

Transcript of Interview with Angelina M. Lopez by Kit Heintzman

Interviewee: Angelina M. Lopez

Interviewer: Kit Heintzman

Date: 10/13/2022

Location (Interviewee): Houston, Texas

Location (Interviewer):

Transcribed By: Angelica S Ramos

Some of the things we discussed include:

Working as a romance author and centering strong Latinx women in fiction. The impact of the pandemic on the careers of new authors; reviews not reflecting sales. The difference between connecting with readers in person and online. Gen X generational norms; learning that no one in authority is coming to save us. The 2016 election and being a target of Trump's racism; having family members who support Trump; having kind Trump-supporters in one's community. Watching others try to figure out how to be an ally without centering themselves after the murder of George Floyd. Moving from Northern Virginia to Houston, Texas in July 2020; selling the family home; getting to know one's neighbors mid-COVID. Easier access to COVID vaccination with good healthcare in Texas; living in a state with low-vaccine demand. Living with husband and adult son during the pandemic; a house full of introverts; another extroverted, younger son in college moving home shortly. Son with social anxiety disorder; masks helping to manage anxiety; university mental health support. Seeing friends struggle with depression and couples going through divorce. Telehealth enabling continuity of mental healthcare despite moves. The politicization of the virus. Catching COVID; son catching COVID. 16-year-old dog (name?) loving having the family home all the time. Coping with the overturning of Roe v. Wade. Safety, control, and predictability. The 2022 Texas election.

Kit Heintzman 00:00

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

Angelina M. Lopez 00:04

Sure. My name is Angelina am Lopez the date is October 13 2022. It is 2:36pm Central time and I am in Houston, Texas.

Kit Heintzman 00:16

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

Angelina M. Lopez 00:25

I do consent?

Kit Heintzman 00:27

Thank you so much for being here with me today. Would you just start by introducing yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening? What would you want them to know about you and the place you're speaking from?

Angelina M. Lopez 00:37

Yeah, my name is Angelina am Lopez I am a romance author, kind of a lifelong romance reader and advocate and I finally published in 2019. And I my kind of tagline for what I do is that I write sexy books about strong women and the worthy men lucky to love them. They generally are people from Latin X communities is who I write about their contemporary romances, very steamy, big books. 100,000 words, if you know, my editor is lucky. They're only 100,000 words when I turned them in. I debuted in 2019, fall of 2019, which is significant for this conversation. But I debuted 2019 I am now in 2022. My fourth book just releases the first book in a new series, yes, and very excited. And definitely steel still feeling the effects of the pandemic on my career. And so that is noteworthy. So in the middle of are just beginning another three book contract, the first of that book has come out. And it's done really well. I've had a critically successful career that's pretty daunting in terms of its lack of sales, it's been a little bit and I do think there's a level of pandemic everyone says that if you're a new author that the pandemic has had an effect on that and so those having both critically acclaimed and sales, not great as is a difficult place to be because as my agent says, You're doing everything right. And I said me doing everything, right. It's the part of the problem. If I'm doing everything right, I'm not seeing my sales kind of turn out that way. So yeah, it's it's a career that looks good, really good on paper. I've started reviews. I have multiple Entertainment Weekly positive reviews I have. I was on my local news station recently. So on paper, it looks really, really great. But there is a level of the pandemic affecting and just societally where we are affecting it looking better monetarily. So yeah, that's where I am right now. Yes, sexy books and definitely writing sexy books about people falling in love was a great way to get through a pandemic, without a doubt what's demanded zero pandemic. I live in Houston, Texas, I moved here and 2020 during the midst of the like beginning of the pandemic, and Houston was, you know, as Houston was losing its mind I moved from a very, police was very conservative in the way it managed. It's I was from Northern Virginia, DC area. So it was very, very locked down very conservative in the way advantage COVID to Houston, which just almost refused to believe there was I moved inside the loop. But I moved here with my husband and my 24 year old son during COVID. And we've lived in a three story townhouse lived all worked, lived, my son was in school, while the worst days of the pandemic were happening. And we got through it really successfully, partly because the three of us are like innate introverts. I'm a writer, my husband worked for a global company that was already remote work. And then my son deals with social anxiety disorder. So he returned to university and that really was kind of like ideal circumstances for him. So it was an interesting time I was writing my third book. So interesting time, but I'm in Houston now. Continue to be in Houston. So that's where I am.

Kit Heintzman 04:04

Tell me a story about your life during the pandemic.

Angelina M. Lopez 04:08

So we had been, I really I released my book like, early November of 2019. And my my debut book and the debut book was notable because it was about a billionaire businesswoman and romance with lots of books about this, these kind of very alpha, you know, almost caveman, like billionaire men. And I had

decided I really wanted to write a book about billionaire women, but not just a billionaire series about billionaire women, but not just kind of taking your standard male tropes and putting them on a female but really looking at what is power look like when women wield it. So I really embrace this kind of spin on a trope, and that she was Mexican American. My heroine was Mexican American. So I have a self made Mexican American billionaire businesswoman that really fundamentally tried to take apart this very popular the trope that became very popular with 50 Shades of Grey. And really, when I said so it was sexy it was you know, I love romance or it embraced all of the escapism and bonkers plotlines, and really over the top. And yet, it was still really looking at women in power, and how the work world confronts them, how they manage the world. So it's doing all of these things. So again, so critically, it did well, was critically acclaimed, the book really did well. But um, you know, that's November of 2019, I get to go, I get to do a few live events, I get to do a few in person book events. COVID hits, my next book is supposed to come out June of 2020. And so we are all all of us are suddenly scrambling. We all talk about remembering our last event before COVID head and book, world but publishing at that point was just was it's this, there were not zoom events, there were very few, there were very few people doing online events. Some people were doing kind of Facebook chats, but it was still it was an unused medium. And all of us quickly, quickly went to live or excuse me, online events and online press an online video presence within our social media, because our access to readers that we were accustomed to was gone. And it felt like there was a void in connection and entertainment that we could sell. So my career quickly went from, you know, live events which I was an aspiring author for 20 years before I published, a career quickly changed. You know, in that initial spate of COVID, it looked like okay, bookstores are dead bookstores are over. What actually happened is a lot of people embrace their and especially their end date, people embrace their independent bookstores, those independent bookstores, found ways to Toby connections found ways to thrive and people were reading suddenly you had people reading, however, what happened is that they were reading people were backless, people who are already well known people who already had multiple books, to go to on the shelves to go to on Amazon to go through, go to finding the new author, which is who I was, was hard finding the new author of color, who was even more niche in terms of our presence, our marketing, our reach was even harder and romance, you still have 72% of readers are still white. And not only that, that doesn't dictate what they are reading, we are going through a transition into romance and really trying to embrace bipoc authors and bipoc stories, representing you know, let's reflect our real world, our real world is not this whitewashed real world, but for a long time romance was. And so this transition to get the reader who can read willingly seek out the 13th century Scott, you know, out book, and the, you know, modern day blue alien book, and the, you know, multi tentacle lover book still has a problem of saying a brown author or brown character on color, that reader can be confronted all these different ways and not have a problem accessing that material. But they can still see a brown author a brown character on the cover and say, Well, I'm not going to understand their story. So we're still dealing with that and to a certain extent COVID You know, again, feeling niche trying to become more generalized in terms of who is buying my book, Angelina M Lopez Latinx characters, it became harder during COVID, especially as a new as a frontlist, author frontlist book was affected by the pandemic, and by its reach. So you have people reading any books we're going but our careers were not, we're not helped in this effort to try to get more diversity in romance was not helped by this going on. So anyway, suddenly, I'm you know, it's a very, very, you know, virtual process of trying to reach author or reach readers, you know, already struggling with all the things we're struggling with. And yeah, so in the midst of my second book coming out, I also was moving to Houston, you know, packing up a home of 14 years that

I raised my kids in moving to Houston with my son and my husband, and then continuing the career from here. And it's been once we were able to start connecting with readers in real life again, it was a huge treat. I mean, it really was and it did, it wasn't that we were connecting with readers again, in real life. We were connecting with other authors again in real life, and that can through a connection of sitting in a restaurant or a bar or room where you're just the free flow of conversation information, I hadn't realized how much it was lacking this two dimensional flatness. It just doesn't provide that conversation as much as publishers, agents, I've tried to create environments where it feels like you're just hanging out, you're not you're not just hanging out, because this is not an unnatural circumstance. So there was there was also a real loss in terms of my own kind of career development, because I just didn't have that connection that I had, I had been accustomed to with other authors. So getting back to that, again, when you know, whether it's been entirely the best idea or safest. All the time. It has been really, really nice to the events. Sometimes they're not sometimes they're not, it's really up to the books, book, proprietor. But yeah, that's a story. That's a story. That's one story.

