

## Transcript of Interview with Melissa Gonzales by Kit Heintzman

**Interviewee:** Melissa Gonzales

**Interviewer:** Kit Heintzman

**Date:** 06/15/2022

**Location (Interviewee):** Seattle, Washington

**Location (Interviewer):**

**Transcribed By:** Erika Groudle

### **Some of the things we discussed include:**

Working as an end of life doula, grief support guide, Reiki practitioner, and trauma-informed yoga teacher, death positivity activism, COVID hospital patients dying alone; helping clients connect with family in nursing homes in creative ways during lockdown, holding space, first hearing about COVID in December 2019 through NPR, traveling in Jan 2020 and taking early precautions, living with a cat (Blackey Olive aka Blackstradamus) and strengthening their relationship; companion animals and love, abortion, social justice, hate crimes, guns, environmental damage, gas prices, supply chains and scarcity, Seattle and homelessness, wealth disparities, drug use, and violence, greater Seattle area as an epicenter of COVID hitting the USA, having easy access to COVID testing due to living near University of Washington University.

Global inequities in COVID knowledge, testing access, and vaccination access, non-binary inclusivity, remembering that historical actors had hopes and dreams and visions; the limits of the archive and documented experiences, and much more.

Kit Heintzman 00:03

Hello.

Melissa Gonzales 00:04

Hello.

Kit Heintzman 00:06

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

Melissa Gonzales 00:11

Sure. My full name is Melissa Lynn Gonzalez, the date is June 15, 2022. And location is Seattle, Washington also Land of the Duwamish.

Kit Heintzman 00:30

And what time is it where you are?

Melissa Gonzales 00:32

Oh, I'm sorry, the time currently is 3:06pm.

Kit Heintzman 00:36

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

Melissa Gonzales 00:48

Yes, I consent.

Kit Heintzman 00:51

Thank you so much. Would you please start by just introducing yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening to this?

Melissa Gonzales 00:57

Sure. My name is Melissa Lynn Gonzalez, and I am an end of life doula, a grief support guide, and a trauma informed yoga teacher and Reiki practitioner.

Kit Heintzman 01:13

Tell me a story about your life during the pandemic.

Melissa Gonzales 01:18

Let's see. So life of the pandemic as a as a doula. I was trained in 2017 to be an end of life doula. And at the time, I wasn't quite sure how I would be in the world of offering my support. Because it's very fast end of life doula work, there's so many different avenues you can take. And also is preparing myself because it's work that, you know, has a lot of, a lot goes into it. It's the world of death and supporting people that are facing their death or preparing for it. And sometimes, you know, people that maybe are not even close to their death, but just thinking about ways that they can prepare for the future when that day comes, and then also being present for those that are alive, but they've lost a loved one. And so, pandemic hit. And at the time, I was doing a lot of advocacy work with end of life, doula support and just like death positivity. And then once COVID started happening, I- You know, being that I have the lens of a doula and end of life doula, I look at the world in this lens of of life and of death and seeing like, what was happening in the world, and how people needed care. And it was breaking my heart to see that, you know, places that hospitals, rehabilitation centers, nursing homes, that there were people dying, or ill with COVID, and not able to have the support, or access to loved ones. And I was just, I didn't know what to do. I was also in my own process of, of being in the pandemic and my own livelihood. And so I did have a part time job that I worked in a wellness center for women. And it was something like that was gone. And like now I have nothing and no work to go to. But having this desire and a training to be present for people, it was breaking my heart that I couldn't access people. So I would read all kinds of things, I would try to be involved in things, but also there was no being in these places. And one of the ways that I found was that when I had relations friends, where they say had maybe a loved one in, in a hospital or in a nursing home, being able to communicate with those, those friends or family members, and being able to say, you know, is there a way that they can access even though you can't be present with them? Is there a way that a device like giving ideas of like accessibility to the loved one, if they can't access them? How can they reach them either digitally or through a window? So having those conversations and then also, I had family members that had COVID. Some didn't like one didn't make it in particular, a distant relative, like a second cousin, but being support also for the family members remotely like being in the conversation, asking if they need anything, letting them know that that you're thinking of them and also by being in closer contact to with relatives closer to access them, or and then the ones that did survive, like being in communication with them during their process, because at that time, they don't know if they're gonna survive or not, they're ill, and they don't know. And so being present remotely through the phone for through a text, you know and checking in. So those were things that were showing up and being in the conversation with others. And an idea came to me, because I couldn't access people because of the pandemic. First was being in

