

- **Trisha Vaughn**
- **Dana Lee Bell**
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- **Fairfield, California**
- **Dana Lee Bell**

Abstract:

Trisha Vaughn is the CPT Supervisor for a large Bay Area community hospital. In her spare time, Trisha hosts a podcast with her daughter, is an avid writer, and she is starting a small apothecary business to sell her skin care creations. In the oral history interview, Trisha shares how she has navigated through Covid-19 in both her personal life, and as an essential worker. She reflects on staying motivated and helping the people in her life stay motivated through these hard times. Trisha describes how the social injustices and civil unrest in response to police brutality during the pandemic has affected her and those around her and about how the urgency of the pandemic has overshadowed the injustices faced by people of color across the nation.

0:00:05.0 Dana Bell: This is Dana Bell. And today, I'm speaking with Trish Vaughn. Today is the 14th of March 2021. This interview is taking place in Fairfield, California. Do you consent to be recorded today?

0:00:23.2 Trisha Vaughn: Yes.

0:00:24.9 DB: And can you please tell me your name?

0:00:26.3 TV: Trisha Vaughn.

0:00:28.6 DB: Trish, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

0:00:33.5 TV: I am 45. I have lived here in Fairfield since my late teens, I finished high school here. I'm a mother of three, grandmother of three. And I work in health care at a local medical center.

0:00:58.5 DB: Can you tell me about your hobbies and projects?

0:01:03.9 TV: Right now, I am working on a holistic beauty and skin care line, I do a little podcasting, and that's pretty much it as far as my hobbies right now, but those are... Those are two big ones.

0:01:31.1 DB: Can you describe your holistic care, what you're making?

0:01:36.9 TV: I formulate soaps and serums for facial skin and aromatherapy products, body oils,

butters, bath salts, those types of things.

0:01:56.3 DB: Awesome. And can you tell me a little bit about your podcast?

0:02:01.0 TV: My podcast is a collaboration between my daughter and I, my oldest Chelsea, she and I came up with the idea to share our connection, our reconnection after being estranged for a little while. And the fruit of that manifestation is that we are talking about self-care, ascension, self-awareness, mother-daughter relationships, those kinds of things.

0:02:48.9 DB: Awesome, thank you. So, can you tell me a little bit about your family? You did a little bit already, but...

0:02:56.4 TV: So, Chelsea, as I mentioned, is my oldest, she's 29. I have a 25-year-old Isaiah, and my youngest son is 19, soon to be 20, and that's Justin.

0:03:13.8 DB: Justin. So, can you tell me what do you do for a living?

0:03:17.3 TV: I am a CPT supervisor. CPT stands for Certified Phlebotomy Technician. As I mentioned, at a local medical center, which I would like to leave unnamed at this point. [chuckle]

0:03:36.6 DB: Absolutely. So, how long have you worked there?

0:03:40.5 TV: I have worked there for 20... Going on 23 years.

0:03:50.8 DB: What was your starting position there?

0:03:53.3 TV: My starting position there was a lab assistant. I started there in 1998, and at that time I was hired on as a lab assistant.

0:04:03.9 DB: And then... Can you... Sorry, do you enjoy your job?

0:04:12.7 TV: I do. I... For the most part, I've always enjoyed my job, but the recent events have brought about a lot of changes that have made it not so enjoyable. I like what I do, it's just that with all of the changes and the pandemic and different things that have come about during the last year or so, has made it a really high stress environment.

0:05:02.1 DB: Can you tell me a little bit about your daily duties? What do you do there, specifically?

0:05:08.3 TV: I am responsible for payroll for approximately 35 to 40 people, some of the scheduling, sick call coverage, supply orders, account credits and charges, reference lab testing results, those types of things, just making sure that the front desk operations are running smoothly.

0:06:04.2 DB: So, can you tell me a little bit why the lab is important to a hospital?

0:06:09.8 TV: The lab is paramount in the treatment of any sick patient. We need to know what's going on, on the inside, which is where the lab results come in, in order to diagnose and treat a patient. So, the lab is instrumental in that process, in treating a patient.

0:06:38.4 DB: What is the size of the hospital?