Kit Heintzman 11:04

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

Angelina M. Lopez 11:09

I believe so. I mean, it would have been, it would have been the same for my book was coming out would have been fall of of what? Yeah. Fall 2019. I want to say it would have been November ish, November, December ish. And it definitely was like this scary thing happening some other place. It was a scary thing, that it was happening some other place. And there was still in, you know, I'm a Gen X or I was born in 73. I do think generationally, there is this sense from my generation, that somebody else is going to solve this not somebody else, the people of authority are going to solve this problem for us. One thing about being in the industry I am is, you know, this idea of bipoc authors that wasn't Gen Xers doing that, that was a younger generation and a younger reader that did that. For me, there were older, older authors that I am taking that space, but it was people who were younger and more fed up and less. I think to a certain extent, I grew up in a world being a certain way and just assume that's the way it had to be. And it was other authors younger authors saying absolutely not, and pointing out to me what BS it is this concept that the world is just that I should not demand people, women who look like me in the books I read, or in the content, I embrace that that's the world I grew up in, that I shouldn't demand that and so to a certain extent, I do feel as what is generational just to me, but there is this general generational sense that we grew up that the authority in place would take care of it. So there's a pandemic happening, who is going to take care of it, UN's gonna take care of it, my government's gonna take care of it, even with, you know, I am staunchly anti Trump supporters are even looking at what my government was doing at the time COVID was hitting, still believe it, somebody was going to save me from us from this becoming what it was. And so I do and I remember, when we it's kind of the first COVID case, or one of the first I think, in Seattle. Just how fundamentally, it has been a long, hard process. And I think the pandemic and all of the societal things that accompany that. And, and 2015 election and its results has been a long jarring process and nobody's gonna come save me. And it does affect now how I manage my own career, you know, and continues to affect, I just had a big book come out and again, critically acclaimed and I got my first my q3 sales numbers and they're awful. And it's startling to everyone process how bad these numbers can be considering the kind of acclaim I've gotten. And so it's, I have, but I have learned something through the pandemic through, you know, this,

you know, November of 2019 and this horrible thing that's happening in China, nobody's gonna save me and the authority, you know, whether it's my government, my governor, or my, you know, publisher, nobody's going to save me it's going to be up to me doing that just going up to me and going to be a collective of people like me, like minded people who have the same priorities to take care of that.

Kit Heintzman 14:47

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

Angelina M. Lopez 14:57

Good, you know, we were I you know, I've worked I'm wildly blessed, I was a stay at home mom, before I was a journalist had the opportunity that what's my small it's my children are born I was a freelance writer, but again now it was, it was because of the work my husband was doing that allowed for that. So I was I was we were, we we're doing well, we're, you know, upper middle class family doing well had really great health insurance. So, you know, up until I remember the feeling like there was a seismic change. Maybe, I don't know, five, eight years before the pandemic. So 2010 2011 was suddenly the things that I expected to be effortless by the insurance weren't anymore. And suddenly, there were a lot more demands of me as a, you know, I'll just, I'll be 50 next year, so long span in terms of, you know, healthcare and my perception of it. And mom, a mom of two kids are going through it for that. But yeah, I want to feel maybe like 20 1011, where suddenly the things that we're at, had been somewhat X effortless for us to access with health, our health care and health insurance sort of becoming more complicated. And it felt like I hadn't changed. You know, we hadn't lowered our, you know, what we're paying, we had, you know, jobs, nothing, we had done a change and yet, services, the ease of access, all of that started changing. And so, you know, it was good in the under the umbrella of upper middle class family in Washington, DC and Northern Virginia in an area where good health care was easy to access. And being able to pay our premiums and overages without any hardship. So relatively good. What's actually been really fascinating is we moved to inside the loop Houston, which is the small center and a mile away from us is a place called the medical center. And it is this strip of hospitals and university hospitals. And we have now x locate ourselves in a one mile of some of the best medical care in our country. And we're part of the Houston Methodist. Our insurance allows us to access Houston Methodist system, which is all interconnected, which is it's kind of like Kaiser in California were super enmeshed super a lot of technology driven apps, it all works together. And it doesn't feel limiting. It feels beneficial. I know, people were doing Kaiser in Northern Virginia that felt very limiting very, it wasn't the quality of care, this is phenomenal quality of care. We, you know, we're first in line for COVID vaccines, part of being personalized was because so few people were getting COVID vaccines, and they were easy to get. But our health care system provided all of this technological instant access. So you know, the second we could get into and we could our doctors are calling us it's available get in there, you know. So weirdly enough, our such our specific situation during COVID is actually our medical care has actually improved, just purely location based and kind of insurance base, our insurance hasn't gotten any better or worse. It's simply what our insurance now allows us to access is far superior than what we'd had before.

Kit Heintzman 18:45

What changed for you and locked down here?

Angelina M. Lopez 18:51

So I am by nature, a lot of authors are innate introverts, we are observers, who keep to ourselves. And when I say that I'm an introvert. People laugh because I can talk and I enjoy talking your point when I talk, but what I find is I can go and I love my husband and I were that obnoxious? Foodie, for lack of a better term, we love going to restaurants, we'd like to sit at the bar and talk to the bartenders about the ingredients you're using. I mean, we're just we're obnoxious, like obnoxious. So I like being out in the world. And I like input. You know, I like to see new things and I like to talk to people. But if I go to an event, if I go to whether it's hanging out with friends, or whether it's, you know, an event with people or especially a reader event, I'll do that and then I don't want to do anything else for the next four days. I don't even if like a week like my husband, I like being out but we'll do one event a weekend. And then that's it. Like we don't want to do anything else and sometimes those weekends where we don't have anything fun And that's delicious. Like we love it. So I'm, I am a person who really enjoys sitting at my desk by myself for eight hours. And talking to the characters in my head, you know, I really, it's something the writing process I fall into effortlessly. Not that writing is easy, but I follow the process of it. It really does. The worries of my day, just and part of its training. You know, I'm a very disciplined writer, I write every day, the same time, but the world falls away. And so, for me, the writing during the pandemic was an end, the isolation of the pandemic wasn't difficult. I have a I'm my husband and I will celebrate our 25 year wedding anniversary next year. Yeah, and and we innately enjoy each other's company like we just he just, I find him wildly entertaining still, weirdly, but I find him very entertaining. And then our son is just this really fascinating, funny kind of smart person. And so in terms of like, the roommate, for my husband and I, he was a perfect roommate. We moved during we moved July of 2020. So just you know, locked down and just began, we moved to a three story Townhome. So my office is on in the guest bedroom on the third floor, my husband's office is in this we have this massive living space and the first floor, he's created a an office out of the corner. So his office is on the second floor, and my son and his schooling was on his level on the first floor. And so we you know, our interaction during the day is very limited. We hardly talk to each other, we don't see each other a whole lot because we don't want to, we all go to our corners, or when you know during pandemic new good our corners, get our work done. And then we would break at like six 530 sometimes six. We were in Houston so it was this beautiful weather like it was actually an okay summer. It wasn't a horrible summer. So we break, we would have cocktails, we have a deck we'd sit out and have have our excuse me a patio, we'd have cocktails, or we'd have them inside. We have a long dinner together. We'd sit around hour and a half. Then he heard someone go do his work. And we'd go watch TV. And it was a lovely we go take walks around the neighborhood. And we live in a gated townhome complex. And we have 12 It's up like I don't know, 24 townhomes maybe there's 12 kids who live in it. So we had moved in and we got a flyer on our door, the kids would do performances. So they would do these performances, like in the garage, and the parents would bring pizza and beater. And we'd all be outside, you know, staying like potted families away from each other, but getting to know our neighbors. It was like we were living in some ideal times I don't actually think ever existed. This idea of like the kids going outside and playing and just running around and getting to know your neighbors. It happened because of COVID. So for us, for me, I had, you know, looking at the law globally, how scary what was happening, how frustrating it was what our government was doing, how unresponsive certain you know, and you know, human beings that seemed completely read in my heart unresponsive they were being that was this large umbrella of what was happening are you know, a woman we knew died in like, April,

April, maybe early May. We didn't know her well, but it was shocking and horrifying. She's younger than I was and died of COVID. And so there was this umbrella thing happening, but our day to day and again, I spent eight hours a day like writing, like people falling in love and having good sex. And so it's like it was this weird. You know, that mitigate this umbrella stress was mitigated, mitigated by the day to day love of my career and the enjoyment of my life. You know, true, like the best roommates I could have had for a situation like this. We're all in a introverts and then the joy of moving to a place we moved to Houston for our choice. We weren't we we just were done with the East Coast and Donald where we lived, done racing, you know, done with high schools and so we moved inside the loop we walk there's cocktails and you know, like cocktail places in Taunton, restaurants and coffee shops. I mean like little like roll out of my house in the there. Everything we wanted out of moving was present even though we couldn't access it completely during code but chose not to access a completely made these great neighbors super welcoming the the community and the friendship we were looking for was here. So, you know, my day to day was this lovely thing happening. And it's lovely like the relationship I built with my son and my husband was like a great one, it was this lovely affirmation of this thing that I hoped was happening in my life. You know, I'm doing what I want with my career, I have this great relationship, my husband, my son, we all enjoy each other's company like adults, there was this lovely affirmation of this thing happening during a global pandemic. So that was that was the weird conflict. And people, you know, one of the questions during the live events, if we're or excuse me, during virtual events, what kind of question you'll ask about other authors is how did you get through? You know, or how are you getting through? And people would say, my friends and the Zoom calls with other authors and reading and I, you know, it's almost you have to apologize for enjoying your husband, your spouse, your family, but I did, it was my family that got me through it. And, and my writing, you know, regardless of its, you know, net sales results, and, you know, I love these books, and I love these characters. And it was a, it was a peaceful place to spend a really, you know, jarring time.