community digitally. And so I'm part of a collective called the Stone Circles Collective. And a member and I together worked in grief support. So offering space for grief support for people because COVID is happening, but on top of it, there's still lives lost that are, you know, from all kinds of things or, or even anticipatory grief, like maybe this just showing up because of all the stresses. So being in circles, digitally, to create space to have and be in the conversation to what's happening. So that's where I found my focus. For the early stages of COVID, I would say like in what was that 2020 Autumn of 2020, working in that realm. Another way that I was supporting people, I do read tarot, I'm a tarot card reader, supporting people through inquiry, but having the lens of a doula and through the grief support to be able to navigate, because there's individuals also like having family members, maybe that have cancer, losing pets, as well. So being in the dialogue, having cards but really being opening up the conversation of what their experience is about. So holding space is where I found myself. Summer of 2020, I was invited also to help someone that had cancer, and diagnosed wasn't sure how it was going was doing experimental, like chemo therapies and medications to try to kind of see how the cancer responds. But it was an aggressive form of cancer. And I was called in to be in the part of the life of this person and their partner, to support them towards the end of their their life and their journey. And what I noticed, in that, because this person was very much a community member, that they couldn't access people, they couldn't access the people that that are dear to them. And on the same side, the people that were dear to them didn't feel safe or to be going into the home of this individual. And so it was really challenging. And those were conversations that I would have, with my client, about them wanting to have this connection, but not having it. And so how do we create that or, you know, being in the conversation with those individuals, and inviting it in, and this person didn't want to be digitally connected, because that just never worked for them in their life. And they didn't, they weren't fond of it. So sometimes I was a messenger like relaying messages from people, because also this person was not always able to have the energy to be in a phone conversation. So I would be in those conversations and then relay what was said, by a friend to this person, so that they know and like be that messenger. So it was a different way of operating. And that was early stages, before we had the ability to have a vaccine, or even be tested if you had COVID. So those were some things that I noticed early on. Later, like more recent this year. It changed a little bit with having vaccines and having being able to be COVID tested, that I could have clients then be with family. And that was like a different dynamic versus this isolation not being able to be connected versus people being able to be tested and have safeguards in place and have say home health care come in and have the support that they needed. So it was a different dynamic and interesting to see for Really COVID versus where we are in? What was it 2022 like spring, completely different summer of 2022, spring 2022 different dynamics in the phases in between where you just as the world opened up a little bit, so did the accessibility for for care for, for those that the end of their life?

Kit Heintzman 10:26

Would you tell me more about death positivity?

Melissa Gonzales 10:29

Sure. Death positivity is inviting in the conversation of death, looking at death in a way that it's a curiosity, versus something that's taboo, and being supportive of speaking, pardon my cat speaking about death, and having these conversations that are open, and in a discovery, because for so long, and for so long, it's been taboo, but it wasn't always taboo. And in Western culture, particular, there was shifts since the Civil War, that had changed the way that we looked at death when involving came into being. But even today, in other parts of the world death is looked at differently depending on what culture there's different cultural differences with death, where it's no different than life. But death positivity is and opening up this conversation, being present supporting people's

choices of how they choose to live, or how to die, like medical aid and dying. having these conversations and a lot of people don't know their rights with death, like that they have access to actually pure and a hospital and you don't want to be there anymore, and you want to go home and die that you can do that. So creating these awarenesses I would say that's what death positivity is like being able to be advocate for advocating for those in the death realm for facing their death.

Kit Heintzman 12:09

What was your day to day looking like pre pandemic?

Melissa Gonzales 12:13

My day today was pretty much, it was very different than it is today. You know, I would wake up and like I mentioned, I worked at a women's center, I'd go to my work. I would meditate, you know, do yoga, these kinds of things and garden, and go hiking and very much a community member. So I'm very active in the community. So you know, whether that's gardening or dancing, or music, being with people, and that's like really much what my life was like pre pandemic, very social, and then pandemic, easing up on that, like not being able to be social, not being able like to be in spaces. One of the hard challenges that I faced was, I like to give hugs be had with people that I'm close to. And that ceased during a long phase on the early stages of COVID. And even today, it's selective, being selective of how I engage. And these kinds of ways and even like same like, I do go dancing sporadically, but not all the time, I find myself outside a lot, which I was before but engaging more inviting people outdoors. And then a lot of dialogues that are taking place like this, like virtually like the virtual world has opened up more for me, whether that be video chats, or voice memos, engaging in this kind of way versus you know, maybe in person. And so it's changed a lot. It's different. Definitely more conversations about that come up with people because I don't know maybe because we're all facing it. And people know that they can have those conversations with me. And so it's I definitely have more day to day talks about, like being in conversations of death or grief than it was pre pandemic.

Kit Heintzman 14:43

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

Melissa Gonzales 14:45

Yes. The first time I heard about COVID-19 was right before I was about to travel. And it was let's see was actually before that was December, December, November, December of 2019, it started making the news. And I heard about it in China. And then then I think I heard about it through, maybe NPR was how I heard about it. And then I started noticing things like through my feeds through the internet, you know, like having just daily news broadcasts and noticing the numbers get higher. So it was December 2019, is when I first noticed, and I did travel in January. And so that's when I started being, I remember, disinfecting, being in the airplane and disinfecting all the space and wearing like a mask even early on, and just kind of being cautious about everything. And that was like January of 2020.

Kit Heintzman 16:06

What were some of your early reactions?

Melissa Gonzales 16:11

Some of the early reactions were shock. And, you know, having anxiety, anxiety, you know, just being anxious, like, you know, just devastated to see the numbers and how quickly the death toll was, like to look up what was happening in other countries to, to read about what was happening in Italy, with people. It just was breaking my heart, like I just felt sadness and grief and a lot of despair, just, you know, in making sense of what made didn't make sense. You know, just trying to work through that. And I found for myself, like, diving deeper into my yoga practices, or meditative practices, or journaling, and my spiritual practices became more of focus, and taking my time, and also reflection, like lots of reflection time, or something that from my process of like, what was showing up?

Kit Heintzman 17:32

Were you living with your cat all the way through the pandemic?

Melissa Gonzales 17:35

Yes.

Kit Heintzman 17:36

What was that like?