0:06:41.6 TV: This hospital, I believe, is about 150 beds.

0:06:53.3 DB: So, can you tell me a little bit about what's the most rewarding part of your job?

0:07:02.9 TV: I would say the most rewarding is being in a supervisory position, helping my staff and being able to grant them time off or do things that they may need me to do to... So that they maintain balance in their lives. Even though I am the supervisor there that that is very important to me, you know that balance between the personal life and the work life. That's one of the things, but also just to be a part of a process where sometimes there is a positive outcome, to get to be a part of the healing process for a patient or to see a patient go from very ill to, well again, it's an honor to be able to be a part of that process. Although there's the other side of that coin, which is, people sometimes do not recover and sometimes pass on. So, but there's that for every patient that leaves the hospital well and makes a recovery, those moments make it worth it and make the job enjoyable.

0:08:31.6 DB: Can you tell me what is the least rewarding part about your job?

0:08:38.7 TV: To be the deliverer of the messages that come from senior leadership, which aren't always the most desirable for my staff, that those moments are not enjoyable. So, I don't make the rules, I'm just the vessel, to deliver those messages to my staff, and being that we've been in this pandemic, a lot of times over the past year, there has been so many times where these messages just were devastating changes. It was a time period where everyone's paid vacation got cut because the hospital wasn't financially stable, and so they had to find some ways to trim the fat, and that was one of the first things that they did. So, relaying that message, and even hearing it for myself, since I was also affected by it. Those moments are the moments where I wish I wasn't in this position.

0:10:04.7 DB: So, when you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts about it? And how have your thoughts changed since then?

0:10:17.4 TV: In all honesty, when I first heard about it, I didn't think it was real. I didn't. I didn't think it was real, I thought well... What's going on here? Are they mistaking this thing for the flu or is this even really a thing? And as time went on and our numbers started to climb, and information from the CDC started to come in about personal protective equipment and the way we wear a mask or what types of equipment we were supposed to be using when presenting to COVID patients. As that got more serious then I realized, Okay. This is... This appears to be a very serious situation and they're not kidding, this isn't a flu. There's still those parts of me that feel like... Just based on what I've been reading and the information that I've gathered from other medical professionals that make me wonder about where this really came from or how it started. But because we have lost so many

patients and the impact it's had on this community and all over the country, all over the world, I realize, well, no matter where it started or how we got to this point, it is very real.

0:12:08.2 DB: So, what issues have most concerned you about the COVID-19 pandemic?

0:12:20.9 TV: I think first and foremost, the idea that initially we didn't really have a lot of information on how this thing was transmitted. Even today, I'm sure people are still wondering, is the mask really protecting me? And for those of us who have been vaccinated, okay, we've been vaccinated, but is there a new strain, am I protected against that or... Even for myself, I felt like before the pandemic started, the November, prior to the start of the pandemic, I recall a time where I was really, really sick. And when I look back on it, I felt like I had COVID at that time, but I just didn't know. And so having had that experience and then working through the pandemic, getting vaccinated and watching some of my staff, get sick and come down with COVID, I just wonder how safe are we? And for this thing to be so serious, yet and still we're in this position where we've got to come to work, we're essential workers, we're needed. So, there's that pressure to show up. And so, for me, being in a supervisory position, I'm an example. I need to show up, to keep motivating my staff to show up.

0:14:12.3 TV: If I don't show up, well, why would they wanna show up? So, just being in that position and watching them go out and care for these patients that are sick with COVID and essentially risk their lives, has been very concerning for me, very concerning. I've had more than one staff member test positive for COVID. I've had other people whose families, whether or not they worked in healthcare, but people whose families had been exposed to COVID, so in turn that affected them, they weren't able to show up for work because, Okay, now they've been exposed, so they need to quarantine and be tested, and so on and so forth. So, all of those things kind of ramped up the amount of stress experienced because of... All because of COVID. It's easy for us, and by us, I mean the management team to say, "We're essential workers, and we've got to show up and routine and..." It's easy to say that when you're not on the front line, you're not the one facing the patient. There... Of course, during this time period, I'm pretty much in the lab all the time. It doesn't mean that I don't have a patient contact, because I do, mainly with outpatients.

