My daughter who isolated me in the room she Lysol, everything because she's she's a doula. And she just doesn't want to get sick. So she spray in and the Lysol was on her hand. I was like, okay, she even won let me she didn't want the cat either because she said cats we have a cat who I love. She said cats can catch it from us, but not but they can't give it to us. So I didn't she didn't want the cat that gets but it was Lysol down it was. But I felt it it landed in my throat. That's why I have that because the pain in my throat was so like somebody took a hot poker. I was like, oh my god, like the throat hurts so bad. And all they said the doctor. And I don't like Kaiser by the way, Kaiser is big thing out here. But I have to say they were so responsive. When I got COVID That I was like, ey, I like you a little bit better now. And the pharmacists was making sure that my meds wouldn't impact be impacted. So I couldn't take certain he was on it. 100% my doctors were on it. So I was like, oh, because I tend not to like Kaiser I don't. I don't like but they were better and they were more responsive during COVID So I just I had COVID But yeah, it was not good. And I'm waiting now for the other vaccine to come out for the that's going to come out. They said soon. And normally I'm at the top of the list anyhow, because I have some heart disease, etc. So I'm gonna get that shot because I felt so bad. And so I this is what they said to me. This will stop you from going into hospital or dying. Like they weren't even mincing words with me. They were like, this is and I was like, oh, it's that serious. They were like, yeah, so you know, because you're sick, so I was glad that I had had the vaccine. Because people said, Vanessa, you were lucky that you had the vaccine. So yeah, but I felt it. I don't wish it on. Well, my question and some people, I don't wish it on everybody, because I felt bad. Yeah, I'm evil, I'm petty [laughing]. But yeah, it was wasn't good in so I'm glad that I feel better. No voice my voice not back then. 100. Thank God, thank God, that I'm okay, though.

Kit Heintzman 1:39:02

When you decided to get vaccinated, how easy was access and how quick was access?

Vanessa Green 1:39:09

For me, I had to get my doctor at that time who I love, right? She get new insurance, she had written a note about my heart disease. So I was able to access it quicker than most people. So and the place we went to, was not accessible. So was the line was never long. So I was first in line, got my shot and didn't get yeah, it was easy. And I told and people talk about horror stories. Because if you lived in a city, like the city of San

Diego, but didn't more difficult, so we kind of were able to get an appointment where I had a car, I could drive a little further out. That's why it was more. And people kept telling me that if you go further out, you can actually get them easier because people can't drive to the site, which is horrible. But that's how I was I went to a college out here UCSD or something that you need a bus or a car to get to. So I was able to get my shot quicker than most and easier than most very easy.

Kit Heintzman 1:40:08

You'd mentioned catching COVID After being in New York and hugging without a mask. I'm wondering how your relationship to touch has been changed by the pandemic.

Vanessa Green 1:40:17

I've never was a big touch personally. It's funny, me and my sister. We'll talk about that. And my kids are the same way. So I'm not I'm okay with it. Like people always ask me and I always tell and I teach people about body autonomy. So you shouldn't ask you shouldn't hug anybody without asking. So I so people who knew me in New York knew like, I was like, Wait a second, I give you a hug. are you hugging now? And I was like, yeah, that to see you. That was you know, I'm saying but I've never been so I knew here and when it came, I would never get it because I dont hug people. Right? You know, so when I got into New York, people were asking, you know, but that's like, I give you a hug, because and so that is because both you know, me and my family we we never were allowed to tell relatives not that we can't we don't want to hug you. So when we got older, we were very much like, Listen, this is my space. And I want autonomy of me on my body. So me and my sisters and my kids were not touch people as much. You know what are asking? So yeah. And I was glad to see a lot of people in California. I mean, in New York side was give me a hug! God, God, missed ya. So yeah, that was that was nice, because I just I do miss my New York crew. So yeah, and they gave me COVID But that's okay.

Kit Heintzman 1:41:45

Has your relationship with your cat changed at all?