Melissa Gonzales 17:37

Beautiful. Very loving, it was the first time like, we've had so much time together, like I'm very much part of, we're part of each other's lives. But we could be with each other more than we ever have been. And, you know, having time like extra time in the morning, versus like, you know, cutting it short, because you need to be here there but to actually embrace that time together. Or, you know, if I'm home, like say I'm on the laptop and doing something or reading things like her being cuddled up next to me, and being able just to have time, and I definitely feel like it's a companion like, you know, for coping with the stresses and the unease, like having this animal that is a pet, but then now being a like a companion, a companion of a of joy. You know, of of like love and giving me that extra boost of security in uncertain times. So it was really lovely, and she's still lovely, and we still have all like it. It definitely strengthened our love Bond was there, but it's like very much so made all the difference

Kit Heintzman 19:03

To the extent that you're comfortable sharing what have been some of your experiences of health and healthcare infrastructure prior to the pandemic?

Melissa Gonzales 19:15

Let's see prior to the pandemic, health and health infrastructure Hmm. That's a deep question. Could you can you ask the question again, I want to like sit with it.

Kit Heintzman 19:31

Right. Yeah. What have been some of your experiences with health and healthcare infrastructure pre pandemic?

Melissa Gonzales 19:39

Okay. So personally, with health care and like a medical like institution, pre pandemic. I noticed. Going even just like to Doctor was visits like the way that things were more relaxed, like more visits could be more relaxed or checking in would be more relaxed. And there was just like a different kind of different than it was how it is now. And I noticed, like a pre pandemic, there wasn't a lot of telehealth accessibility. And, you know, now we're in the very much it's very normalized for telehealth. And also, just thinking about, like, I'm thinking about visits going to the doctor personally, or even with clients. You know, he's checking in, like, making sure like, taking time, whereas before, maybe that wasn't happening, but noticing the, like this kind of checking in different questions and conversations coming up. That wouldn't have before, like, kind of when you're there making use of the time, you know, because you don't know when you're going to be able to have another appointment. And really checking all the boxes, like before, versus just showing up. But just like, making sure like, everything is intentional. I know for me, like that's what I'm looking at, it's like, okay, I have the attention of this physician. And I want to make use of this time, because I don't know when I'll see them again, because you know, to get scheduled for an appointment may be a long distance out. And if I don't get it, you know, taken care of now, luckily, there is a lot has changed within you can be in a what is it like inside the infrastructure of the digital realm of like making your Med appointment, and then being able to leave notes to the doctor or to whoever's assisting them. So I've noticed like that's changed, like having that connection to like reach who you need to speak with.

Kit Heintzman 22:09

I'm curious 2020 was such a sort of notoriously large year with so much going on. And then there was the same narrative about 2021 and 2022 is also trucking on with a lot and wondering what some of the other than the pandemic what some of the other issues on your mind and heart has been over the last couple of years.

Melissa Gonzales 22:28

Mm hmm. Definitely. Abortion, like what's happening with women's bodies like that's been ongoing politically, like what decisions are made for women. Also, social justice, you know, like definitely facing- There's crimes like hate crimes. [Cat meows in background] Do you mind if we pause for a moment? Is that okay? Yeah, okay. I'm gonna take care of her thank you. All right. Okay. [Cat meows again]. Right. Thank you.

Kit Heintzman 24:00

No problem.

Melissa Gonzales 24:04

She's up early today. Normally she's not up until about four. Where were we?

Kit Heintzman 24:14

You were talking about some of the other issues that have been on your mind and so you had mentioned abortion and then you started discussing social justice issues, hate crimes.

Melissa Gonzales 24:24

Yeah. Guns like you know, the fact that there's been a lot of violence with with gun like, gun reform is something that you know, is on my mind and environment, environmental concerns as well. And homelessness. I live in Seattle, and homelessness is out of the roof like it's there. It's just everywhere. It's it's it's interesting be because we have so much wealth here. So there's a big divide and disparity, insist witness, so much wealth, and then homelessness on a grand scale like I've never seen before. And then another is drug abuse, like seeing so much

like addiction and outward drug use, like just out on the street, you know, there's seeing people use, and also violence. There's violence in the city that I live where innocent people are dying due to, to maybe mental health, you know, that's another issue, like mental health crisis. So it's kind of like ripped up the seams of like, all these things happening in a very much monumental way. Another concern is economic, you know, the economic concerns that we have, like, gas is almost like \$6 to the gallon. Um, concerns about food, like accessibility for food, like food chain, something that I, I have a concern about, like when we have supply chains, not able to get all the food that that people need, or even may not be food, it might be things vehicles, like things to actually navigate, to get people what they need. So there's a lot of supply chain issues that I'm concerned about as well.

Kit Heintzman 26:41

What does the word health mean to you?

Melissa Gonzales 26:45

Health, you know, it's it's said, and it could be cheesy, but like, health is wealth. Health is everything. And it's very much a holistic way, like when I think of health, I think about a holistic life. Because with our health, it dictates a lot of how we navigate in the world. You know, if you're not feeling well, then it just changes everything. So health is something that it's essential, you know, and also there's different degrees to health, it's, it's, it's natural, like, there's different stages of health, and everybody's at a different stage at different times. But it's really, the well being like it's connected to the well being of an individual and a quality of life. And even if that quality of life is say, you know, in a decline, that there is this palliative care for where the individual is, and that health matches that along the journey of a person's life, or even health with like a lot of companions have an animal as a pet. So like the quality of health for living creatures, like living beings.

