

Transcript of Interview with Kirsten White by Kit Heintzman

Interviewee: Kirsten White

Interviewer: Kit Heintzman

Date: 04/08/2021

Location (Interviewee): Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Location (Interviewer):

Transcribed By: Angelica S Ramos

Some of the things we talked about include: Grateful that there is socialized healthcare in Canada, while remaining aware of the inadequacies of OHIP (socialized healthcare as it exists in the province of Ontario): poor mental health coverage and prejudice in the greater medical system. Doug Ford's provincial management of the pandemic and physicians' public responses to Ontario policy. (<https://www.ontariofamilyphysicians.ca/news-features/family-medicine-news/~161-An-Open-Letter-from-the-OCFP-AFHTO-and-NPAO-on-PPE-in-Primary-Care-During-COVID-19>) A pre-pandemic experience of taking care of someone who didn't have access to post-hospital care. The busyness of pre-pandemic life: long hours and global travel as a producer, night classes in the field of mental health, and playing shows on the weekend. New pandemic norms: spending more time with a dog, taking up meditation. Being partnered with an essential worker in construction: new depths and details of communication about day-to-day activities, getting COVID testing before seeing one another. Distance from family. How habits like washing hands have come to feel more normal, fear of the outside, and desensitization. First learning about COVID through social media. Protesting the Toronto encampment evictions of houseless people and the experience of protesting during a pandemic. Queerwashing and Blackwashing. Releasing an album, Weighted Ghosts, in June 2020 and giving proceeds for donation. Defunding the military/police. That prior experiences of violence impact responses to the pandemic, hypervigilance

Kirsten White 00:00

Sounds good.

Kit Heintzman 00:01

Hello.

Kirsten White 00:02

Hello,

Kit Heintzman 00:03

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

Kirsten White 00:09

Sure. So I'm curious to and wait. It is April 8 2021 is 5:06pm Eastern Standard Time? And I am in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Kit Heintzman 00:23

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

Kirsten White 00:33

I do agree. Yes.

Kit Heintzman 00:35

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

Kirsten White 00:45

For sure. So again, my name is Kiersten. I'm a pansexual. white female colonizing Toronto. I, I'm a commercial producer, and a psychotherapist in training. I also play hard hardcore and metal music in front, two bands in that genre. I am a staunch feminist and a supporter of Antifa. And love all living breathing things.

Kit Heintzman 01:23

I'd like to start by asking you what the word pandemic has come to mean to you.

Kirsten White 01:30

pandemic, to me has come to mean isolation, loneliness, separation from community. But at the same time, it's it's meant coming together as a larger group to hopefully keep all of us safe. It also means a very quick stop to all of the things I used to do. And it's sort of a refining of what it means to be me without all of the extracurriculars that would normally occupy my time.

Kit Heintzman 02:11

To the extent that you're comfortable sharing what were some of your experiences, like with regard to health and healthcare infrastructure prior to the pandemic.

Kirsten White 02:24

Prior to the pandemic, I'm very lucky to live in Canada, we have a free health care system, so a socialized health care system where everybody can have access. I personally have been in and out of hospital a lot over the years, with mostly sports related injuries and one car accident. I feel I had felt and still feel that it is a bit of a rush system. We are overburdened we were overburdened pre pandemic, the ability to care for people was sort of within the hour hour and a half in which they'd want you in and they'd want you out of whatever system whatever, whether you're at the hospital or you're with your GP, it's a very limited amount of time. So it does take quite a quite a bit of time and, and resources in order to fully heal from things. I have also felt like I've experienced some sexism within the the health field where the problems, my problems, specifically whether it was reproductive health, or mental health, we're not necessarily taking this seriously. And I felt like I had to really advocate and fight for myself to get that that kind of care that I needed. I feel like the system is set up to deal with, you know,

injury that is seen and not necessarily the invisible pain or injuries that other people suffer, or that we all all sometimes suffer with.