Vanessa Green 1:41:49

No, she's my baby. No, even when she came in here, I had covid during my check. I get COVID I'm like, Listen, he's my baby. And she likes to sleep with me. So she comes up on the bed, so I don't care. So I she is the sweetest. She's the sweetest thing she is. I had we used to have a cat Nina Nina was vicious. Nina didn't like people. Like I get a little bit. She loved my son. I bought it. I had got it from my son for socialization. And she tolerated him but she was like this cat like, listen, just get my food get the hell out my face. This cat that my daughter got is the most loving submissive cat and we do stuff to her and I'm like Nina what a cut us up with her nails. This one is just like, hi. She's so sweet. And so my daughter can't stand her because she is very big and very food motivated. But if you pick her up, she puts her head on your shoulder and she looks at you and she might even like she's my baby. And so I told my daughter she can come in her room. She needs her mother. So she's good. And she is to me the queen of the house. Her name is Princess Margaret, she's noticed that she's messy. That's why I named her that. But she is she is we that's my that's my baby.

Kit Heintzman 1:43:12

Do you think of the pandemic, as with given all of the work that you've done surrounding trauma and violence, do you think of the pandemic as a moment of collective trauma, which is sometimes described as?

Vanessa Green 1:43:27

Oh, that's interesting. No. No. I think that United States, if it had stayed the course of everything they did, it could have been a better country. But I don't think it was collective because I think, to me, if you collectivise it right, then I think that we neutralize what the impact is, on marginalized, marginalized folks suffered the most. So I don't think it's collected trauma. Because I don't I'm like na no I also I think, it couldn't have been collected trauma, because if we really were collected trauma, we just shut down everything. Even essential workers would have had support and understanding which they didnt. Right. And I say essential workers I'm not talking about nurses and all them because that's another piece. But like, just the super ma. I mean, supermarket people who, you know, damn, well, they didn't pay more money. So no, I don't call it collective because the United States is not a collective in general. It's, it's so it's pocketing. You know, people say it's a melting pot, like it's not it's a salad and you can pick shit out of the salad and get rid of it. So stop it. So it's not a collective term only because I don't think that we were good with some of the most poorest folks in the United States who suffered right? More than anybody but I don't know if a collective I think we like to say that because I think you'd like to say we're one [emphasizing sound] you're not. And so no I don't like to do collective trauma when I hit I'm like, somebody could sway me another way but it's like, hey, talk about and so no, I think it was um, put it this way. I think it was worldwide trauma because I also was watching worldwide I was watching how Africans African suffered so for me and other countries where people wouldn't give the vaccine United States bastards that's where my that's what to me collective trauma is we took care of the whole world we didnt right we have vaccines that that expired. You couldn't get something to Haiti they couldn't get some so poor countries in Africa so I was collected trauma to me is everybody gets helped everybody. So if I can say worldwide it was collective. So I think that other countries also did better than we would ever do. But not in I don't want give the United States that they don't get that one because they suck so but I think I'm always a global person. I always want to know what globally was going on. I remember Brazil? They're all the places that are similar to Trump suffered all the places that's what got me is that Oh, everybody who has crazy people crazy men in power, I get it, I get it. And so that mean, collectively watching the country countries and then the countries where women leadership that better no shit, but anyhow. Go figure. So you know, so that's, that's where I was, I don't you know, I've heard it to click. I'm like, I don't know what that means. But

Vanessa Green 1:45:16

How I'm feeling about the immediate future?