Kit Heintzman 28:12

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

Melissa Gonzales 28:19

What I would like to have for the health of myself, and those around me know, a quality of life, like stability. Having again, needs met, you know, basic, like it can be basic needs met, having accessibility to health care for myself, and for others around me. And it's, it says a lot, because there I've personally, like for me, I've witnessed things where people didn't have the health care that they needed, and they don't make it. Whereas maybe they would have if they had the health care that they needed, if they had the attention that they needed if they had the right medications or medications that were suitable for what their needs were. And so, for me, it's like having a healthy quality of life throughout the stages of my life. And I would say that for others around me as well. Because it's, I see like, if somebody's suffering, we all are suffering. You know, and it's something that we have with all the technology and all the intelligence in medical systems. There's so much that we can offer for each other and even in our communities because there's an abundance of intelligence and technology where there are things that are you know, making a difference, like lives are being able to we can study like even the fact that the vaccines were created so quickly, that goes to show that where we're at, with the intelligence of humans, and the intelligence of technology, merging together for a healthier society. So, you know, that's something that I see that, that there's hope there within the realms of, of what we're part of, and it's up to each one of us to be part of that, if we choose to,

Kit Heintzman 30:38

What does the word safety mean to you?

Melissa Gonzales 30:42

Safety is security. Having security. Also, stability, you know, that can be in so many different forms. But safety is like having security having stability.

Kit Heintzman 31:06

There's been this really narrow conversation of safety in our moment, and we're on the subject of COVID, taking in that sort of tiny field, what are some of the things that you've been doing over the last couple of years to make yourself feel safer?

Melissa Gonzales 31:20

I know for myself, a creating structure. As far as like my own wellness practice, making sure you know that I have enough rest. Also, my mental health, like doing practices for my own mental health, creating healthy boundaries, as well, you know, in the line of work that I do, that can be like mental and physical boundaries, of making sure that, you know, I have my needs met, before, I'm in the world, supporting others. And having that toolbox, so like, also, things like for safety, I'm washing my hands, you know, I'm wearing a mask. Just cleanliness. And, you know, just being like, I even go to the grocery store, say anytime I'm in places like really being mindful of my engagement, my own distancing with people that I that I don't know, that I am not able to be in the convert, like, when I have conversations with my friends, like being able to know where someone has been traveling, having these transparent conversations about where we're at, and or even, it may just be safety of feeling secure about where you currently are, and where you were yesterday, with things may not be the same place of where I am today. Might it might shift depending on what is showing up or these kinds of things, seeing numbers go like safety, I'm choosing not to fly, I was going to fly next week, where I was going and it has a high count of of COVID rates. And really not taking those trips like deciding to change my mind. And these are things that I'm looking at and navigating. Also looking at numbers, like I just mentioned, where I'm traveling, or even kind of like a weather report in a way like if you know that it's gonna rain and there's forecast for rain, then I'm wearing rain gear for COVID. If I see numbers rising, and I get invited to something, it's going to have a large populace of people maybe reconsidering or if I am going to navigate, choose to be in that arena. Choosing how I'm going to wear PPE. You know, like, how am I going to what am I going to do? A big part of my safety is making sure that my clients are safe as well, because I go into homes of people, I'm working with people now that things have opened up, I've been in contact with people. And so really being aware of what my the more that I'm safe, the more that I can create safety for others. And so that's something that I'm always navigating, choosing to say no to something, but then, you know, then so that I can have room for my clients while being in their safety.

Kit Heintzman 31:49

I'd love to know how you speak with clients about boundaries and safety needs and what you can accommodate.

Melissa Gonzales 35:00

A lot is transparency, checking in. Sometimes people don't know that they don't, it may not even faze them. Like, it may not be something that they even recognize. So when I introduce something, and I've noticed, all go visit a client can all show up wearing a mask. And then they'll see me and they're like, Oh, should I wear a mask too?



And I don't impose anything I, you know, it depends, like, if I know a little bit more what's going on. But I will say, Well, I'm gonna wear a mask, because this is what I feel comfortable with. But, you know, you get to choose what you like. And again, it might change. And I can sometimes have said, yeah, I would prefer that you do wear a mask, you know, because of things are, like numbers are high. And just having these really open hearted conversations, and navigating in that sort of way. I find it beneficial, and certainly being honest. And surprisingly, people respond well to it, especially when you're not when you're not making somebody doing something, but living by an example. And, and having a dialogue as to why I'm doing something the way that I'm choosing to do it. You know, one of another thing that I'll do, I'll ask a client, like, do you mind when I get in? If there's no hand sanitizer? Like, do you mind if I go and wash my hands? And asking these kind of questions and going and doing the ACT doing the action, and then coming back, you know, and so it's just living by example, you know, and to create that, but not making other people do things, you know, necessarily, but are asking where things are like, asking where cleaning supplies are, if I need to do something, and so, know that it, I've noticed that it creates reassurance with the people that I'm working with, that I am doing these measures, you know, and it's just become very much habitual, and part of, of what I do. It's just natural, I've gotten used to it. And so it's it, I don't think of it in any, I don't think of it, I don't second guess that it's no, it's just part of breathing now and drinking water, like doing these, these practices, you know, and just checking in on people. Sometimes people don't know where things are, they don't know, where, because they haven't read, maybe they haven't read things or they don't know, but opening up the dialog, to see like, where they're at with things and understanding in so find that communication can go really far with people, especially if you're not imposing but just being curious and asking questions, it like really opens up dialogue in a whole different way of understanding.

Kit Heintzman 38:11

Has your social circle changed much over the last couple of years?