Kirsten White 04:02

So that's always been a hard thing to sort of swallow as a Canadian is to see our health care system not necessarily take mental health or maybe neuro divergence or anything else along with people who are just differently abled, but it's not necessarily visible seriously, with with their concerns or with with whatever bringing them to a doctor. So that was my my pre pandemic experiencing. I also had a family member who in the early 2000s became my ward provincially he fell down a flight of stairs and cracked his skull open due to some alcohol and drug related issues and just the care he received in that setting. Again, just sort of dealt with trying to get him in and out as quickly as possible and I don't really feel like left him with much support post that problem. Lucky for me, he did regain full faculty and so he was no longer legally, I was no longer legally responsible for him. But the aftercare that he received was almost zero other than suggestion of going to alcohol anonymous, which he never accessed, and just sort of has silently suffered. I mean, he's been a drug and alcohol free since then, but certainly sort of suffered with his addiction since the early 2000s, which was really painful to watch, and still affects him to this day. So

Kit Heintzman 05:33

I want to thank you so much for sharing that prior to pandemic, what was your day to day looking like?

Kirsten White 05:43

My pre pandemic, life was very busy. I work as I mentioned, I'm a commercial producer. So that's sort of a, you wake up and when when the job's done is when it's done sort of job, but definitely not a traditional nine to five. I would travel all over the world for that job, it can leave Romania, South America. And on top of that, I was I had started school, so I was training to become or I am training to become a psychotherapist. So Monday nights and Wednesday nights would be class, the weekend would be class as well. And then Tuesdays and Thursday nights, I would play in one or the other of my bands, and split and sprinkled throughout that was getting to play shows all over Toronto, Quebec and Northern Quebec, and yeah, getting to go to fest to festival season, which was always a fun time it was, it was a gogogo lifestyle for sure. Never, never a dull moment. Before pre pandemic, so

Kit Heintzman 06:54

How have you been adapting your day to day living? I know, it's been a long time since it started.

Kirsten White 07:02

I mean, I think I'm still sort of fighting the adaption to be honest, it's not a natural state to be so still, for me. I have, you know, tried my best to incorporate daily exercise, more time with my dog more times, with speaking to my family to try to balance work, which is still very much go go go all the time. Just I guess, because there is the space to actually sit in the uncomfortableness that is the stillness, I've, I've slowly started to sort of see it as a gift and maybe less of an a feeling like an oppressive weight.

Kit Heintzman 07:52

For sure. And what are some of the ways that you've adapted coming to meet your sort of day to day needs?

Kirsten White 08:06

I don't know if I've fully met them yet, to be honest, that that there still seems to be this feeling of lacking. And I think for me, that's really based in community, and not being able to go out as often in support, whether it's through benefit shows, or protests, or just, you know, actively sort of helping out specifically in the music and queer community. But I think I think just in that stillness, and learning how to, to even, you know, taking it taking on meditation as a way to help with that stillness that's helped with adapting. It's, it's just, yeah, it's still really, it's still very uncomfortable, I guess, I don't know if I fully tapped it yet, to be honest. I mean, I don't go out, I'm home. You know, all day, I order all my groceries, I order all my food. I try to have this almost no contact. I'm the only person I see as my partner. And seen except for from a great distance, haven't seen any of my family members really, other than my brother and just trying to do my part to not as much as I want to be out and I want to do the things understand that it's for the you know, the better good to stay home and to stay solo. So

Kit Heintzman 09:33

Would you be willing to share a bit more about what partnership has been like for you in the pandemic?

Kirsten White 09:40

Yeah, partnership. That's a very interesting question. Or, for me, it initially was my partner works in construction, so he's deemed essential and so he's out. He's out working, you know, every day 4am to 3pm or whatever it is that whatever side is on. So there was definitely some some compromising and some discussions on deeper discussions on what is safety what what each of us feel safe with, in advance of like, at the beginning of the pandemic, I definitely wanted him to stay home, I wanted him to go on to serve, I wanted him to not be in contact with anyone, I was very worried, very worried for everybody. And that was a very privileged place to come from as a as I can do my job online, and it doesn't didn't, you know, except for at the beginning of the pandemic, when we all had to take a bit of a pay cut, in order to sort of keep the company going, right, I was still able to earn and pay my bills. So we had to, you know, have that conversation where my privilege was pointed out to me and, and through those more difficult conversations, we were able to find a more comfortable middle ground of what makes us both feel safe, and what makes us both feel comfortable. And it kind of expanded our communication as well.