0:16:05.2 TV: However, I'm working side by side with my staff and they are going out. So, anything that they're being exposed to, I'm also being exposed too, because we're right there in the lab together. So, all of those things have been constantly on my mind during this whole experience, and it add that much more stress to the situation, being that, is today the day somebody may have been exposed, and so then they come back to the lab and I get exposed. Or another prime example is, I sit in the lab. My desk is basically just a counter-space in the lab. So, whoever has come and used that space before me, how do I know that maybe last night wasn't the night that somebody got exposed and then used my phone. Of course, we come in and we disinfect, but you just never know, and being that, this is such a grave situation. I take that very seriously, because we just don't know. Even up to now, we just don't know enough about it to know how safe we are.

0:17:40.2 DB: So, you talked a little bit about this just now, but is there any other ways that COVID-19 has affected your life?

0:17:51.2 TV: When the pandemic first started, I was almost to the finish line, at the very tail end of finishing my bachelor's degree. And my plan was to take the CLEP, the Spanish CLEP to test out of those units and be done. Well, that came to a screeching halt when the pandemic started. I was needed at work, my time wasn't mine anymore, because everything was about work, You've got to show up to work, you've got to be there, you can't take any time off. We're slicing your PTO accrual, your paid time off. Excuse me, accrual in half, essentially. So, everything changed. There was no... Everything shut down, shelter-in-place. So, literally for the first six weeks or more, my family and I spent every weekend inside. I'm not going anywhere, I'm not doing... Our outings were going to the grocery store or going to Costco to buy, stock up on toilet paper, and water, and all those types of things so... It really... When I look back on it, it really, really impacted my life. You never know, until you look back, you know, hindsight is it's 2020. When I look back on it, we were going out all the time, we would go to concerts, we'll do all types of fun things, get together with our friends, all of that was over with, when the pandemic started. I can remember going to a venue out in Lincoln, where there is an outdoor pavilion for concerts.

0:20:09.0 TV: And after the pandemic started, I remember driving out to this place and noticing that they had taken down the stands and everything, and I thought, "Wow, this thing is serious, because they're already tearing everything down, so that means no more concerts." I don't even know if there's a plan for any of that type of thing to take place anymore. Will we ever be to a point where any of that is a thing where we can go to an outdoor concert safely? I don't know. It really... Well, there were a lot of, which you could say are negatives, things that changed in my life, things that I was no longer able to do. On a positive note, because we are quarantined and sheltering in place, it did allow me a lot more time to spend time with my family, reconnect with them, of course, we got closer, because we had to look at each other all the time, [chuckle] we're stuck in the house with each other, we have no choice, and that's a good thing, that's been a good thing.

0:21:37.4 TV: But it has been socially stifling to not be able to go out the way that I'm used to doing. Now, while I haven't been one of those people that ran off to the beach on Memorial Day, it really affected me, because I am an outdoor person or a person that likes to get out even if it's just for a ride, and now could I still go and take a ride? Yes, but it was that... Were we really supposed to be doing that? No, we're supposed to be sheltering in place. So, yeah, a lot of that stuff really impacted my life, because I just wasn't used to being told, "You can't go anywhere, you have to stay inside." That is not really wasn't my jam.

[pause]

0:22:52.7 DB: So what's been the biggest challenge that you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic?

0:23:04.3 TV: Keeping myself motivated to press forward and keeping all the people around me motivated to press forward, so many people just wanna give up. And while a big part of it has been keeping the people that I work with motivated, it's also been keeping my family lifted up and igniting that fire and keeping that light on for them, because I've got older parents, older in-laws

that, as I spoke about before, are literally just banished to their houses, to their homes and not able to go anywhere, and that has been such a challenge, and I think mostly because it's been easy for me to say to my 72-year-old mom, "Oh, it's okay, mom, you've got to stay inside." But I'm going to work every day, so at least I'm getting out. Whereas for her, until recently, when the vaccines were made available to her age group, she was basically in her own prison in her home, she wasn't able to go anywhere.