Melissa Gonzales 38:15

Yes, it used to be more broad. But since being in pandemic, it's definitely values like aligning being with people of similar values, or energies, like, what I mean by energies is not being around like, say someone can be more activated or anxious, like really being mindful of my engagement, like seeking out like friendships, where there's more of a balance where the person is really, you know, taking care of themselves the best they can, even if things are happening in the world is chaotic, that they have their own practices and their own grounding. So that when we are together, it's like that's the synergy that's happening. And I find that that's what I'm, I seek out like being with community of value or of interest like having interests like you know, I'm a gardener so then my garden community like being in my garden community and having these conversations about like we know the world is going on as it is, but being really enthralled and being in the conversation of growing food and plants and what's happening with the bees and what's happening with the birds and like being in those dialogues are talking about soil and you know, it can be even like oh, look at all the earthworms like really being in those conversations. So find Seeing these connections, you know, I'm also in the innards. Like in a healer, I work with Reiki like being with others that are similar like working with people, like I have an end of life doula community being in those conversations. So I find that I'm in circles of individuals that we are passionate about, what we're what we're doing. And so I find myself being in communities of other people doing passion work, or, or even switching up what they were doing before, I know a lot of people that may have had a job like that they were working for someplace. And finally, now they chose to, like, run a business, that's been the passion idea for a long time. And these are, my community has is this, these are the people that I navigate with, because it helps me It lifts my spirits, you know, because I'm doing work that sometimes can be, you know, really intense that has an intensity

and to be with people that are up to doing what they love, it's a different connection. And it creates this kind of solidarity of this, you know, being in a world that is as it is, as we as we know how it is right now just being uncertain, and all this different. kind of chaotic, but having stability, and having deeper conversations, I also notice my friendships are very deep, like the conversations can flow in a very deep manner. I don't really have a lot of relationships that are very surface, everything's like really, more profound conversations that I have with others. And these are the people that I navigate with, or, you know, talking about activism, being friends with those that are active and activism, doing things in the world to kind of make a difference. So I've noticed that this has changed. I've always been pretty broad in my friendships, but due to the nature of the work that I do, I have limited free time, at times. And so I choose to be really selective of who I spend my time with.

Kit Heintzman 42:38

What's access to testing and vaccination been like where you are?

Melissa Gonzales 42:44

It I reside near the University of Washington. And so maybe because I'm so close to a university that has amazing testing facilities all over, it's kind of like an epicenter. And this is something that I never thought of like Kirkland was were in Washington State, which is just across like, maybe, you know, it's across the water from where I live. It, I never thought of it that way. It's like this is an epicenter of where COVID came into the United States. So we have a lot of testing centers, we have a lot of accessibility to vaccines. There's, you can, if you don't have a computer, there's a phone number, you can do walk ins to different pharmacies. So it's there's a lot of accessibility, a lot of ways for people to get tested. There's even I haven't seen in a while but haven't watched television in a while. But for a while there was public service announcements of helping people like thinking about people that can't get to a testing site, offering up support to get people there. So like and getting people what they need. So it's really interesting, like I feel, I don't know what it's like in other places. I do though, like I have friends that live I have a friend that was living in Chicago. And I remember, you know, them needing to go get tested. And there there was that run out of testing. Like they couldn't, there was no kits at all. Meanwhile, like we were getting shipped, like an abundance of kits. So I was like, how does this work where there's a place like Chicago like that doesn't have like, what they need, but like we're able to get these kits and you can even now like you can order them I don't know if that's like that for everywhere but can order them and have them delivered. Like for example, a few weeks ago, I went in and there's a government site that we have for Washington, and I ordered the kits, and they came in, like the next day through Amazon. Like, it was incredible, like how quick that could happen. So I feel grateful to have the accessibility. And I don't think that that's like that everywhere in in the United States and definitely not in other countries. That's something I know it's off topic. But something that I want to mention is that in other countries, like, if we notice, a lot of the variants come in, through other countries, and it's something to look at, like, how accessibility is in those countries for the vaccine, or for testing kits, like it's something like where, where I live, you know, there's accessibility, which changes the numbers, but I really have concerns about places that are not where people aren't able to, maybe they don't have cars, or they don't have access to what they need, or even have the awareness, the knowledge of what is going on. And that's something that that I think about, for other places, outside of here.

Kit Heintzman 46:24

How are you feeling about the immediate future?