Kirsten White 11:04

Because, you know, you don't really think about telling your partner who's going to be where when you go out, you just, I'm going out, I'll see you later, you know, and now it was like, this is the person I'm going to see. And these are the rules that we've all discussed. And these are what people are feeling comfortable and safe with. Which at first I think made us both sort of feel like we were reporting in or somebody was our boss in a way, but are each each other were each other's boss in a way, like what are you doing? Where are you going? But it's, it's it's gotten easier. I mean, there's still things that, you know, like, if he wants to go and do something that I don't necessarily deem safe, you know, we wait until he gets a COVID test, and then we'll see each other but it's, it's I feel like it's a good test. It's a good test for couples, or in any partnership. I mean, I've had the same conversations with my best friends. I've my brother and sister in law and I own property together. So we've all you know, if we wanted to see each other up there, we all had to have those, you know, deeper conversations around each person's comfortability levels. And I think in some cases, it just brought me closer to them because I felt like I knew them better they wouldn't have those wouldn't necessarily be questions I would have asked pre pandemic. So

Kit Heintzman 12:24

I'd be interested in hearing a little bit about what you remember regarding the beginning of the pandemic initial reactions when you heard about it.

Kirsten White 12:34

Um, my, I was actually on I, I was on vacation to write an essay, which is sort of how my life goes. So in order to have the time for school, sometimes I have to take time off to write so I'd actually been offline and had been focusing on an essay I was writing for school and through socials ended up seeing that friends in New York were posting about crazy lineups for toilet paper. And then friends in Toronto, were noting that they there was some sort of flu that was going around the city and I definitely felt panicked. I felt like, you know, that movie outbreak was like coming to life a bit. My first, my first reaction was to go back to work and to figure out how I could help and what I could do and what we were going to collectively do and how we were all going to stay safe. So definitely my trigger reaction was to try to organize and find solutions. And when you're staring down the the new cycle of uncertainty, it definitely was pretty anxiety inducing because there was no other than stay home do nothing. Don't talk to anyone Don't touch anything. You know, the uncertainty, we started to become quite anxiety inducing to the point where I think I remember feeling like there was so much like a difference between the air outside of your house and the air inside of your house. And I you know, had never had that thought before. Being scared of the outside was a was brand brand new. So that was definitely my first first couple, couple, maybe 10 days worth of reactions.

Kit Heintzman 14:21

And how has that reaction changed over time?

Kirsten White 14:25

You become a little bit desensitized. I mean, I think the putting on a mask disinfecting your hands washing your clothes, when you get home from set have all become very habitual. So they don't necessarily seem out of the ordinary now. I did however, notice the other day when I was quite engrossed in them podcast that I walked into my building without a mask on and couldn't believe it was just you know, shocked. I think the relationship out in public is a little different people are very, like, there's not that same I really like to stop and chat or pay a compliment, or, you know, how does the how's the weather? Or did you you know, just saying hello to my neighbors and saying hello to the people who walk up and down the street. And that's I feel like all but stopped. So that's I've noticed to learn much more into keeping to themselves a little bit of self self preservation where I'm like, even six feet apart, can't we just wave. So that's, that's where I'm at now.

Kit Heintzman 15:31

So 2020 has been a pretty big year, and 2021 is also shaping up to be a lot. I'm wondering what some of the most significant issues have been on your mind across this period of time.

Kirsten White 15:49

For me, the issue of our houseless population and having absolutely nowhere to go to seek safe social distancing. And just the complete lack of the city's response to creating permanent housing for those who are in the houses community who want it. And on top of that, like going after the encampments, destroying the encampments, removing people from the tiny shelters that are being built to help them not freeze to death in the winter, has just, it's been my main focus for the last I'd say eight months, nine months. Whether it's raising money or awareness or

going to the actual, like going down to the parks when the police are there to raid and putting my body between them and being camera residents like that's when I just can't I with Am I allowed to swear?

Kit Heintzman 16:48

For sure.

Kirsten White 16:49

Okay, I like I just can't fucking believe it. Like, I can't believe we're treating our most vulnerable population like as if the like they're doing the parks, or wherever they're, you can find respite wrong, like it just, it just is fucked. They just served last two weeks ago, they served all the current residents with an eviction notice and then accrue it, you know, there's a, you would essentially get a \$10,000 fine or a criminal record if you didn't vacate the parks. Well, who else is using the parks? Who needs the parks? It's a pandemic, everyone's supposed to be in their house. We are we're in Ontario has been in the longest lockdown order, I think out of any province or maybe even any territory in North America, maybe even Europe, but we've been in lockdown or some version of lockdown since it began. And with so who's out using the parks and what is wrong with our houses population using the parks 90% of our respites or dropping centers or shelters have had outbreaks.