Kit Heintzman 26:32

I want to invite any specifics about how you were feeling about government response to what was happening,

Angelina M. Lopez 26:39

Just, you know, it just I there's a level of horror that, I guess to a certain extent, I have become a little numb to It's a horror that existed since the second that Trump was elected. We, I couldn't say we, you know, we weren't listening to the results in 21 years. 2015 1615 16. Yeah, we weren't listening to the results, because I couldn't, you know, I couldn't. And a week before, I was on a walk with my friend, and I was like, There's no way he's gonna get elected. And microphone was like, I don't know, when I was like, I actually, I had a girlfriend who covered the Obama White House. I'm next to her former journalist. And she was covering the Obama White House for the Wall Street Journal. And I asked her, I was like, Are you so excited? So she covered the Obama White House, kind of figure out whether she was gonna stay or not. I said, you know, you're gonna have the opportunity to cover the first female president, like, how exciting and she was like, I don't know. And ultimately, she decided to move change jobs before the election. But, you know, one of the first things like, you know, I'm so glad you got out I'm so glad that would have been such a nightmare to cover the Trump White House a week before I was like, There's no way and microphone was like, I don't know. And the next day after the election when he won why went on a walk with my husband, I'm I'm half Mexican American, my mom's

Caucasian my dad's full blooded Mexican, but boy, United States. So I'm half but you know, take a look at me, you know, your, um, something people have identified me as Mexican my whole life, their hat, you know, I had all my own profiling and all that fun stuff. My last name is Lopez, I kept my maiden name. Um, my husband is white Lundqvist, you know, as America, you know, blonde, but just immensely supportive and immense a fan of me. So we went on a walk the next day after the election, and my husband was honestly like, if we need to move on, though, if we need to figure out someplace else to live, he was more scared for me than I was like it. It felt like such a it was so unprecedented to have somebody who was so violent to my face president who was active the one of the first horrible of the many horrible things he said, one of the first horrible things he said on the election trail was that people who had a face like me were bad people. And that he got elected after saying things like that was just so jarring, alarming. So the level of horror that built up over the election than him winning, then the years, you know, to my shock could still be you know, get worse during a global pandemic during a situation that felt like well, this. This is what's going to bring us all together because you cannot argue with a virus like it's a virus, Who ever heard of arguing with the, I'm gonna say the cold, I don't think COVID is cool, but nobody wants to ever have an argument with a cold, you know, virus, who's gonna argue with a virus. And for instantly, it can be chosen as this situation that to separate us and divide us and to call it, you know, who has acting as if there is somehow some willpower over it or some masculinity over it, you know, that you can, you know, alpha your way over COVID and that you would honestly, consider the unnecessary deaths of so many Americans as viable. Like, that's okay. Work. I'm so ashamed of us. I mean, at the end of the day, I'm 50. You know, I'm gonna be 50 I have a responsibility for what happened, my husband's like, Nope, we don't. We voted we supported we, you know, we did all this stuff, but I do, I feel responsibility for what's happened, I feel a responsibility to my children, that this is the, you know, excuse my language shit, that we're leaving them. Um, I, to a certain extent, I'm numbed by it. But I cannot believe that this was okay. And I can't believe this is this is my neighbor. I can't believe that them being right was more important than keeping Americans alive. Like it's I'm horrified. I'm horrified. And I'm ashamed. I am, I feel ashamed, I feel like could have done more, I could have done something else, I could have something done different. And I feel like if my generation doesn't feel ownership for this that's where the problem begins, you know, my generation baby boomers, we're responsible for this, we should feel ownership, we should feel shame for it. And I'm sorry, you know, I am, I'm sorry, to the future generations that are going to have to clean up what we've done. Yeah, I'm horrified and I'm ashamed. That's how I feel about it.

Kit Heintzman 32:15

What are some of the things you noticed and other people's reactions?

Angelina M. Lopez 32:19

Oh, they're just so I mean, it's so funny, they, they, they span the gamut, even in our own house, and to be able to get a house to with government should have done more, and we're all vaccinated and feel it's ridiculous not to so span the gamut within that. But, you know, again, like, I think there's certain once we got the second vaccine, if I went to a situation where people were wearing masks, I would be like, I'm wearing a mask, and my husband was so angry, that we were that other people who were making more poor choices was requiring us to feel guilty about masks. And so he would put it on, I mean, he has been, he's a person who, that that kind of societal, you know, pressure works on him, like, as it kind of, I mean, enlarger, you know, the certain ways it should work. He, so it works on him,

but he was so angry that our sacrifices and our making choices and not seeing family and all of the things that we had done, it didn't matter, and we were still being subjected to, you know, these mascots and just fear. We were doing everything right, you know, that it was the choices of people who were doing things wrong, but kept this pandemic going, you know, churning along so, so intensely United States. So we just resented it in a way that I didn't you know, my son is, you know, liberal to the point of, of, you know, socialism and let's, you know, rise up and bring it all thing down. And I'm, you know, getting there, there's no doubt, like, so frustrated, and, you know, demoralized to a certain extent, but um, you know, so his, he, I he will still a lot of times, not so much in restaurants and those kind of things, but a lot of times in class, there's a lot of students, so wearing masks, so he's still masking at in university, you know, they've all gone back to full time, but a lot of people are still masking. And he said an interesting thing that for certain extent, it's a way to manage anxiety, because you're covering half your face. And I was like, and he thinks that's a lot of a lot of his peers are doing that because there's mental health was so intensely affected. At that age. I mean, all of us, but specially in that formative age range. We're dealing with so much social You know, all of this kind of social growth was completely suspended. But there's so much intense anxiety and depression that Andrea and a lot of people are still masking because it helps kind of mitigate some of that my therapist talked about, it causes panic breath, that kind of trapped breathing, but he was like, it feels more comforting to have half your face covered, which I thought was a really interesting point of view. So, um, you know, my parents live on a vineyard in Russian River Valley in Sonoma County. And so they're on six acres. And so they handled it. Like, they were, you know, super, super conservative about their movement. It's about masking and it's funny when we say the words conservative, but it COVID It mean, anyway, they were super, super safe. And yet, they, yeah, they did it. There's a weird subset. And I've noticed this in my peers, parents, where some people did really well, during commit, they did well, financially. They did well, I'm kind of personally they, you know, it's a weird. And it was, it wasn't that difficult for them. Because it was certain socio economic place they were in. So there was, there's been other kind of like, there's definitely been this feedback loop. Like, we've all been in these homes, or we've been in these clothes, like zooms, and so we're like, all getting kind of, and then there's Twitter, right? So there's, like, all getting kind of the same. And, like, we're in our little feedback loop, and we're getting the same information. And we're kind of like, sometimes I think we're kind of verifying the worst aspects of things we believe. And then we go on Twitter. And it's just like, everything's burning. It's the worst. So this is a weird. Yeah, I probably don't want to say too much. Anyway, I think they're just there can be a weird feedback loop. Um, I think, you know, certain people when I had dear friends who went through intense depression, intense, scary depression, that came out that the level of isolation, and the level of inability to move out in the world was just intensely damaging. And they are doing much, much, much, much, much, much, much better now. But it an earth something in them that they never, they didn't, they didn't expect they have mental health issues in their family. But they never expected it for themselves. And it, it was. So it was surprising, but not surprising, but intense, intense depression. Um, I have another dear friend whose marriage is falling apart. And maybe it wouldn't have made it what it happened. But the pressures, not the pressures of COVID really getting to see their spouse that closely has made it much more difficult for them to stay in that that relationship and they're trying, they're trying to but they've saw things that friends of theirs had seen for a bit, and they saw them much more clearly. Um, I do have my mom's family's from Northern California. My dad's family is from southeast Kansas. It's my Mexican American community. It's what my latest book is about. But I am third generation Mexican American from a small community in Southeast Kansas. We've now the fifth generation, my Mexican family came

there and early 1900s worked on the railroad and settled and you will find throughout the Midwest, there are all of these multi generational Mexican American communities because of the railroad. So this is a community of you know, very much like, pull yourself up by your bootstraps were very prideful, very self made. But southeast Kansas, they and their neighbors are watching Fox News. And so I have Mexican looking. Last names Lopez, you know, Ortega Hernandez who are actively voting against their own best interests. they're active, they're voting for a Trump White House, they're voting they're anti vaccinations. They're you know, when their rates of people of color dying and COVID getting COVID are way worse than than non people of color. It is wild the level how well propaganda works, and my family some of some members of my family a result of that, and it's made the some of those relationships complicated, you know, as COVID is settling until something we start to live with. There's still these conversations that start and I'm like We can't talk about this, we are fundamentally different. And it makes me so sad and angry, that you're working against yourself, and the people we love. So if this is going to be a relationship, this is not something we can talk about. I don't say all of that I just tried to veer the conversation away. But um, so that's a really weird and difficult but again, it's kind of feels more of the same. It's a continuation of what happened with the 2016 elections. Um, yeah, so I think that's the varying, yeah, you know, we actually we, we have a neighbor who is, you know, I'm not sure how they I don't know if they're vaccinated. I know they vote for Trump. And I know that every time I've needed anything, every our community is wildly diverse. Our townhome community is wildly diverse. Every time anyone needs anything, this is the first neighbor to come out with the car jack, with the you know, I'll save your dog, I'll you know, pick you up if your car's out of gas. This is the neighbor and he and they do it with like, there's no pressure, there's no they do with absolute service first mentality. And zero expectation of fakes much less, you know, a claim or applause aren't they just do it. And that this has been the weirdest, weirdest aspect of moving to Texas that, you know, it's the it's people believe what they believe. And yet, it's not just friendly. And again, this is why I painted with a wide swath, but it's this true and Nate and neighbors and neighbors a neighbor. And, but a physical neighbor. I remember I was in a small town. I was driving back from seeing my family in Southeast Kansas. And I'm a small town in the middle of nowhere in Texas, my GPS moved me around because of highway construction, and middle of nowhere, and I had to go to the bathroom. And I was a little nervous, quite honestly, you know, I haven't driven through this hadn't driven through this country since 2016. I was all nervous. So I park at this I have the bathroom. So park at this gas station. That's just a one off little it's not even a chain or anything. And as I'm walking through the door, these two huge white guys and full camo bull hats to boots, camo. I don't remember if they were coming out or coming. I think they were coming walking in with me. And I'm seeing this happening. We all get to the doors. Both guys grab both doors, open them. And the guy on my right goes, here you go, ma'am. Thank you. And I walk in. And I can't I don't remember the last time anyone in DC or Northern Virginia opened the door for me or called me any. So it's just the weirdest place to live. It's the weirdest place to live. And that's that's the, you know, confrontation and joy that I've experienced, you know, being here?