0:24:43.6 TV: She's asthmatic and has some other health issues which made her quite vulnerable to this disease, so she really, really had to be careful and wasn't... She was one of probably, very few people that strictly adhered to the shelter-in-place, because it could have been very dangerous for her, if she didn't. So yeah, just keeping my family motivated and my staff motivated to press forward, it's been very, very challenging.

0:25:30.9 DB: Okay, so a few months after COVID-19 hit the US, protesters began... Or protests began all over the country in response to police brutality against unarmed Black civilians, can you tell me about the impact that this has had on your personal life?

0:26:01.3 TV: Let's say that all of those instances where police brutality and... Any of those circumstances that has taken place during this time really... I think I felt all of those things that much more because in this social climate, we can't do both, it's like oh there is a pandemic. We can't talk about that. Just no time for that. There's the pandemic, so while we were already ignoring the big elephant in the middle of the room, here's our excuse now because we've got the pandemic, you know nope the pandemic tops that I can't talk about that. It's not important. And for me, working in healthcare, because that was such an important thing in the vehicle that essentially is driving everything we do in that container, in the hospital, it was almost as if I would be doing my team, the hospital, my superior a disservice to feel anything, to want to discuss anything with regard to the protests, police brutality, and diversity and inclusion, none of that, do I feel was given a space to even exist while we have been going through the challenges involved with COVID-19 pandemic, I feel like there is no... I wasn't given the space to really acknowledge that or express any feelings with regard to that.

0:28:45.8 DB: Can you tell me about how the protests impacted you?

0:28:51.6 TV: I really feel like the protests laid that much more of a burden on my shoulders, here I've got a staff to try to motivate my family to try to motivate and keep... Keep them pressing forward. But I've got this baggage that I'm carrying because I'm watching all these things unfolding in front of me, and it's made the whole situation that much more challenging, and for every Black life that has been snuffed out, that burden just became heavier and heavier and heavier as time has gone on, and even as I sit here now, having this discussion, I feel like I don't know how I've made it this far, I don't know how I got to this point without having a serious [chuckle] mental breakdown, because it's been... It's been difficult not to mention the fact that I am one of very few people of color at the place that I work, so... With that said, there are not many people who have the same concerns as I have in that container, which also has made it very difficult... It's been a very, very painful and heavy existence over the last year, two year and a half, it's almost...

0:31:26.3 TV: For me, it's, yes, there's the pandemic, and yes, there's COVID-19, but I feel like those social injustices have also been a part of the pandemic for me, and for people like me.

0:31:53.0 DB: Did the protest impact your work life?

0:32:00.8 TV: Absolutely, I can recall a situation where a co-worker said some very insensitive and unsavory things on social media. Now, for whatever reason, I can't recall the specific circumstances, but other people in the workplace knew about this, management knew about it yet, and still... It was never really addressed. There was very little done to rectify what had been said.

0:32:48.9 TV: And as far as I know, nothing ever came of it. It was kind of quietly brushed under the rug, and well, maybe you need to take down that social media post type of thing. And nothing ever came of it. So that made for a very tense and uncomfortable working environment that I essentially had to suck it up and move on without very much of a remedy for that. And that in and of itself, it's just kind of like adding insult to injury, we're already hurting, we're already experiencing these things, adding to our post-traumatic stress syndrome that we're already experiencing from COVID, from prior social injustices, from the lack of diversity and inclusion in our workplace and in this community, so then to have to kind of just zip everything up inside and just move on, because there's the pandemic... I'm a leader at work, I've got a family to take care of, all of those things.

0:34:37.7 TV: I'm surprised that I even have the strength to sit here with you today and discuss it, because it's difficult. It's been difficult to not have such an important experience that has impacted such a large demographic, and mainly mainly just people that are like me, that look like me, to not have that acknowledged... It's been an eye-opening experience to be right in the middle of the pandemic and a social climate like the one that we're in right now, and it's brought a whole new meaning to No Justice, No Peace. That unrest, I feel it in here in my spirit, I feel that unrest, and I don't think it will ever go away or be like it was before I woke up and became aware that so many bad things are happening to my people, black and brown people, people of color, or whatever label you wanna put on it. I think I will always remember this time period just because of that, it's been heavy to say the least.