Vanessa Green 1:46:44

Not good. Not good. Because I think we reverted right back to the same old same old you know, and even my boss said the same thing too, is that we, we just reverted back. He's, he's even he surprised about how we kind of went, we slid back and so I'll just continue to do the work but as it's and I just looked at him say you shouldn't be frustrated. This is how United States works. So I am, you know, I heres my belief unless we really start to demilitarize policing and military, same old shit. And we are pouring billions now when to military and the police. So and they are the foot soldiers for the elite. You know, I get it, right. We gotta make but here's the deal. You know, that particular meme that says eat the rich? It's true, like we if you

don't take care of the people who you feel like the peons, who who, who's gonna literally clean your house when we all gone, literally, so I am aggravated and I don't believe that anybody and this is my belief. We should have billionaires like that. That means you have not just distributed the wealth the way it should be. And I knew trickle down economics was bullshit. Anyway, I'm like, that doesn't sound right trickle down, shut up. So. And, you know, people always ask me like, what did what was your impact? You know, when the Trade Center went down, and we had the recession, I just looked at people go, I don't get it. And they like what I said, because that was no difference for me as a black person. And I always tell people that even when the market crashed back then was it [inaudible] people like black people? Like what? Oh, okay, we poor. So for some folks, that stuff doesn't even impact because it's like, I'm already in the struggle. Well, you talk about so. And for me, that's where I get frustrated is that we have become this elite. Make your billions and forgot about. Nobody should be billionaires. Nobody. No way. No, no way. And my head is boggled by that. I'm like, wow, I think some people might be treating as right. Elon Musk, right. He's he's one of the ones I hate the most. So I just thought it just to me, it boggles my mind that that's that we have allowed money to dictate what people that people are human even that we should even treat them human. It's about the money they have or the status. And that makes no sense to me. That's not humanity. Actually. I don't know what that is. But it's not humanity. So I Don't wallow in it. Because I busy doing the work. You know, people need stuff, but it's scaring me because I'm like, where does that lead? Like, where does it as a climate as our country in our Earth deteriorates? Right from climate change. And you can see it right flooding and stuff that never flooded. And you know, and then people saying, no, that's not true, and it's just boggles my mind, because we can't live, we don't have a space ship to take us to the moon we live in, we need the earth, and we have decimated her, we continue to decimate her, and we don't even and then when Biden does try to do something for climate people attack him because they want to continue to destroy the earth. And I'm like, you know, it's just only planet we can live on right. So it's, and I've started talking more about environmental racism, and, you know, climate and, and, and people just looked at me like, I got two heads, because I don't think people get it that this all works together. Health, climate, um, if you live in an area, and I forget Barrio Logan a ship was on fire, right. And it had some chemicals, but nobody moved to people. And now people are having problems. I'm like, but you didn't move the? Because you kept saying it wasn't it? Well, it's no big deal. Because all these people are Latin-A. I'm like, these people now are suffering with breathing, dizzy, and I kept saying it burned for three days. And I'm like, what? And they were like, yeah, and I'm like, there's people there. And now these people are having problems and kids are having breathing problems. And everybody's like, got their hands up. And I'm like, you had a ship of chemicals burned for three days, and you didn't do shit. So that's the thing that we don't even if they're if it's the impact of community, we don't care. We don't care. And I was like, That's my problem that this all goes hand in hand climate, health, safety, everything you asked me goes hand in hand and I'm just like, we have to listen to the indigenous about this land about what it means to be good surrogates of this land.

Vanessa Green 1:51:45

And we don't and I know we've me and my daughter recycle, but I keep looking at this company going. I don't think they recycle. I think they do something else when they you know, and that's my thing. You know, I'm I'm trying to figure out how do we do compost now because it's a thing to me. And so I'm just bothered that we are just lackadaisical about it. And that's anything that can help us it's not free like you know, people we want solar right? But Jesus the cost here and SD and G and E or whatever the hell her name is. Then there's this whole big thing about getting solar that you have to ask their permission. This is

an electro conglomerate. Why do I pass them in their fucking permission? This just to be free? So this is the thing that this money grab is what I call it is ridiculous. It's you can't eat money and you can't breathe money. Money doesn't make you healthy. And so it's frustrating to me that United States puts that so much value on that. So much value.