Kit Heintzman 43:22

What was it like moving while all this was going on?

Angelina M. Lopez 43:27

It was so funny. So I had a book that was good. And as we moved sold her house put the house on the market May 1 like and this is in Northern Virginia. So great market. Right right inside the beltway. So

like, place you want to own a house, location, location, location, this is location. So we put our house on the market May 1 And I'm asking a realtor, do you sell homes during a pandemic? And at that point, he's like, maybe I don't know. We sell it in about a month, which is what what took which is a bit it's before the COVID pandemic real estate market took off. This was still during a weird time. But we didn't we sold it. And so our move was planned for mid July. And so I had a book release coming out beginning of June. And I do like August 1, and I'd move so all of these things happening. And so I was like guys, we cannot get COVID We're all healthy. None of us have long term health problems. So I was like, you know, and ours are 20 What was he at the time 2222 year old was living with us and our 20 or 19 year old had to come home from school. He was in school in Chicago had to come home in March at March and come back with us and he was miserable. Like in nature we knew He was very unhappy and made sure we all knew how unhappy he was. So, but I was like, Guys, I cannot get COVID I got so much to do, and I have so many deadlines and removing. So the boys were okay, the bait, the oldest one was great a bit again, like he deals with a social anxiety disorder. So that was more of than more of the same. The baby was having a rough time of it. But kind of did what he could finally we're all so he's he's so miserable. We're all miserable. My husband's like, let's send it back to Chicago. You know, things were fine. It was like, post immediate lockdown. He was like, he wants to go. You're gonna be happier. That's Cinemax. So we sent him back to Chicago. So that relieves some of that pressure. So it was like, Okay, we're not gonna get COVID because nobody's doing anything my son gets, we're all trying to figure out how do we say goodbye to these friends. And we're doing like these weird, like social distancing little gap, tiny gatherings. Like one person, one person. Everything's Clorox, and we're doing the backyard and everyone's you know, 10 feet apart. But trying to say goodbye to we've lived in that area for 20 years, trying to say goodbye to people but doing it in a safe way. And I can't cover it. So that's all going fine. Except my husband, my husband, my son says something about an ex girlfriend, friends, he's gonna be friends to our friends. I was like, Honey, can't, like, do anything. And you can't get in a car. And he's like, no, no, no, it's gonna be fine. They're gonna come up or sit in the backyard, whatever, okay. And I just I completely believe and I trust him. And he knew like, I cannot get COVID You can't get COVID Cuz I can. So I come down one morning, like, five days before the movie truck shows up. And I see his ex girlfriend's car in front of our house.

Angelina M. Lopez 47:07

I'm like, what's her car doing here? So I go up to his room, he's not in his room. And I and it's early, like six in the morning, I go, and we had a finished basement. And I opened the door and then the lights are on. And I go Gabrielle, he goes, Yeah, and it goes on there. Yeah, he and his ex girlfriend are downstairs in the basement. I was like she has to leave right now. It's so funny, because I didn't say any of my friends names. And I even said they but I like call out. So I don't know. But anyway, it's probably the reason I feel really bad now. Anyway, I'm still so angry. So I'm like, your friend needs to live really right now. And he was it was like, he, he has been aware. He came home in 2017. He he came home from his freshman year of school. And he had an undiagnosed Social Anxiety Disorder, we didn't know he didn't know, we didn't have the vocabulary. And it's been a long journey in mental health for all of us. And, and, you know, a level of, I just didn't know a lot of how the world worked. And I needed this awareness, like I didn't know. And now I do. But part of what's made it work for us is my son is really trying to establish this relationship that this is not his parents in him. We sometimes during crisis moments for him, we hit we that relationship is established again. But for the most part, we are a support system for him, as he's still getting to the things he wants to do. And we've, you know, this

many years now, we've really established a good balance. And part of what's made that work is this understand that we're roommates and that there's a mutual respect, not only from him to us, which he really manages it really well. But for us to Him, He is an adult. And there has to be a level of mutual respect for this stuff work as well as it was. But in that moment, the week totally went from mom to sign. No mutual respect on either end. I was furious and he was like, This is what I needed. Like I have been good. I've done everything right for COVID. I'm not I'm not sorry. The day before the moving truck shows up. He comes in I'm doing something in our study is where I worked. And he comes in the doorway and he's six foot two. He's tall kid. I'm five threes tall kid and he's standing in the doorway and he's just he looks like he got hit. He looked he got slapped. He's white pale. His eyes are huge. He's just getting his mom. I'm so sorry. I have a fever. And I'm just like, So we immediately what did we do? He had a fee like 102 Fever, we immediately gathered. And that was like testing was like in these outdoor tent. I mean, it was all it was all over the place, but we could get an appointment for the next day for testing for all three of us. Literally, it was like an hour before the moving truck was supposed to show up, we can get the test done. I'm like, you know, all of us already, we're dealing with like Uncharted Waters. So go and get the test. And I want to say it was a rapid test, I want us to be got the results relatively quickly. Who knows? It wasn't COVID He did not have COVID. I did not none of us have COVID At least from that initial test. So then they're like come back in because he was obviously any say he had lesions that he had had mono like the year before. It wasn't mono, it wasn't. To this day, we don't know what it was, he got so sick, he was so sick. What ended up doing is I end up getting a motel room. Because I didn't want regardless, I didn't want to have to tell every mover that walking in it's not a COVID it's an COVID and that COVID got to my hotel room. Put him there with the dog like a block away. You know, we're dealing with this, he's but that whole so anyway, moving to Houston was we're going to drive because we had the car and the dog. Gable was going to help we were driving this Prius. So it's three, which wasn't going to be an issue if he was driving, but it's three people a grown adult, so two of them at six foot and six, two, and the dog in a Prius and one of them sick like he we just like made a bed out of like the front seat. And just like he was so sick, so miserable. It wasn't stressful to this day, like we kept testing him for different things in it. And by the time he had like, I don't know, he was sick, like four or five days here, all of those days without any furniture, we have like air mattress on the floor, he's still sick. We get here, but like going that that trip was, I don't know two nights, we did it in two nights or three nights, that was just a blur. Because we're changing our lives. We're trying not to stop at anywhere, but we'd read that, um, rest stops get cleaned, we're getting cleaned more than gas station. So we're only stopping at rest stops for bathrooms, I would like load up a cooler to begin the day with like waters and like foods and stuff like that. And then we would drive we would you know, manage checking into hotels in like Alabama like this insane. But it was such a blur because changing our lives. We're in the middle of a pandemic, and our kid is like, so sick, like, but we never got sick. And we don't know what it was. But it was we can now laugh at that story because my son just he was, you know, when he was just like, I couldn't believe it. And I was like, and you learn to listen to your money. And he of course won't concede that whatsoever. Like, no, it's not what I learned. But it was he was mortified. He was he was horrified. Like it was a very funny, very funny moment. So yeah, that's how they move was it was a it was an ordeal.

Kit Heintzman 53:32

What are some of the things that you notice that were different in your two sons reactions to the pandemic?