Melissa Gonzales 46:31

The future, something interesting that I look at differently now than I did. Pre COVID. I really don't know. Like, I really don't know, I had a conversation recently with a barista, and they're younger than I am. And, you know, it's allergy season here. And we were talking about allergies. And they brought up something about nowadays, like, because it could just be allergies. In the past, it was like, Oh, I might have a cold or it might be allergies. But now COVID is in the equation. And it's like, oh, no, like, I need to get tested. And I don't know if I can go to work and these kind of thoughts. So I, I mentioned to this person, I was like, Oh, I thought I was the only one having these thoughts like and this idea? Because I question it too. And then they started going on saying yeah, like, I wouldn't be surprised because now there's a monkey pox, like monkey pox is in the news. And it's like, well, that was around up until like the 1970s. It's always been around, but that it was being I think vaccinated until like the early 70s. Like maybe 1972. And now it's made a resurgence and it's in the world. And it's like on the rise. So things like that happen. Or you know, there's these killer wasps that were happening. I don't know if they're happening this year. But last summer, there was killer wasps. So, you know, this person mentioned? Yeah, like, if aliens came tomorrow, like, you know, it would not be a surprise or if there was like a deadlier virus than the one we already have. It's like we've already being in I agree. Like, it's, it's been like, there's so much going on that it doesn't, it's like it, of course it faces you, but you would be not surprised. So really, you know, for me, I would say like the future is like right now, like, that's all there is like, and it's kind of, it's kind of always been that way, there's this illusion of a future and there is a future, but like we really none of us really know, the future. So really, the future is really in our present. And that's what we're working with is like this present moment. So this is where it matters, like in this present time, because the future can do so many different things. But really, it can be also, like, I know, thinking too far into the future can be more anxiety can bring in more anxiety, but what I know is like being present now and being present with what showing up. You know, today's a beautiful day. There's birds chirping, I'm here, like being present with you. And in this is where it's at. I have coffee, that's awesome. You know, I have fresh water. That's amazing. And so really being with the gifts of the presents that are here, that's like the future, but really, it's so uncertain. I don't really even know what will happen. But what I can say is that I am hopeful because I do see really amazing things happening in the world. It's not televised, necessarily. It's not in news articles. It's not in a feed like it is something that it's happening. More on a micro level trouble sometimes. But there's a lot of different micro levels of, of things happening within communities where people are supporting each other in ways that we can't even see. Because it's, it's more on a micro level, but it is happening, because I hear about it by being in dialogue with people in community in having conversations.

Kit Heintzman 50:25

Do you have any hopes for a longer term future?

Melissa Gonzales 50:28

I do. Yeah, I do. Yeah, I have, I have so much like I, you know, I know, people having children, I see people being pregnant. I've seen, like, you know, I think about the lifestyle of these future generations. And, you know, I know, I know, children, there's children that I, I know, I'm like part of their families, and to have conversations with them. And, you know, even though there is a pandemic, and the world is it is there's this innocence that they, they bring, but they have their own visions and hopes and awarenesses and are really savvy at technology. At a very young age, where they're navigating, and it's second nature for them. And, you know, there's also people that I know, that are maybe 20 years younger than me, that are going into medicine, like going into nursing careers, and taking the leap. And really, I know them from a more holistic, like, they might be yoga teachers that are doing this, they may have like, awareness, like, different coming from different backgrounds, and going into medicine, and, you know, being in that field of offering a diversity that maybe wasn't there before, you know, seeing the

world, be non binary, as well, like seeing that come into being that embracing that, like embracing those conversations, of being non binary, bringing the non binary conversation to language, to Yeah, to like, documents, you know, inclusivity, like having being things being inclusive, I see that more and more all the time. And so, I'm hopeful for things I do see, you know, there's shifts that are happening right now in politics with like, women's bodies and choices. And, and at the same time, there's a lot of movement, otherwise, so I am hopeful, you know, it's, I was just thinking about suffer just the other day, I was like, oh, like they had, they had their time to do what they needed to do. And now in 2022, there's those of us now that have the work to do for future generations, and being documented to say these things are really helpful for other generations down the line, to have, you know, knowing that we all have a timeline to work with, and that we're all present. And we have the ability while we're alive to choose how we want to bring in the future of the world and share that with younger generations. So I am hopeful and I am grateful for technology, and actually the internet, that it can be a beneficial tool to access communities that maybe wouldn't have access otherwise, to an awareness for a future generations and for thinking in Native Indigenous, like seven generations out, like thinking about in that timeline, how that works. So I am hopeful. I am

Kit Heintzman 54:16

Who's been supporting you?

Melissa Gonzales 54:21

Who's been supporting me? Like, in which kind of way there's different types of support, like emotional, financial. Um, let's see. So, you know, in financially early on pandemic, I received benefits from the state, Washington State I'd never received like, I've never been on benefits before. Like I've always worked and made my own revenue source, but for 2020 and part of 2021, I was receiving benefits from the state. So it wasn't anything that was, you know, it wasn't where it matched what I was earning, but it was able to, I was able to make sure that my needs were met, you know, and so, but then at the same time, there was no going out. So I didn't have extra expenditures, it was just kind of creating things. So that happened, but I financially support myself, I do have a partner that I cohabitate with, and they, you know, have, like, we have joint things that we, we pay into for like rent, or, you know, different household things. Sometimes I make our get dinner or like, make dinner, and sometimes they do so it's like sharing that. And also, I would say, emotionally, like having a partner, my cat, for example, I've mentioned. [Laughs] It's like an emotional support. My mother, and my father, my parents, like having familial, like, you know, support through just emotional. Right before COVID happened, my parents actually gave me one of they got a new car, so I got a car, a vehicle, in that vehicle helps me like, get to clients houses. And it was interesting that I had got that. So I see that, you know, it's like, my family helps me like, my, my friends helped me I have a community of friends that support me, whether that be as cheerleaders, you know, like, like really supporting me, like, on my journey, or like sending messages or thanking me, you know, for contributions that I'm doing, I think them too, because I see what they're doing. And yeah, like community, like community support, I've, I have clients, because sometimes it's through community, like communities, like, you know, I've had a in my yoga community, I've had clients through my yoga community. I've had clients through my garden community, I'm into books, you know, I have like book friends and like being in that community as well. So it's very much community family. And in relations, like my close relations, that's how I'm supported.

Kit Heintzman 57:40

What's partnership meant to you during the last couple of years?