Kirsten White 17:50

And then the city was like oh, well we'll we'll start to give you the hotels that are abandoned that no one's coming to and then the hotels would have outbreaks but they wouldn't tell the residents in the hotels that there were outbreaks like just the complete lack and disregard for this community has been absolutely the forefront of my of my daily consciousness you know, since I since I started to see the tents pop up in my local parks obviously also like, I mean, I have been a longtime supporter of BLM but it was you know, it was like so so too little too late, you know, this last June when it finally exploded, and it became you know, just like people queer wash things during June they started black you know, everybody was black washing everything that they were doing. And I'm glad that that was getting out there and everybody was was creating some space for you know, black activist black artists, black entrepreneurs, black everybody to be the voices of the front but I feel like it since then sort of dissipated and people feel like especially the white community they got too tired to to keep going and so again keeping keeping that awareness and keeping that conversation going has also been top of mine my my metal band released their our album in June and immediately we're like all the funds for this forever are going to the Black Legal Action Fund like it just now is now is the time for us white folks to start stepping up and helping out and raising black voices and actually doing all the things that we say that we're going to do that we never seem to do in the fight just ends up back on on our on our black comrades shoulders, and that's no longer acceptable. So that's also been very top of mind. And would you be proud to keep doing my know just how to keep doing my own Learning to in that space. So

Kit Heintzman 20:04

Would you be willing to explain what queer washing and black washing is for someone who might be listening?

Kirsten White 20:10

Yeah, for sure. So I work in advertising, so I'm extra extra aware of it. It's essentially when a brand aligns itself with either like a, like normally some sort of political or socialized movement. And they, you know, for the month of June in Toronto is Pride Month, and they'll all of a sudden, TD will have, you know, pride flags all over their stores, or they'll be noting that all for like, for one cent of every interaction online will go to, let's say, Rainbow

Road. And it happens for that one month, and it makes them look really great. It makes them look like they're their true allies with community and then they do nothing else for the rest of the year. And every month, they they trot it out, whether it's Black History Month, whether it's Women's History Month, whether it's black pride, or like it's, they essentially just slap a the insert flag here, for whatever movement it is, and say that they're supporting that or that they've always been supporting that one, if you look a little deeper, and you do a little research, you'll see that they just do it either for that month, or they've only ever done it once, or it's completely in reaction to whatever political or social movement is happening at the time. And it's disgusting.

Kit Heintzman 21:30

I wanted to follow up something on something you had said about your work in with people without housing. And that was when you talked about putting your body in between how did because in that kind of protest, there is often a very physical relationship between those whose bodies are in between and the police trying to cross that threshold. Do you say something about if any of that changed under COVID, either in terms of the practice, or even feelings and emotional relationships to what that may means during a pandemic?

Kirsten White 22:15

Oh, that's a great question. I mean, to, to get to personalize my own, recognize recognition of fear, that's actually only been something in my own personal work, and then would have been doing for school that I've recognized that actually, I didn't really due to my upbringing, and due to how I was socialized, like to feel fear was never something that was useful or important, you know. So, the last time that I went out and did this was before I had had this revelation, and to me, it didn't register because I wasn't fearful for myself, there was no fear for me, there was only fear for those around me, for those who, you know, if their house was ripped up, they literally have nowhere to go. So it didn't register. But I think in retrospect, if anything, because I was so angry that it was happening and more angry than usual, because I've been locked up in my house for eight months or whatever. I I found myself even more willing to do it and even more disgusted with the police and even more, like I've kind of this is just me, I kind of fucking dare you. I dare you to stick your hands on me. I dare you. And that again, is very privileged white thing to say. But I, I dare you to fuck with me because it was just at this point where it was like, I can't even imagine being a police officer. And going to work every day and being like, yeah, my job has a purpose. Like I just like just put down your baton, put down your gun, take off the badge and walk to the other side with the rest of humanity and help us out. Like, that's what it feels like and obviously like your body to the like, body to the front for me. Especially white bodies to the front was something that was like, had always been taught to me in terms of like protest etiquette and privilege etiquette in that sense. Like the last person they're gonna pepper spray is a white woman, especially a female presenting one so yeah, I just that's just all I know. Yes.