0:36:57.9 DB: In what ways have you worked to make change in your workplace?

0:37:05.5 TV: So, in noticing that the skills have always been tilted with regards to diversity and inclusion, and especially in my workplace, once I had the power to help make those decisions with regard to hiring and things like that, I've been mindful in the choices that I've made and made it a point to be a part of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee on the job. The wheels have been turning very, very slow. With regard to that, we haven't done much, we formed a committee, we have a mission statement and are in the midst of training, so that we can train and educate the entire organization on diversity and inclusion and really spell out for them what this means, there's... Whether or not people know it, you can think that you're not biased and you can think that you're open-minded, but there is such a thing as unconscious bias, those things that you don't know that

you do based on your personal experiences, and so... We always say, "Be the change that you want to see." So I am educating myself so that I can educate other people and open their eyes to those things that they don't see that they're doing.

[pause]

0:39:21.0 DB: What has it been like fighting for social justice in the workplace while also fighting the pandemic in the workplace?

0:39:31.4 TV: Oh, it is a constant battle. A constant battle. I can recall a time where I had an experience where a co-worker, eventually was let go, but it came to the attention of management that this person had been under the influence of drugs on the job. And I remember that person being treated with so much respect and when I look back on that situation, even though she had done wrong and it was obvious that she was under the influence on the job, she had been treated with so much respect and everything was discreetly handled, whereas on the other hand, during the pandemic, there was a situation where a similar situation came to light and this person wasn't treated with the same discretion and respect. And the only thing I can think of when I consider those two situations now, was that one employee was white and the other one was black.

0:41:14.3 TV: And I remember questioning the situation with the black employee and making a statement something to the effect of, hmmm, that's odd. And being questioned by my superiors about, why is that odd? Almost as if to say, "Well, this person is black, so she's gotta be on drugs," and when I think that to the other situation that took place years and years ago, I thought to myself, I don't recall that question ever being posed, I mean, I feel like, on the one hand, they knew exactly what was going on with the employee, the first employee, but the level of respect given to that employee in the situation and how it was kept so quiet, I just... It baffles me, the blatant disregard to the employee... The black employee and her feelings, and it was almost as if there was no doubt in their minds that the black employee had done something wrong, whereas the other situation... Yeah, there was no denying that this employee had done something wrong, but on the other hand, it was almost like... I don't know if you ever heard about the church shooting, where the young man... Young white man went into the church and shot all the parishioners, and was taken to go get a burger on the way to the station. It reminded me of that and how we are so quick to say, "oh, we've made progress. We've made progress, or that was so long ago, these injustices were so long ago," or just the idea that they're not the same, I just can't help but sit here and think about, we have so far to go.

0:44:14.1 TV: Yes, we've made some very small strides, but at the same time, we take a couple of strides and we take a few back. And so I just... Even as I sit here now, it is unbelievable that we haven't made more progress than this at this point where we said it was March 14th, 2021 at the beginning of this interview. And I think to myself, and it's a shame that we aren't further along than this... It's a crying shame.

0:45:02.5 DB: Has your experience transformed how you think about your family, friends and community?

0:45:09.7 TV: Absolutely. I am so much more protective of my family and my friends. And unfortunately, as far as community, I happen to live in a place where my ethnic group is just not the majority. So, the way that I approach things is just so much more cautious than I ever was before now. I've been... There have been times where I was labeled as militant, and I wouldn't go so far as to say... Use a word like militant. However, I am very vocal and very passionate about what I feel in terms of the pandemic, social injustice and inequality, all of those things are so much more magnified for me now that I am very, very protective of my close circle of friends and family. And as far as community, I don't... On a grand scale, I don't feel like we belong here. We don't. If I didn't have so many elderly family members in this area, we probably wouldn't be here, we would go somewhere where we were welcomed, because here isn't it.

0:47:19.0 DB: How does this pandemic compared to other events that have happened in your lifetime?