Kit Heintzman 1:52:50

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

Vanessa Green 1:52:53

I don't know. We can continue to go this way. So I see the collapse, right? And I think that when it collapses, marginalized communities will hold it up. And we will be the ones that will help people see what we've been saying for so long. And so when the collapse happens, because I just I don't see us going, I can't continue the way it is. And I know that marginalized communities who have been doing the work on the ground, struggling making ends meet being resilient will be the ones to say, well, here's what you do if you don't have toilet tissue [laughter]. Here's what you do, if you don't have a pad, you know, because that is what's gonna be those people who we should be listening to anyway, are going to be the ones to lead us out of the dark ages again, because they're the ones that are surviving this bullshit now. And so that's, I just don't see it continuing. If it does, I'm, I'm surprised. And so my hope is that we start to listen to those communities before the collapse comes in. And these people know what is best and let's start listening to for the whole, like world, like, you know, like I tell people, if you want climate change, if you want to end it, you need to be listening to our indigenous folks, those they should be the leaders of this. They have been the stewards of this land forever. So we need to start listening when you start listening to folks who have, you know, farmers down in South Carolina, like black farmers who have lost their land, right, because they couldn't pay. We need to be listening to them. Like, how do we have food that's healthy and not Monsanto? Anyhow. That's what we have to be listening to when I feel that that is when this country does that turn its eye to the most impacted? We'd be out of it. It's possible, but we just we don't value them.

Kit Heintzman 1:54:54

During the pandemic, in moments where you've needed support, has there been anyone that you've been able to turn to?

Vanessa Green 1:55:03

Not the beginning because I was doing the strong black woman thing. But as soon as it starts to come out, me and my friend, I think I told you, Tanya, she's the one that I would turn to and Jay, I would turn to the two of them. They weren't like my touchstone. My daughter's always been my touchstone. Right? But I make her cry. So I try not to [laughing]. She's so emotional with me. So luckily, I had them, right. But I still, and my sister my younger sister is is really I tell people, my best friend is her. She's my best friend, my younger sister. So we talk a lot we I think me and her talk every day. And so I mostly turned to her and I was lucky she's a nurse and I made her get the shot because she is another one who believes poisons in the job like your nurse, turn to your nurse badge. You're terrible. But she was funny. She finally got the shot her and her daughter down in South Carolina thank goddess, and I was because she wasn't gonna get the shot. You're a nurse. What the hell, like but I get it now that a lot of nurses didn't want the shot cause they felt that it was poison I don't get it. But anyhow, she didn't get this shot. So um. Yeah, so that is a good thing.

And she's my best friend. So without her and I also helped her the financial because she was struggling too. So yeah. Luckily, I had her.

Kit Heintzman 1:56:32

and what are some of the things you've done to help take care of yourself over the last couple of years?

Vanessa Green 1:56:38

I don't, nope. And that's, you know, like I connected with Van. And Van is pushing me to do self care I don't do a lot of it. I also think that self care it become this you know, everybody gets on the bandwagon when it didn't it becomes this whole big almost becomes more about money and so I and that's why I shy away from it because I'm like, what does that mean? So but Van is pushing me to do it even if it's not spending money like just to just take a break. Like you said, you you Vanessa you used to go out to the beach, just go out to the beach, it doesn't go so I because I just self care now become that buzzword. It's always like Oh self care I'm like get away from me. So I don't really I've never really and I think that's a older black woman thing that we've we've never center ourselves and the young black femme center themselves. So I'm learning to center myself is what I'm learning to do.

Kit Heintzman 1:57:51

I'm coming to the end of my questions and they're going to take kind of a turn. The first is do you think, the first of the last, is do you think Think of COVID-19 as a historic event.

Vanessa Green 1:58:04

Yes. Yes. Yes, um, it will definitely go down in history because it was a historic event. And it will go down in history because of the lives taken by it, right? It was a lot of lives taken by it a lot of the impact on housing, like people lost housing people. So it will go down history, because I think it was devastating with the lives and also with just what happened to different communities. So yeah. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:58:49

What do you think scholars in the humanities and social sciences, so departments like film studies, or anthropology or sociology or literature? What should we be doing right now to help us understand the human and social side of the pandemic?