Kit Heintzman 24:34

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

Kirsten White 24:39

Oh, health is a is definitely a system network. So you know, if the mind and the body is are not able to connect and able to communicate with each other than one is not healthy. So if you're living in a situation where you're in constant fear, you know, you're body isn't necessarily going to be able to communicate. To your mind if your mind is repressing the feelings of fear. So for me true health is is the ability to be involved embodied, and to know what's happening with the self.

Kit Heintzman 25:18

What are some of the changes you think might be necessary for you and those around you to be able to achieve that version of health?

Kirsten White 25:27

There's a lot of there's a lot of oppressive systemic systems out there that need to be dismantled. I mean, again, from my privileged position, what affects me most I would say is the patriarchal system, I mentioned that earlier with even my own health care feeling like not heard, not understood not taken seriously. I think the, the idea that productivity is attached to one success, or one's earnings is attached to one success that so obviously, capitalism needs to be, you know, really looked at and dismantled. I think that's a very unhealthy system that affects all of us. And those who, who suffer the most, or obviously, for the most part, are black transistors. And so I don't think that true health can be achieved until some of those systems are broken down. And I guess the, the fastest way to do that is to take the money out of the heavy ends of, of the sort of political system. So like, let's say, defunding the military or defunding the police, and spreading those dollars around to, to health care, to mental health care, to housing to all those different systems that from like a Maslow Hierarchy of Needs actually help fix the base needs, so that then people can actually look at the needs that are above that, and start to achieve those as well. So that you can, you know, with safety comes the ability to reflect and actually look at the rest of your life and still, instead of being constantly in fight or flight mode. So I think I just went on a bit of a tangent, but the, the, the way for me to achieve health is for those systems to change. Because I can only do so much work on myself, I can only do so much work on my community. Top down change has to happen. Because those those like unconscious constant, knowing factors will forever be pushing on all of our, on all of us who are not white man, white and male identifying. And those, you know, cause health issues that will be one things that were affected ourselves our entire lives, but then that we also pass down intergenerationally. To, to all to all the all of our children after us. Someone's gotta put a stop to a big deep question kit. Sorry. I went all over the place there. But yeah,

Kit Heintzman 28:15

I want to just take a second to affirm that in an oral history interview, there are no tangents there is no rambling everything you have to say as a value. Okay, great. I wondering in the more sort of parochial sense of COVID-19 how you perceive the current medical infrastructure to be handling this moment.

Kirsten White 28:39

I feel I feel horrible for our our RNs, our doctors, our frontline care workers I just the relentless pressure of this invisible disease is just was just like it's just there was already problems in the healthcare system, there are already cracks. And now that they've released the like tsunami of, of like ball pit, they know that the pandemic is essentially a tsunami and now we've literally just busted the levees and like we're trying to fix, you know, major problems with band aids. Everyone's just like, gushing, gushing blood and we're like, put this bandaid on it, it'll be fine. So I don't I think our system is brutally underprepared, brutally underfunded. It's the but it's considered the ultimate line of defense and provincially our government is doing nothing to help our our healthcare workers it's it's much more interested in in the Ford government is much more interested in keep how they can keep business going. I put that in air quotes than they are to do the things that our healthcare system specifically asked them to do, which is just shut it all down, give everybody use of universal income and paid sick days. And, and nobody, nobody moved for the next 28 days because we are ICU right now are at complete max and the new variants are making it even worse because now people my age 35 and younger are coming in and and need to be intubated and you know there's no there's no stop and the government's not doing anything to help with that. Our this last week

our all of our ER doctors wrote a letter to the provincial government saying please, please put us please put the whole friggin province into lockdown. And this was like four days after they were like we're gonna open patios because Ford is more interested in business than he is. In the fact that our healthcare system has flat out said we don't have any more beds or like we're building more field hospitals. That's great. We actually don't have the people to staff those field hospitals.

Kit Heintzman 30:57

Would you tell me what safety means to you

Kirsten White 31:02

safeties? I guess just to, you know, more safety is different for everyone. But for me, it's, it's a perceived lack of threat. So, you know, threat can be anything from income or lack of income, loss of income, to physical body bodily harm to there's so much stuff. Let me start again, what, what is safety to me?