Angelina M. Lopez 53:38

Again, I think the, you know, our son's in mental health. You know, him being isolated was kind of the norm we've been dealing with for a couple of years before really doing a lot he went back to do he went to our local junior college to he was going to Rice University and he's back at Rice University, but came home from Rice University and so therapeutic so he was in therapy on meds. And part of the therapeutic process was going back to school and going even at the community college level, those courses don't transfer to Rice, but it was incredibly important for him to go through the process of that. So he'd been in school, he had friends, he had a couple of girlfriends, but there was still a lot, a lot of of a journey, a lot of work, you know, mental health work for him to get back. He wants to be a physicist, so it's, you know, getting back to where he wants to be, um, to a sofern to a certain extent with our son Gabriel, there wasn't you know, he, and again, I think part of his reaction was me very, very beginning and again, it wasn't just it was for myself. It was for my husband it was there are huge, momentous things happening in the next three months and we cannot riscos once we moved here to Houston, my husband, my son and I were very aligned in how we were just doing everything. So there never really wasn't any conflict after that. My younger son was 19. I didn't turn 19 yet. Now 18 years old, had moved from Northern Virginia to go to film school in Chicago, downtown Chicago. You know, he had this dorm, these dorms these kids had, they were like these full apartments, the dorms were built like communal room, and then their own bedrooms, and the two separate baths, like their own bedrooms, and two of the kids would share one bath. A two kids was here. So it's like, the most like sumptuous kind of arrangement you could have as a freshman in college. Like, I would just tell him like, You're spoiled, right? Like and it was a joke only because he was paying for not he but his scholarship for paying for most of his schooling, but I was like, still spoiled rotten. So this kid is in film school in downtown Chicago, like everything he wants, having to come home. I mean, he was doing everything. Like when it hit, I was like, Do you want to come back, he's like, like, they're not closing the door. And yet, I'm gonna ride it out as long as I can. And then he was looking to see if he could live with a friend. He was doing everything in his power to not come home. And ultimately, like, they said, You have to get out, he didn't have an arrangement. He didn't have a job, you know, jobs are impossible is kind of you got to come home. He was miserable. He was miserable. He kind of put all of his energy into, he made his first album, he released his first album, like, he really got into music, he'd already been getting more than music, we got into music during that time, he would take a skateboard and just leave for the day, just go riding for the day. And I had to trust that he wasn't like, making out with people. You know, trying to stay six feet back. And you know, again, nobody got cut, we did not get COVID Nobody in our household got COVID until this summer. And it was me first. And I had it for. And this was after my boot like not like I had gotten one booster. I got it. And then two weeks later, my son got it. He was actually sicker than I was. My husband has never gotten still has never gotten it. So we did not get it until summer of 2022. Yeah, like May, I think would have been May. Um, my husband Yeah, so my husband is this we're like total anomaly. He's never gotten it. Um, but my but it was really hard on my son. And even when he when it goes talk about going back to Chicago, my, my, my baby is an extrovert and family of introverts. And that was a huge part of kind of a growing pain for him senior year, his freshman year and a lot of anger towards me and his dad. And you know, and I took about six months of like, okay, like, let's all take it, let's talk through it, let's go through it. And that's the six month point when I was still getting yelled at, I was like, I'm done being yelled at, like, we're good. I've listened, we've changed what we can I said, you know, but one of the things really came down to is Honey, I understand the sense that you

feel like maybe you're doing it wrong, you know, but you're not, you're simply you're literally are you feed off interaction with other people. That is that is a basic nutritive store for you. It is not for dad, and me and your brother. But if you're sitting at we were at a dinner table family, we sat at the dinner table tonight. So if you're getting me sitting at a dinner table, and you see three people who you love going about things, you know, and needing things differently than you do, then one of those assumptions could be Well, I must be doing it wrong, I'm sick, you're not. But you have different needs. And we do. And we want to emit, like, make sure that this sense, any sense that you have, if we're giving up a sense that you're doing it wrong, we don't want that. But we also want you to leave space that we're not doing it wrong, either, that we just have different ways. So I think coming to that understanding to a certain extent, the pandemic helped us figure that out. Because we had the there was a three of us had really aligned seemed seemingly, and the needs we had. And inside our babies just had very different needs. And we've definitely come to like, I think that we've come to a real place of peace and kind of that we're different, and that's okay. And, um, but I remember he really when COVID really started to recede, he was over the moon. He was over the moon he actually just hosted an event so he's really in the music scene and he just hosted an event in Chicago that he put the money down for he rented the space, whatever and he made this huge profit and so He's 21. He'll be 22 this summer. So he's like, yeah, he needs people he needs interaction he needs collaboration is is, is again, a source that feeds him. And so very different ways about approaching something like sets expects you to be isolated.

Kit Heintzman 1:00:19

What's it been like living with a dog during all this?

Angelina M. Lopez 1:00:23

He's just old, our son and our dog. Both are no, I'm not getting to do that. Our dog is not a hugely social, it's just not really social. And so and he was at rescue three and a half years old. And we thought we were gonna get a dog and we're gonna go camping, we're gonna hang out the coffee shop, he's gonna get us out in the world. He's a walk down, and he's a great house dog. I mean, great house up to the point, like we could have 50 people parties with like, infants running around, and my dog would just be so like, not bothered anybody. Like he'd be engaged, like, involved it present. But like, he never jumps, he didn't bark at people have little infants, like, you know, pulling his tail and he would just sit there and take it like, we wouldn't put him through it much. But just this incredibly, just the best house dog he didn't. You know, he doesn't, he just doesn't do anything wrong in the house. You pet taking him on walks, if he sees another dog, he barks and he's got this big, deep chest. And, you know, we finally we after, you know, we spent about two years once we got him again, he was three and a half and a rescue for two years trying to figure it out. And we finally had it that was like, love the things that are good about him. This is not going to change, just stop trying to take him to dog parks. And to a certain extent that gave us like permission to like, okay, we can just love the dog that he is. So we take him on a daily walk. If he sees a dog, he's worse with my husband, I he has more, he'll he'll listen to me more. But if he sees a dog, he barks super loud, I pretty much ignore the people. I just manage him. He's not lunging. He's not aggressive. It's just this super loud, very visible bark. So really very little change. Because especially when we moved to Houston, like when our friends were complaining, and 2022 is ball hit, and suddenly everyone had to go back inside. And they couldn't our you know, our DC friends are, you know, north of the country friends were complaining about going inside. And one of my girlfriends was like, I haven't seen people in five months, because we can't get out. You know, it's 82

degrees here, like we were going on walks. And so it was really easy for us with him because our daily, my husband and I take turns every morning giving him a big long lot. We just kept doing that. So it was really it was really, really effortless. But it did it was like kind of the fourth person in our you know, little COVID clubhouse was this dog. And to a certain extent, we were like, you know this, if Peter had to go back to work and my husband went back to an office, I don't know what our dog was to do with himself he's so accustomed to. I mean, he must love the pandemic, like it must be the best thing ever. Because we're home all the time. We're with him all the time. And he always has one of us inside. I will if I'm on a call because so I you know, had maybe two meetings a week, I closed my door so it doesn't disturb my husband. But if not, he's either here in the hallway staring at me. Or he's downstairs in the living room, in front of my husband's office staring at my husband like he's always got like, line of sight on one of us. And yeah, I don't know what he would do if, if we if we went back to work in an office. He's 16. So we're probably not going to have to know. But yeah, he was. He's loved it. pandemic's the best thing that ever happened to him.

Kit Heintzman 1:03:56

You meant mentioned getting vaccinated. Could you tell me a bit about the decision to do that. And then what access was like once you decided to do so?

Angelina M. Lopez 1:04:03

Sure I went my husband is four years older than I am. So he was naturally his age put him he got his annual and we got his annual and it was, you know, we've been here, not a full year yet, but we hadn't needed you know, that's telling. We moved here in July and nobody had needed a doctor. My son was seeing a therapist. And and they actually he was still medical. He was still meeting with his therapist and psychiatrist in Northern Virginia because they were doing it all, you know, I forget what that was called Tella doc. They were doing it all tele not Tella, Doc, but like that that which would not have happened. Without the pandemic if the pendant if the pandemic hadn't happened. He would not have been able to stay with it and he would have had to find somebody right away. So that was delayed. So he was the only one who was saying I'm a medical professional all my husband, or I didn't need one. And then I think he actually saw he got he signed up for his annual or made an appointment in order to get the vaccine. So his annual was like March of 2021. And he was in a minute or something I can't remember exactly, but he was of an age where it was like, okay, he was immediate. Well, when I found out that I was like, Oh, that I'm getting my annual and see, like, I'll beg I don't care because I wasn't old enough. But when I went in, like my weight was like, I got the lovely COVID weight. And he was like, Okay, you can get it. Yeah, it was worth the wait was worth it. So yeah, I it was really effortless, he got me, he got me signed up, you know, Houston, Methodist had, like a whole kind of vaccine clinic that, you know, it was very organized, it was really, really easy to access i It might shot was maybe three weeks after my annual. Um, but it was this incredibly like, kept us separated and, you know, got everyone through and masked and it was it was just an effortless process. Then the second vaccine it again, because it was all so interconnected. They do my chart, you know, we're getting notifications, like you're eligible and get your booster, you know, so it's been super effortless, I think my booster I did at the, at the Houston Methodist clinic as well. But then my last I got my last booster, what, a week ago, two weeks ago, my second booster, and that was just through sea bass. So but again, it's all up like all my information is all in my chart, it's super easy to bring up my vaccine card is there to like, it's been a really effortless, effortless for me and my husband access, and then my son could go through it that