Melissa Gonzales 57:43

Partnership is everything. I feel really fortunate to have a partner during this time, because I have friends that don't have partners. And, you know, things like, when you're not well, like having someone there that cares about you and can help, you know, and I can do the same thing like, you know, make food or, you know, make tea or, you know, help out like around the house, you know, and also emotionally supportive, like, knowing that we're in uncertain times, and being able to have conversations about that, or even to joke around and to have lighthearted conversations, you know, and being able to, to be together it really makes all the difference because again, it's like emotional, financial, or even like spiritual like there's some a bond there that there's it's beautiful to have, you know, a partner that can be there to cope cohabit and have a co regulate also, you know, co regulation of like, you know, maybe had a stressful day and the partner has been, you know, take tending to their, their self care and that can like really merge together and bring like a again, like this synergy, this co-regulation of like, ah, like a great like, you know, and if you feel awkward, like having conversations about what that is, and or something that happened in the workplace or in the world and having these this depth to share was really, really helpful.

Kit Heintzman 59:39

What are some of the ways that you've been taking care of yourself?

Melissa Gonzales 59:42

So many ways. I, I meditate. I am in group meditations as well. breath work, doing breath work, either on my own or We're in community, I haven't done breathwork in person and I'm very like pre pandemic I did, but it like virtually what taking my time, like a lot of times just like reserving time on my schedule, that is self care time. And that can look like taking walks. Being in the garden, I found like, in pandemic times, like early pandemic times I was in the garden a lot like the garden is everything, like being able to tend to the soil to plant seeds to water to be in nature. hiking, camping, swimming, like when the weather's warm enough, like swimming in the lake, like really being in the elements. And just opposite observing. Like I find like that, reflecting like watching the birds like watching, watching, watching things grow. And self care too. Like I had mentioned relationships, like the relationships that I have with others that are very nurturing, being in in connection with those individuals and, and being present, and having conversations. Being in community yoga, like being outside in community yoga is really helpful for me. And mint or herbs. So having teas like tisanes, like herbal teas, and, you know, really tending to the cycles of my own my own body, you know, like seasons like paying attention to the seasons and times of day and really nurturing like taking naps, like I definitely I take naps now. Whereas before I may have like be like, I'm just gonna drink coffee and like power through being tired and no, like, now I'm like, No, I'm gonna, instead of doing that, I can find time to like, take a 30 minute nap. And just dive into that, and then wake up and then go on to what I need to do. So really just carving out my day in a way that has time in the morning, before I start my day, and if I don't have that accessible to me creating it at another time of the day, and being able to do some kind of activity first, like if it was walking or doing yoga, like something that's going to, like move the body. So like my lot of Mind Body practices. Another thing that I like to do, I just got a dry brush. So like doing things like self massage, you know, and, and taking time of, you know, noticing what the body's doing, like if it's dry, like tending to that. So like, tending to the landscape of the body of like what showing up and, or aches and pains, like really massaging and doing scanning, body scanning and breathing into things. So these are things that I do.

Kit Heintzman 1:03:27

I'm coming to the end of my questions.

Melissa Gonzales 1:03:33

Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:03:34

What do you think people in the humanities in the social sciences, so people in departments like sociology or poli sci or literature? What should we be doing right now to help us understand the human side of the pandemic?

Melissa Gonzales 1:03:50

I would say things like this, asking questions, talking to people, and really investigating, you know, what, what showing up? You know, write those books, like if you're curious about, you know, stories, like the stories writing the books of development, we're all engaged in this pandemic in some way. And it's brought things awarenesses to, I would say, and everybody I talked to has a story. And, you know, each individual is a book in themselves, and we are that as well. And inviting in conversations and sharing that, you know, sharing how it's showing up for you journaling. You know, creating nowadays we have websites, we can create websites, or there's, you know, blogs, blogs, really noticing what's there and taking the time and being in conversation but there's so much a wealth of information that you can find on the internet. But you'd be surprised like, how there are people that are willing to be in the conversation. And having panels creating community, creating the invitation for people to gather. I know from my own personal experience, hosting grief circles has opened up a wealth of information that is confidential, like I keep it confidential. But at the same time, like for my own development, of being able to navigate conversations, it's opened up and in a really deep way. So and that's something that I didn't, you know, I learned through being taught, and I read books, and I read a lot, but firsthand experience of being in conversation with people is actually has profound information that can be learned by taking the time to be in conversation, ask open ended questions, and you'd be surprised, like what develops from that, and then, you know, merging it with what factual information there is, as well, that's documented, but like merging the worlds together. And it's really helpful, because and I even had a conversation with a friend today about suicide, it's something that's not not necessarily brought into conversations. But it, it happens a lot like it's, it's there, suicide is very common. And lot of people don't want to touch on it and alcohol, but it has value. If we dialogue about things that are awkward and uncomfortable, it shifts and then opens up and people may be open to having conversations, or it might stir something within them. But that's something for us to look at deeper. And as we evolve as a species. Having conversations and having open ended conversations and understanding not none of us are an expert at anything, we may have a lot of time invested in an awareness, but it doesn't necessarily mean we're an expert. It I mean, we have time, you know, you can know a lot about something, but there's always something new. And there's always another perspective. And so really being in dialogue with different individuals and bridging communities, and finding out information from another community that may not be one that we're familiar with getting out of the comfort zone, and stepping into other areas and listening and seeing what shows up. And just asking questions. And I think questions are the curiosity can open up more awareness than we can even possibly imagine.

Kit Heintzman 1:08:12

What are some of the things you'd wish to learn more about in history?