Kirsten White 31:37

Yeah, safety is a lack of threat. It's, it's the ability to be able to take the time for oneself if one feels reactive. And either self soothe or soothe with others, is really hard to do during a pandemic. So

Kit Heintzman 32:00

there's been a quite narrow medical description of what safety means under COVID-19, thinking of that narrow framework, and you did mention some of this in terms of negotiating with your partner already, but how have you been determining what feels safe for you and negotiating that with others around you?

Kirsten White 32:23

So I, because of how I grew up with a lack of safety, in a violent home, I am very hyper vigilant to what is and isn't safe. It's also very much based on who the person have also realized during the pandemic, it's also very much based on who the person is and the level of trust I already have for them. So in terms of, which is really interesting, I mean, you look at all of your friends, and you realize which ones of them you actually trust, you know, if you're like, Let's go have a hang in the park, you know, there's certain people I would trust more than others now that I've realized to tell me the truth about how they're feeling or where they've been or what they've been doing. And, you know, with those people, I'm seemingly not that I'm taking risk, but I'm willing to take risk to see those people are to be with those people. And, or, or to clearly communicate my boundaries. Whereas certain people I will just say no, and won't you won't even start to have the conversation around what is safe for me and what isn't. Also realize that, like, I think I mentioned earlier, like with the real recent realization of, of repressing fear for myself, that admitting that admitting that to the people that I trust, I'm scared, this makes me scared, I don't feel that this is safe has been really connective and a very good practice and in being vulnerable with those specific people that I trust to have those conversations with. So it's been a bit of a gift that way I don't think I would have ever noticed that I didn't process fear unless I had to upset in a very, you know, undetermined undeterminable amount of time of staying home and being under a lockdown and dealing with an an invisible virus, all these unknowns, all these unknowns create anxiety, and it builds it builds it eventually builds up to a point where you can't ignore it. And you can't ignore it with others. So you for me, was safety. It's easier to communicate now those needs.

Kit Heintzman 34:42

May I ask how you're feeling about the immediate future

Kirsten White 34:48

About the immediate future? I'm, I'm very worried. I'm very worried for the province I'm in right now. Very worried for The business first people second mentality. So I'm just hyper aware of the just how much longer this is going to be and how many more people are going to be affected by it. It's very overwhelming and daunting and sad. I don't even know we have the, the, you know, vaccinate vaccinations being rolled out. It doesn't to me, too, there's something about this now having happened, it doesn't to me feel like this will never happen again. To me, this now feels like as we increase as like, our capitalistic market, capitalistic community puts more and more emphasis on dollar value and making money and less and less emphasis on, on people. And in living in the environment, we're going to obviously keep encourage crouching further, further and further into places that will put us into contact with more and more of these types of diseases. And we will just be in this kind of constant. Circular isn't such a bummer. It's a constant circular reaction to these types of possible threats in the future. Like, that's honestly how I feel, I feel like it's just going this is just the first of many.

Kit Heintzman 36:29

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

Kirsten White 36:36

Oh, so many desires. I mean, my first desire is again, just our houses population in Toronto actually having housing built permanent housing built in my city, so that we can like people who have lived here, their whole lives can continue to live here and are pushed up by the gentrification. So that to me, is my desire for Toronto to turn around in the next eight months and go, you know, what, instead of these 98 condos we're putting up, we're going to put up eight, you know, eight to 12, because I think it's only like, they only need to build like 2500 units or something to like, do to house everybody. It's not, like really not that many units. That would be that'd be my desired long term goals to see. Toronto residents be able to stay in Toronto. It's a really, you know, the very diverse and loving city. I've lived here my whole life and didn't really realize how lucky I was until I would go, no offense to America, you know, go somewhere like Louisville or Kentucky and just be met with like, so much whiteness, and so much blatant aggression. Like, I can't imagine everyone I know carrying a gun like it would just be insane to me. So I, you know, in Toronto is an even more magical place because it's, it's an urban urban city, and I just wanted to stay. I don't want it to become so yuppie gentrified that nobody that can, that actually is a creator, or creative or any of those things can't live here anymore. So affordable housing, that's my long term desire.

Kit Heintzman 38:24

You've been using the term house lessness. Throughout this, could you explain that syntactic difference from what is often described as homelessness? And why you use it?