way. But Rice University has been you know, so, you know, everything that we you know, it's been, it's been great. You know, again, it's the notifications they were testing through, when they finally stopped testing. Guess last spring, they were testing for a long time you go in once a week, get the test, you get tested by these results. But the vaccines and the boosters, they've just come in and get it done. And it's been a really, really seamless process. So fortunately for us, it's been effortless to get the vaccine. And I've been but we were productive to about like, Okay, if it's available, we're gonna go get it instantly. And the thought process was like, again, like, I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna argue with a virus. Why would I do that? It makes no sense. And that's it. I mean, it feels so obvious. Like why? I mean, it's one thing I like to look up my fellow man, when I die, you know, there were a lot of people who didn't fit Lee, you know, elderly and ill people who died. Want to die not I did that. People are not looking out for their own self interest. Like it's okay to be selfish about this. I don't want to die. If that's purely the reason to go get a vaccine, go for it. We were at a bar last night, my husband, I went for a happy hour. And we were chatting with the bartender and the bartender was talking about a client of customer who come in. And he asked the customer like last time you were in here you with this really cute girl? And the guy was like, yeah, she didn't want to go on another date with me when she found out I wasn't vaccinated. And the bartender who said like I shake this guy's hand all the time, the bartender was like, Oh, you're not you're not vaccinated. I'm wiping my hands on my shirt. I'm not vaccinated. And I was like, you know, what, if, you know, as a romance writer, I'm like, it's the motivation is I will not have sex with you unless you get vaccinated. Go for it. Like whatever motivation you need, or whatever societal pressure like, cheers to her I'll buy her a drink. But for me, it's like I don't want to die like and I'm not gonna I'm not gonna argue with a virus. So and again, like for my whole family was really effortless. My 19 year old because he was in Chicago. It was like something he was gonna get to eventually So eventually, whenever he was with me or I was with him, I was like, let's go. So a lot of it has been seen to by me because he's 19 and his heads firmly up his butt, but not because he doesn't believe that it's necessary. It's just, you know, you're gonna live forever when you're 19. So well, now he's not anymore. He's 21 Now, but um, yeah, but again, it was just so obvious, you know, and I do know, people who got really sick with a vaccine, we None of us did, none of us felt bad at all, for the vaccines or the booster. So we're really fortunate, I don't think the baby did either. But the three of us, you know, had no side effects. But we just you want to give me something that's going to make sure I don't die and is going to let me go out in the world. And if I you know, whatever, don't need a mask. I don't have to wear one. I'll sign me up. Great. You know, it. It was just such a non starter, you know, again, it's like putting on a seatbelt anymore or putting on a you know, how, you know, helmet if I was gonna ride a motorcycle, but I don't. Any of those things that I just do, because I care about being alive the next day. It's so effortless.

Kit Heintzman 1:10:36

Would you share a bit about the physical experience when you caught COVID?

Angelina M. Lopez 1:10:42

God, I felt 100% Fine. The is this right? Yeah, I felt 100% Fine. That night before, I felt super fine. When I woke up. It was a Saturday I woke up that Saturday. At like, 10 in the morning. I sneezed like three or four times in a row, which I just don't do and I was sitting on the couch. It wasn't like I was cleaning or, you know, I just and I sneeze heart, like three or four times. My husband was at one in the couch. I was at the other reading. I sneeze really hard. And I go. And it was like loud and hard. I just like I'm like, Oh,

by noon, to like, in two hours. I was 100% Sure I had COVID I felt horrible. My whole, all my sinuses were inflamed. And so I mean, we had all of the we gotten a bunch of the post office, the tests you get from signing the post op, so a bunch of free tests. I immediately grabbed one, but I was just like, you know, and so I swapped. And so I'm trying to think of exactly what my symptoms were that I think it was just all in my sinuses. You know, it's hard to remember. I think it was all my sinuses. And so swab. And I mean, it was, I mean, it was like, you know, they tell you not to look for a certain but it was like, brown hard line and like, it's like, oh, it's so hard. And so immediately so I this is my my office, but it's also our guest bedroom, we have a three bedroom place. So I immediately came up here and just got like, blue medicine, water, you know what, and just making me close the door. And so, what I had, it ended up being about five or six days of truth like illness. I did have a low grade I did have a fever, but low grade super sinus. See, it wasn't really in I never got a cough and it was whatever that summertime was so a lot I didn't get a cough. Um, I did have somewhat of a sore throat but not awful, but lots of drainage. And just exam like wiped out beyond wiped out just completely no energy for anything. I stayed up here. I was like talking to people, you know, and they were like, stay hydrated. When I finally I think I think finally like on the third or fourth day because I'm thinking I don't want to do it. I'm just gonna write this out. third or fourth day I finally called my doctor because I just was sick enough and I said I just thought it'd be a good idea to connect with you just to make sure there's no you know, there's a sauce on normal for COVID And should I be doing anything else? And he was like yeah, you're doing everything right Sam flip medicine take zinc, vitamin C and D and stay super hydrated. So I went I remember about a bunch of he was like electric cannot stay up we have to stay hydrated to take electrolytes, so I bought a ton of like Gatorade and just to that, and it did I mean by like also by day six. And it was so funny because the same way that COVID came on that Saturday morning from like, healthy to fully sick and four hours was how it left. It was Thursday night I remember because Thursday woke up thinking like, I am the tiniest bit better, but like not better. And by Thursday evening, it wasn't that I was all better. But like by Thursday at six, I was like, something's happening. And by Thursday at 10, I was like, I feel exhausted, but I didn't, I had didn't really have any symptoms anymore. But it was another, at least five or six days of just exhaustion. Like I really, I really, it was two weeks, it was two solid weeks of not being able to do and trying, like actively trying is when I got better, trying to like get some work done, whatever. I had the attention span of about 20 minutes, and then I had to lay down or sleep or do nothing for two hours. Like I just had no energy. So it was exactly on the two. So I stayed isolated. When I went downstairs, I wear a mask when they were in the same floor with me. They were in masks by like day 12. I was like, Can I come hang out with you? I was so bored and lonely. Like an introvert can only be an introvert for so long. So like I sat and went into the room, and they weren't the other. But it was two weeks in my son and my husband and a friend of theirs went to a bar. He's my son 24. And two days later, my son came down with it. So I was like, it wasn't me, I did not give this to you. And so he had it way worse. He had really high fever, and super, super sore throat and we checked him get with a doctor. He's like, it's fine. He's doing well. Same course of action about the same time off. And luckily, it was I guess it was during summer break. It was during summer beginning of summer break. And before we had a job. So the timing was ideal, in terms of it was actually right before his job started. And then my husband never gone it. And it's I mean, we were good in terms of like, isolating but not like I just I'm astonished, I cannot understand how he's never gotten it. He's the only that I can. We just don't do that much apart. So when I contracted it might have been at a meet up where my husband wasn't. But I don't think it was. And we were like, making out over that time. So I'm

like, and then when my son got it, it was they weren't the same bar like, so something's going on with my husband. I don't know what but yeah, yeah, sucked is what it was.

Kit Heintzman 1:16:47

2020 had so much going on, that wasn't just the pandemic as to 2021. So that's 2022 I'm wondering other than COVID-19 would have been some of the other issues on your mind and heart over the last couple of years.

Angelina M. Lopez 1:17:01

Yeah, my the police kind of the nakedness of police killing black people. Which, you know, privileged to have either known or not known or ignored for so long. And for this community to finally say that there's no more we're not. You know, we're gonna be silent and kind about this anymore. The Black Lives Matters movement was so again, you know, I'm a good lapsed Catholic. And this idea, I grew up with idea that the people were in power, or supposed to be there. And it suddenly foolishness on my part, but how broken our system is, and how that was exposed, and how little has changed in the two years since Black Lives Matter has happened. I mean, I fully advocate for taking services, taking money away from you know, gun and club police and putting that in a services that can prevent people who are you know, are falling into the system prevent that from happening, you know, the idea that, you know, they take away abortion rights in the end, then they don't augment that with Okay, well then let's put more services into childcare to early childhood education and into resources for all of these women who are forced to have children that they don't want, you know, complete lack of balance, and the complete inhumanity about that. Again, there's a level of of I mean, there's numbness but there's also this sense of like, I can spend a lot of time on Twitter, or I can vote and I can be active and I can donate and I can talk to people And, you know, I can put my energies reduction to doing something that actually changes the system. Even though Well, you know, what I'm doing is moderate at best, um, my husband's job was that, you know, they have, they're a global company, that have a lot of young people who got into his business to make change, and the Black Lives, movement, hit them hard and hit them, you know, these are young people who in you know, summer of 2020, we're super young professionals, a lot of them don't have partners, a lot of them don't have roommates, a lot of them were living in small apartments in urban areas, because that's all they could afford, totally isolated, dealing with, you know, not only this isolation of loneliness, but then this, you know, injustice that was happening, and having to deal with that on their own and, and then, you know, trying to respond to a comment and trying to respond to it in a way that it's like, they feel ill equipped to respond to it. And, and a lot of like, trying to have these conversations that nobody's been prepared to have. And it was a growing time for my husband's company. I think they got through it. Well, as well as it could be, but it was, it was really, it's been amazing. Man, my husband, the white man from the middle class from the Midwest. And it has been, you know, neither of us are activists, again, we're kind of good middle class Gen Xers. But to watch him really try to figure out how to put true concern into action, and how to be a real ally, without making himself the expert are making himself the person who should be focused on you know, it's been a really fascinating journey to watch him watch, my journey has probably been both quieter and louder. Because it's been in the books I write, you know, that I'm writing, trying to write these stories about brown people being seen and noticed, and, and loved. And so, it's a different kind of activism. But um, I think, I think the Black Lives Matter movement has been the one that's been most active and most talked about in our household. That being said, so much has happened. That right now, and you know,

it's one of those things that I almost have to step away in bullet point, the conversations and the things. Think I'm in COVID brain, the idea that if my, you know, my son, gets a girlfriend here in Texas, and she gets pregnant, I don't want to have that kid. That us helping them not have that child, we're gonna get we could get arrested. I can't even I can't even functionally put my head around that. I mean, that it's beyond, it makes me speechless. And I obviously have a lot of words we met that day, they overturn Roe v. Wade, we just, we just took the day off. We just took the day off. And my husband just followed my lead. We went to this bistro where they have french fries and champagne. I was like, I'm gonna drink friendship, champagne and french fries. And that's what that's what I've got to offer the world right now. Feeling so hurt, you know, feeling so worthless. And, but it's like I said all of that, like things, you know, there's so much that's happened, that you have a hard time even putting your arms around it. We changed, you know, I can say we've changed so much. Other people will say we haven't changed. You're just seeing now and you're forced to confront it. And I 100% empathize with that like, but I'm forced to confront it now. And it sucks. And again, as a mom, I felt really bad. I feel really bad about what I've delivered that to my kids. So I think those are the two big ones. You know, I guess one one that the not the yet one is the beginning and one, not the end. But one of the you know, closer to the time now are the two. But there's been so much I mean, there's just been so much

Kit Heintzman 1:24:23

What has motherhood meant to you?