Vanessa Green 1:59:06

Talking about the impacts, [inaudible] in marginalized communities talking about why so many Latin-A and Black folks died from it, talking about still the social ills in those communities. Right? Why is it that people have pre existing conditions? Right? I hate that word. But it is a thing. Then given the history, you know, I think they do do that about the United States and how it was built. And if you worship the dollar, you wont worship the people. So I think that we have higher education, schools have their charges to let people know that this is not a just society. And those bodies, the body count speaks to that. Like it's not a just society. And that my understanding is that this virus was here before March and April, that this virus was here in December, November. And we didn't talk we didn't even put things into place to protect people. And why was that? And so I think that's we have to like pull the covers back off that. Why was that? I think CDC has done stuff too, because of capitalism. Five days, isolate. Why? Capitalism? Probably. So we have to talk

about capitalism and its impact on making sound decisions for people. So there's a lot of stuff that needs to be talked about. That hasn't been and so I think that you know, people it's their job its their charge to start talking about this historical event. And the impact in in communities.

Kit Heintzman 2:01:04

What are some of the things when you were when you were growing up and learning history, as a young person, what are some of the things you wished you had learned more about?

Vanessa Green 2:01:21

Everything Everything I didn't know a lot about even black history till I got until I was adult. I was in college. I didn't learn about racial justice movements until I was an adult. So let's be real clear. I didnt learn shit in school. I don't even people say what's your favorite teacher? I just look at people. What the fuck you talking about? I'm not that I can tell you my worst teacher, because I remember him fucking names. But I remember because that's not I went to I went to a school that was kind of predominantly black. And I can tell you my friends, I can tell you who the hell I hung out with because that was my that was my community. But I couldn't tell a teacher. So what did the teacher have an impact sure it did they had no impact. They had none. You know, I had teacher who constantly say shit like I got my high school diploma you need to get yours. What the fuck you talking about? What the, shut up so I, I learned that I was able as a good kid to get through school. In order for me to get my high school diploma, get the hell out of here. I just got to be good and chill. Thanks, deuces. See you. But I, I couldn't tell you what I learned in history. You know, you always know during slavery time, right? And they talked to that piece of the book about enslavement. Everybody looked at the black people. That's how you know, oh, we must fit Black History yourself. But that's about it. Like, but I couldn't tell you a teacher. I didn't like none of them.

Kit Heintzman 2:02:57

I'd like you to imagine speaking to a historian in the future who's watching this, someone far enough away that they have no lived experience of this moment. What would you tell them? They cannot forget about COVID-19 about sort of what's been happening now what do you want them to hold on to no matter what.

Vanessa Green 2:03:21

Remember, the devastation it caused, remember the lack of response in the beginning. Remember that we went back to business as usual, even though COVID wasn't over. Never forget capitalism is a bitch. But I want them to remember the lives that were lost that we lost the lives that will continue to still lose. Because if you don't have housing, and you don't have adequate food, you know, you'll die early. That impact of COVID. Remember, people not believing in science anti maskers and anti vaxxers. Remember those people and they're devastation on communities if they're carrying if they're spreading it. But just to also look at the history look at what people have said about it. And model through the BS, right that it wasn't, it was made up lalala or you know, they tried to put the poison, but model through that bullshit, and get to the root of what the impact was on people. Because they gonna that to go down in history to anti maskers and anti vaxxers. They'll have shit in the books too and which is sad, but to muddle, get through that and get to the real, the devastation of this virus on the entire world.

Kit Heintzman 2:04:54

I want to thank you so very much for the generosity of your time and the thoughtful beauty of your answers. Those are all of the questions I sort of know how to ask at this moment, but if there's anything that you'd like to share that my questions haven't made room for, I just want to make sure there's some space for you to do so.

Vanessa Green 2:05:13

No, I think you covered it all [laughing]. Think you did. Yep, yep, yeah.