Kirsten White 38:38

Um Well, it's, I feel like homelessness is like, gotten way more negative connotation. I guess I don't I'm not I can't remember what actually, I mean, for me. houseless is just like this is you were without house, it's not like you are without home home is a wherever your heart is sort of thing. Right? And this isn't something that people are without home, they're without house. And, and some people might, you know, there is a part of the population that are houseless that want to be houseless. They want they don't want to be without how they don't want house

but they want home, they want a place that they can call theirs and feel safe and live the way they want to live. So to me, that's the that's the that's the difference.

Kit Heintzman 39:24

I'm curious, what are some of the things that you've been doing to take care of yourself throughout the pandemic?

Kirsten White 39:34

Um, I mean, when it wasn't the winter, ie Toronto, Canada half the year. You know, taking myself down to the waterfront and sitting sitting near Lake Ontario was quite healing, making sure I take my dog for a good walk every day. Working out working out every day yoga every day. I have until I hurt myself a few weeks ago, but just making sure I was keeping my body moving and and eating, eating, eating enough eating well I find my stress some part of my stress responses are normally to stop eating and unconsciously obviously, that is an attempt to control what you cannot control. So to try to be aware of that, and to nourish my body and be kind to my body in that way, and not not, I guess unconsciously punish it because I can't control what's what's outside of it. So in lots of lots of games of Settlers of Catan, with my partner, we figured out how to make a four person pack into a two person pack. So I'm just trying to get away from screens as much as possible and listen to myself, listen to my body. That's the kind of self care that's all I feel like I know how to do, I'm still learning.

Kit Heintzman 41:02

This is my second last question. So we know we're in this sort of flurry of biomedical and scientific research. I'm wondering what research you think people in the humanities and the social sciences could be doing right now, to help us understand this moment?

Kirsten White 41:22

Oh, well, I think studying the the effects of stress on the body and the stress on the auto immune system would be really important and making that information, something that is as common as the understanding of what to do when you get a cold, which is, you know, drink lots of water and rest. Like, what do you what did what does one do to help with stress?

Kirsten White 41:41

How does one identify stress markers? And how and what does that do to the body long term like, I think, including that, and including the and studying the amount of people going in, to receive treatment and care for like spontaneous illness that has come up in the face of the stress, this chronic daily stress that we all live under with this pandemic, I think it's a time where we're gonna have this is like the time where you would have the most candidates to do the research with and to really make that part of the canon of conversation around total health.

Kit Heintzman 42:23

So this is my last question. This has been an oral history interview. And I come to it as a historian with my own sort of historically located sets of assumptions. And one of the values historians of my generation typically have is that the values of our historical actors are really important, regardless of whether or not we agree with them that paying attention to what people at a moment of time thought was important. I'm wondering if you could tell historians of the future what's what they shouldn't forget what advice you would pass on to them.

Kirsten White 43:10

Don't forget Maslow's hierarchy of needs, I feel like we could have been avoided this entire pandemic, if there weren't such imbalances of, of money and power all over the world that people have to go and seek alternative food sources further and further back into our natural spaces. Which I feel like is just sort of like if you haven't seen the movie contagion. Go rent it, go watch it, it's a pretty good example. We could we could have avoided this if people's basic needs so you know, housing, food security, if those things have been had been met, you know, we wouldn't be where we are right now. And I really, truly believe that.

Kit Heintzman 44:03

I want to thank you so very much for everything that you shared today, and your honesty and your vulnerability. And at this point, I just want to create some space that if there's anything you want to say that my questions, haven't given you a space to say, presenting that to you here now.

Kirsten White 44:26

I think the last thing I would say is just you know, I hate when people say things like silver lining, or what did you get out of it? Or how are you? You know, what can you reflect on but reflection is really the best way to understand how you're feeling about any situation. And if you have the capacity and the ability to journal during these types of these times, and to sit with yourself and and really be honest You know, you will, you will find in that writing you will find in that you know verbal expression however it is that you want to do it, you will find the ways in which healing will work for you or self care will work for you or you know just what you need in that moment you have the answers. And so during this really intense and difficult time, just take a moment for yourself to sit in that silence and journal and let yourself be honest. Because repression of those things and not communicating them will just make everything worse in the long run.

Kit Heintzman 45:43

Thank you so much.

Kirsten White 45:44

You're welcome Kit. Thanks for letting me sometimes I get there sometimes I don't.

Kit Heintzman 45:50

I think you definitely got there. I think this is great.

Kit Heintzman 45:53

Thank you.