Angelina M. Lopez 1:24:30

Oh, my God, just in general or during COVID? Or?

Kit Heintzman 1:24:34

Yes, both, and.

Angelina M. Lopez 1:24:36

Yeah, God, I mean, it's, you know. It's, yeah, it mean, it's defined me it really, and I didn't think I was going to be that person. And we both of our kids were a fun surprise. I was with my husband for years, and we got pregnant. And we made a decision, you know, obviously, I 100% would have said, we're not ready to have a family or have a child, we would have done that. And my husband said, I'm not ready to have a family or child. We would have done that. One with no, no guilt. No, that's, you know, but we decided, okay, yeah, just weirdly, it's not exactly what. But yeah, this feels right. Let's, and we were in a situation we were both college graduates. He was, you know, both of us were doing well in our careers. We, you know, it wasn't a very long before we looked at what could could we do it on his salary, and we could, and I was like, I can freelance, you know, but I my parents were divorced, I didn't want to put my kids in daycare, because I just hated it. Um, I wanted a different experience for my children than I had. And we are blessed and privileged that our little low income families, and our bachelor's degrees turned into something where my husband could had a job that could support a family. And so, um, so both kids were surprised. I wasn't, I wasn't the person who was I, you know, we and we weren't married yet. I never fantasized about weddings, I never fantasize about motherhood, I want to be a writer, I at that point I wanted, I would always want to be a fiction writer. But first, at that point, I was a newspaper journalist, I wanted to be a great newspaper journalist. So it was unexpected. And so I had my son, but I'm staying home with my son and I was freelancing, and those bed me if I, if we decided we were

going to have a family, then those children were a priority. And the part of that party was our relationship. But I was not going to put my kids through a divorce. I wasn't, you know, so. I just, it became I have to say less about motherhood, and my children a focus on the family being a focus, this is the thing we said we were gonna do, we brought two people in the world who didn't have to be there, you know, it wasn't their choice. So if this is the thing we were gonna do, I was gonna do it, too. We were gonna have something that fed them and nurtured them and nurtured all of us and be the people that I know hopefully gave something good back. And so it I mean, it 100% made me a better person. It and then and then, my son, my oldest group, you know, was an early reader was this child recognized just just as a it's not a smart, it's that knowledge. Beat him. You know, he loved reading, he loves science. He loved math, he from infancy, you know, like, he had a cloth book about space that he would look at all the time this weird, weird, it just unique thirst for information, and nature on the stars and. And way beyond me, I was always a creative, and my husband kind of math, but both of us were more on creatives. But I'm recognized early, a really smart driven kid unique, you know, a different kid that always well liked, you know, he just he always traveled in his own lane. It was a lane that everyone liked. And he started his sophomore year, we were in an incredibly competitive area in Northern Virginia. And my husband and I, we went to the University of Kansas had bachelor's degrees. For us. Holistic happiness is way more important than keeping up with the Joneses. But when you're in an area, like Northern Virginia doesn't really matter what you your family philosophy is, those kids are absorbing a lot of stuff they're absorbing from their schools and their teachers, whatever. And my son did have this big brain that could go far. But with that he absorbed all of the stress and all of the pressure. And what we didn't realize, but what you're able to track later is he's always had a social anxiety disorder. He always had it but he was able to manage it in both healthy and unhealthy ways and unhealthy being distraction. You know, what is therapists would say like, the worst thing that ever happened to him was to have a strong family in it, because some of that self support he would have built was, was built by his family. So we went in and went to college and that support went away, then he didn't have all of the tools to manage it. And again, he didn't have, we didn't have the, we hadn't dealt with mental health in our families, we didn't have the vocabulary. I didn't recognize it, he didn't recognize it. His teachers didn't recognize it. But I just knew, I remember talking to a girlfriend, and she was going on and on about how well my son was doing. And I was like, something's wrong. There's something wrong, I don't know what it is, but he's not happy. And it's, it's not just, there's something wrong. And that's all like, it's, that's, that's what I had. So we he gets in a race, you know, he gets into all these schools gets full ride to get to these phenomena schools, because the Rice University, and I'm just like, hopefully, whatever is wrong, we'll get you know, we'll just get in take care of because this dream starting to happen once we have physicist and he came home, Spring Break of is freshman year, having dropped off the mat for a couple of weeks, and, you know, Rice was great, they gathered all the horses, and and finally was got a diagnosis. Like, it's very intense, very intense. And, you know, we'll do whatever you want, we wrecked, but he wants to step away from school. You know, they have all of these resources around it. And I was like, what, I just want to help the kid, you know, I just want to help the kid, bring them home. And so we came home. And so it was a very long journey for us. But for me, what I learned from having a child with mental health issues was this idea of parenting is you know, and I mean, anyone who is engaging with this, like, I have a strong point of view about what's a strong parent point of view about parenting, and yet, what I firmly believed was, you know, giving my children the freedom to grow into who they want to be. As long as there was forward momentum in something, you know, but both of my kids are passionate, and focused. And I'm really proud of that. But I but I did

have a sense of this is parenting, this is what it is, and a child comes home. All of that goes out the window of what parenting is. Because this idea that you have this human just alliance to certain rules and structure, it just doesn't work that way, especially with mental health with you wouldn't there's a clinical mental health component. That is, you know, my, my son would have loved it, if everything went this very specific, obvious pathway. That'd be great. Everything he's gone through, it's not things he wants to go through. And yet people who have diabetes don't want to go through that either. And for us, it's acknowledging the health issue. It's supporting the health issue, and it's normalizing the health issue, that he has a health issue. And that has been the long journey of that. And for me, this person who thought is his senior year, he was voted most likely to cure cancer, like he was that kid. This person you thought up until about his sophomore year, and my younger son is very successful to, like, I got this, this mother got much mothering thing, I got it, it couldn't have like, you know, a storyteller, like it couldn't have happened to a better person, you know? Because I was the person that needed to realize I don't got all this and that's okay. You know, I mothering has made me like, so much more kinder and empathetic to kind of the entire human experience. Probably then they made me a better writer. But it's not something that I would ever tell anyone else they needed to do. But I made a decision to be a mother. And it's been. I mean, I, yeah, it's been my whole world. It's been everything, you know, it's fundamentally changed me in the best of ways.

Kit Heintzman 1:33:52

What does the word health mean to you?

Angelina M. Lopez 1:33:56

Oh. I think I have to make so many allowances for imperfect health, that you can do the things you want to do and achieve the things you want to achieve with imperfect house. And so Health to me is taking care of all of your imperfections, I mean, it is doing what you can to mitigate your imperfect health, you know, if you, you know, all of the things that we struggle with, um, take your medicine, you know, go on a walk, can we do you can give yourself a break when you can't, don't exacerbate the issue by ignoring it. Don't assume that the solution your health is an easy fix that life is long that there is no reaching the you know, pinnacle of health, and then you never have to do anything again. But I think it's managing the body and mind that you're given. Doing what you can. And that, that bodies and minds are so many varieties, and doing what you can to take care of them the best way possible, you know, with and that's with amazingly, that with resources that can be so limited based on your access and your economy and your knowledge and your support. But I think I mean, to me health is doing what the best you can accepting imperfect health.

Kit Heintzman 1:36:12

What are some of the things you'd like for your own health and the health of people around you?