Melissa Gonzales 1:08:18

Let's see. More in history. I love it. I'm still alive. So I can keep learning about things in history. But I had a conversation with a friend not long ago, and we were talking about things like the like different plagues, like and like learning about different plagues. And because we live in, in this time, like understanding like timelines of other times and in diseases that have been in the past, and evolution of like where we are today. But in history, like anything, you know, from my own, I really am fascinated with cultural histories, you know, like cultural history, because that helps me understand because we're all evolved from from somewhere. And there's ancestry but understanding another culture and cultural histories, helps with I think the dynamics of where we are today, because it's something to look at, like, far back as far as there's documented, history, some of its oral but like history, but understanding more of that. I myself, I'm into ancient cultures. So understanding just you know, more ancient cultures in the realm of Indian cultures, eastern Indian cultures, Egyptian cultures. and really understanding like, early times, like I do my own research with, I like space like stars. And I'm fascinated with cultures that were looking at space and stars and mapping, like, way back then. So we'll go back into like the Babylonian times. And what was brought into being from that awareness, vert, and understanding the dynamics of where we are now with, with what we can study with, you know, different measures of having satellites and space exploration. Fascinated, so going all back into deep history into futurism is like kind of the realm of things to look at. To understand the past, we have a an idea of potential futures.

Kit Heintzman 1:10:59

I'd like you to imagine some historian in the future who's watching this someone far enough in the future that they have no lived experience of this moment. What would you tell them cannot be forgotten about right now? So they're watching this. They know they want to write something about COVID-19. They don't know what, what would you tell them cannot be forgotten?

Melissa Gonzales 1:11:34

I like this question. It's pretty deep. It's a profound question. Not to forget that. So it's interesting to look back at times, like we can look at times in the past, and maybe have our own judgments about things because we don't have the lived experience. And to put that aside to put any biases or judgments aside, and really listen. And there is a teacher that I'm fond of she's a yoga teacher, Judith lasater, she's a she's a physical therapist, and a yoga teacher for the past. So far in this current timeline. She's been doing this for 50 years. So she's really well knowledgeable about the body. But one of the things that I love that she's said, is listen to what I'm saying. Not what you're hearing. And that right there just like, changed my world to really listen. Not with your bias, not with the thought of like what you're going to do next. But really, truly listen to what's being said, in a very open way. And understanding to like, again, this is in the future. So I don't know who will be listening to this or how far out and I've had the privilege of listening to, to things recorded from the 1970s of people, tribal elders, people that are advocates during that time, like of the 70s and all the revolutions that were having that happening then and to really listen to what showing up and, and that the timeline that we're in now may be different than the timeline that you have, but really understand don't have bias and judgments about what's up what has happened, or even resentment because we're, as time moves on, we learn more, and we understand more, but also things get forgotten. So really just open mindedly wander again, be curious of like, the Simplicity's it's just like really the simplicities of what's being shared. And, and it's so hard to, for me to like verbalize it even but I'm thinking about like the nuances like really understanding the time like if you're studying something of a time, know that. Even like the forms of electricity, for example, there were times when there wasn't electricity that people would have to

work by candlelight, and that's all you had. And so in the future, I don't know what kind of technology there will be. But really understanding the the nuances of things and being open, being open to really listening and remove all the biases or understandings that you have, but really get into the present of that timeline and all the understandings that you do know, but to not lose sight, you know, not lose sight of the human condition that really, we may be in different timelines. And there's something beautiful like I like visiting cemeteries, to look at timelines, to look at how long a person has lived, and think about what was going on in their birth, and through their lifetime. And also know that those individuals had hopes, dreams, and visions, and they had a legacy, it may not be known, because sometimes these things only have the shelf life of those who knew them. And then once those people are gone, if it wasn't documented, then it doesn't even exist. So really paying attention to the nuances and knowing that there's a lot that isn't shared, because it doesn't get documented. And I don't know, it's just something to think about, like thinking about, like, the fabric that we all like, we all contribute to the tapestry of life. And it's really, really rich, and it's really deep. And sometimes it doesn't get documented. So that's up to all of us to be the carriers of, of information, and wisdom, and knowledge and legacy for those that have come before us that we now are in present time to share that with the future.

Kit Heintzman 1:16:40

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

Melissa Gonzales 1:16:58

Sure. Yeah, it's wonderful to think about it futures and presents and have opportunities like this. Because, you know, something to think about to for the future. Future individuals listening to this, that so often in history, people like me, are not recorded, or actually silenced. And people like me, meaning female, identifying person of color, and not being able to be heard or seeing. And it's, it's part of history. So to have an opportunity like this is incredible, to have voices heard, from lived experience, and to be able to share, to share, even if it's just a segment of this time for COVID-19 and about future, but it's so profound, that it really is touching. It's touching to me to be able to have this time. And it just goes to show like where we are in history that there are strides. And there are differences. And there is a shift of awareness. Because so often in history, like things were there are times where it was just certain religions would have documented history, or males, of, of, of wealth, were documenting history. But so many people that didn't fit those criteria's were not being documented of what they had to share. So being able to be part of this study is like really, really amazing. And the thought process that went behind it for the individuals to consider thinking about this and reaching out to individuals, also. And all the participants like it's really profound to just have a milestone on where we are in the world, and the timeline of history. So that's something that I want to add because it's just really profound. Thank you.

Kit Heintzman 1:19:44

Thank you so much.

Kit Heintzman 1:19:45

You're welcome.