0:47:28.2 TV: I would have to say that this has been the most impactful event that has taken place in my lifetime. When I think back there is... In terms of major events, I can think back to say the earthquake in 1989, Loma Prieta, I was at home by myself that day. And I was early, early teens or pre-teens at that time, and... Yeah, 13, as a matter of fact. And so that was a very big thing, very, very scary. We lived right, probably a mile from the Cypress Freeway that collapsed, and you could smell the death in the air from all the bodies that were trapped underneath. And while that is something I'll never forget, I can't say that it impacted me as much as this situation that we're experiencing right now. There were the fires, I don't remember what year that was, well, actually right after the earthquake was the fires. And even then, we didn't evacuate, nothing like that happened. We weren't close enough for it to affect us to the extent that we needed to evacuate, but then here, more recently, there were several fires. We... The environment and the air quality was so bad at that time that we actually did drive to Nevada to get away from the poor air quality.

0:49:31.5 TV: But again, that was a day or two, this particular situation with the pandemic and all the unrest from social injustice has really, really impacted my life. I don't wanna say in a negative way, because I feel like it's always a blessing and I'm always grateful to have my eyes open to something that I might not have been paying attention to before, or I might not have thought prior to now was so serious. But being right in the middle of things and being at the stage of my life that I'm in now, while all these things are unfolding, has definitely been eye-opening.

0:50:39.6 DB: What can you imagine your life being like in one year?

0:50:47.9 TV: At this point, I feel like, well, you can't do anything but get better from here, it has to go up from here. It just... It has to. I feel like being a healthcare worker, I've been able to see the numbers rise and fall, and in the past couple of weeks, our numbers have a dropped to the lowest they've been since the pandemic has started. So, I feel like a year from now, we should most definitely be looking back on this saying, "Wow, we made it through all that." Even now, I'm thinking to myself, Now that the numbers are lower, outdoor dining is opening up, which for some people is really an important thing, but just seeing those changes and how things have evolved from

the beginning until now, it makes me feel very hopeful about how things will be a year from now. Like, I have a lot of positive things going on in my life, a lot of things that I'm working on as we spoke about my hobbies and such. And so, I feel like a year from now, I'll be looking back on this thinking, well, I don't know how I made it through all that, but I made it.

0:52:27.6 DB: Do you think in a year, things will change on the social justice front for America?

0:52:36.0 TV: I believe so. I believe there are some positive changes brimming just below the surface, and I'm hopeful that we will make some effective strides in the right direction.

0:53:12.6 DB: Knowing what you know now, what do you think that individuals, communities, our governments need to keep in mind for the future?

0:53:26.0 TV: As a whole, and this is on local government level on up to the top, we need to be proactive. In my position of leadership, in my job, I always stress that if we stay ready, we don't have to get ready. We don't have to prepare... Scramble to prepare at the last minute. If you're proactive in any situation, when the proverbial shit hits the fan, you're gonna be ready. You can't dance around the issues and not be ready and then, "Oh my God," when things go wrong and everything blows up. No, you have to be constantly building, building, building so that you're ready for situations like what we've experienced over the past year, year and a half.

0:54:35.8 TV: We can see when we look back on any of these situations, there was always an opportunity where we could have done something to prepare more thoroughly. And sadly enough, we didn't. Even with COVID, when you think back, we knew about this ahead of time. We could have prepared more effectively than we did and we just didn't do that. We didn't take it seriously enough. And so, my thoughts on that are we need to spend more time on strengthening the infrastructure, so we don't have these catastrophic events come about where people are going without... People are literally starving and freezing to death in their own homes in other states because we haven't prepared properly. We've got to take this pandemic and everything that's happened amongst within the last year or so, and take notes. Let's use this as a learning lesson. To be more prepared. To be better prepared in the future. There is no excuse, going forward.

0:56:11.5 DB: Is there anything, that we didn't talk about today, that you would like to discuss?

0:56:24.6 TV: I think we pretty much covered it. I didn't anticipate being so candid, but I think that I've said everything I wanted to say.

0:56:39.1 DB: Thank you so much for your time and contributing to the archives.

0:56:45.7 TV: You are very welcome.

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