Angelina M. Lopez 1:36:26

My own health. I am a big proponent of acknowledging the truth. And I think in health, there's so much harm in your own unwillingness to kind of face the facts, and other people's unwillingness to face the facts about their own health or your health. And so, doing what you can to kind of face you know, the reality of your situation, acknowledge your values, situate your health situation, and then and respond to it. And give allowances for it. You know, I, my dad had adult diabetes he was he was diagnosed in

his mid 30s diabetes a problem in our family, but it was definitely exacerbated by obesity. And he had all of these bats, I mean, just the last decade of his life was just miserable. And it was a real learning experience for me about what I don't want to have, you know, I our whole family has tendency diabetes, our family has a tendency to be overweight. I am by no means perfect health. Um, but it was such a drain on the people around him, it was a drain on his own hopes for himself. And I want to be writing for a very long time. And this is a job where you sit in a chair and stare at a screen for hours on end. And I have so many stories to tell. And I don't want that to be, you know, curtailed by my health and I don't want my health to be a burden on my family. And I want you know, I'm just really seriously in love with my husband. I want to enjoy that for a really long time. So yeah, I mean, I want to be really, and for our son, coming to terms with a mental health disorder that is never going to, you know, go away. It is a mental health disorder and for us normalizing and as a health issue is he has a chronic health issue. He had a panic attack this summer for his job he was teaching he was working in a camp and had a panic attack. The morning before he's supposed to go in for you been at work. month, month and a half, so they knew him. Unfortunately, they would break up the camps. So sometimes he would be teaching a course, where it just be him. Sometimes it would be a group of counselors. And unfortunately, this was a course where as a few counselors that he had a panic attack, contacted his boss right away and said, I deal with a chronic issue, current health issue, unfortunately, it flared up this morning. And, you know, I will let you know, as soon as I know whether I'm gonna be able to make it in today. And I don't know, this is language, he came up with himself, I don't know if this is we just set the tone. We're involved in his mental health, care and support. And so the conversation of his mind, we actually had this conversation a lot. So anyway, I don't know whether this this language of I have a chronic health, this is something he came up with his therapist or his own, but it was so brilliant. I mean, it was so like, Of course you do it. Oh, my God, she texted right away back away. Perfectly. Thank you so much for letting me know, I hope you're doing okay. Let me know when you know. So it's also the world understanding this conversation and then responding accordingly. And she did it like, textbook perfect. Ultimately, he couldn't go in we I drove him to to the camp, he tried, he was like, because what we're trying to mitigate is his anxiety, turning into a panic attack and having a panic attack in front of other people, which has all of this cascading stuff. And this was kids, you know, so it's whether he thought he could, you know, take take something, get over the hump and be able to get in ultimately coded. And so getting out of a situation that the increasing anxiety is a warning sign, you might have a panic attack, managing that before he does and again, or it's something where it's going to have repercussions. So ultimately decided will not got home, let her know. In the past, this has happened where he he's so self flagellating, which is an element of the social anxiety disorder, that it causes a sequence of events. There have been times where it's been hard to recover from he always has, but it's been difficult. This by that afternoon, he was talking to some friends online, he was organizing a bachelor party, um, and went into work the next day with no problem whatsoever. And all it was said was his boss was like, thanks. You handle it. Yeah, great. Yesterday, if you you know, flares up again, just let me know. And his coworker said, you know, hope you're feeling okay, glad you're back. And it was just one of those things that I was like, this. This is, that is the pinnacle. It's not that my son is not going to have social anxiety disorder, it's living with it exactly. As our society has come to understand living with a health disorder. We haven't gotten there yet with mental health. And so it's accepting the truth of whatever our health condition is. And getting us accepting it and communicating that acceptance and like, this is the things I need to work around the health issues, but it's also the world responding accordingly. Like okay, because everyone has got some kind of health issue, we're all dealing with it how do we get the

world to respond accordingly? And generously as well? And yeah, that's what I think is most important to my health, just telling the truth, and other people accepting that truth. And then like, okay, then how do we, how do we work with it?

Kit Heintzman 1:43:06

What does the word safety mean to you?

Angelina M. Lopez 1:43:09

God, that's a lot. Like that's my definitely my my Keystone word. I'm a child of divorce. All kinds of fun, like really obvious, you know, child of divorce child like 80s latch key, you know, it like you're really you can just watch any kind of after school special to get my whole story. So yeah, I mean, you know, I, there's a lot wrapped up in providing, you know, as a mother as a parent providing safety for other people, my relationships I align with people who make me feel safe, you know, my relationship my husband, and even in both my husband and I are from, you know, a, you know, a certain amount of family trauma as most people are, but ours really align and so we both if somebody comes in our sphere, we both trigger the same way. If there's an alarm, you know, and again, alarm but just somebody who like, that person does not feel safe. Both of us trigger the same way. Both of us back off the same way. We have a lot we have a very common, a lot in common And we find a lot of situations the same way. So, you know, it's lack of chaos. You know, I think safety for me is lack of chaos it's calm. It's you know, I think for me safety is is isn't really physical, it's more about state of mind. It's longevity of safety. You know, it's it's not letting people into my sphere, who will bring, you know, chaos over time. It's managing my relationships in my conversations, so that there's long term peace. And yeah, I mean, I think for me, safety is really about lack of chaos. Lack of chaos, predictability is huge part of my safety, predictability. And I, you know, I'm a fan of surprises. I'm a fan of changing things up but I do I like discipline. I like predictability. Yeah, I mean, it's, it's funny, because as a writer, it's hard to actually put into words, but it's, it's very emotion and sense based. And that the the, and it's control. Oh, five my other key word safety and control. Like I'm, you know, very, I that is a trigger point. For me. That's not always healthy. But it is about having control over a situation. Or that I trust the person who's in control. i Yeah, I'm definitely on personally wants to control every situation because exhausted, that's exhausting, zero interest in that. But do I trust the person in control, then I can just leave at you. Whenever I do say whatever a lot. And I mean it. So yeah. But do I trust the person in control that they are bringing? Continuity, predictability? Warm sense of things? I've always been a person who, you know, if I don't feel safe, I bounce I I'm absolutely okay. Going off on my own. And just, I'm done. So, yes, safety and control after chaos, predictability.

Kit Heintzman 1:47:06

Some of this has come up in your answers already. So feel free to say like, I covered that question anyway, under the sort of narrow biomedical framework of safety from the virus, what are some of the things that you've been doing over the last couple of years to keep yourself feeling safer?

Angelina M. Lopez 1:47:23

Yeah, I mean, initially, well, so we put a house on the market during COVID, like May of 2020. So we were, you know, massive amounts of cleaning fluid. So, you know, they would let us know that they were going to be coming. And everything was wiped down daily. And so then they would come. And we

had bought gloves, we bought booties, we bought wipes, the whole thing, but we'd see whether they use them or not, which is just crazy to me that people hadn't use them because we didn't know back then. And so that it would be making the boy stood outside, we would go in, we would mask up we would post stuff on, we'd wipe down every kind of doorknob in the house. And then okay, we can live in it now. So the show House showing process was the worst beyond that you so we weren't worth trying to say goodbye or friends to we were setting up we had a TV tray tables. So we're setting up previous TV type tables outside, like literally like, like six feet away, six feet away. They would bring their own food and drink we would have food and drink. I mean, it was the weirdest way to try to say goodbye to 20 years worth of friends. Um There was a weird I I think I've probably made this clear before but there was more of the emphasis that we can't get COVID over. I'm scared of COVID I was scared of it. We we had all of our food delivered. Like we weren't going to grocery stores. We're having it all delivered. But I had already been I'd already had groceries delivered for like 10 years. We know like, I've been having groceries delivered since my youngest was born because I was still like, I hate go to the grocery store. So there was a lot of things built in. But um, there was a weird Since I really enjoyed my family, you know, my when my 19 year old came home at Korea, it created a level of did create tension in the house. But we really had a nice time we had a big house, we could separate people could get their things done. I mean in DC, so even in those initial days while it was Gary, turn off the television and do the things we needed to do. Is it cocktail hour? Let's do we, let's play a game. Let's, you know, we would have lizards in DC. And I always enjoyed them because we're all just sitting at home and together. So yeah, I wasn't overwhelmingly petrified because we weren't going anywhere. We weren't doing anything and we weren't. So we weren't exposing ourselves. We're all healthy, and extreme privilege. 100% nobody had to have a job out of the house, we were dealing with extreme privilege, then added privilege of genuinely enjoying each other's company. So the safety thing was mostly about the house buying. And it was less about being scared and I can't I can't waste the time of having COVID And again 100% wrecking my recognize my privilege, and being able to say that the drive here was a little bit bit, you know, nerve wracking, especially because my son was sick. But once we got here once again, it was like it was beautiful, always outside. So we just went outdoors, you know, I wore a mask for a while walking the dog but then stopped doing that because a lot of people weren't outdoors. Um, yeah. And my dad would have been the most susceptible. My dad was gone. So my mom's was only I see if I was 47. My mom's 67 My stepdad 63. My other my stepmom is 67 The people who would or would have been most susceptible, were gone. And everyone else was healthy. And pretty much paying attention to the rules. i We didn't I didn't lose one family member to COVID. I got a big both my Mexican American side and my mom's side, big family and we didn't lose one member family member to COVID. So again, like, very privileged, so yeah, whether, you know, I can't really remember firmly how afraid I was, but I just we were caught. We were very cautious. But we weren't, we just weren't innately overexposed really was probably the main reason we weren't overexposed. And it wasn't trying to be together. It wasn't trying to be isolated, isolated, it was kind of fun. People are gonna listen to this and be like, she's the worst, I hate that. But I do acknowledge how fortunate I am.

Kit Heintzman 1:52:20

It's come up a few times, identifying moments of privilege, and I just like to invite a moment for you to talk about what's important to you about naming that.

Angelina M. Lopez 1:52:31

Hey, God, it's so important we've I am both my husband and I are lower middle class incomes, lower middle class families. I'm the first in my both of us are the first in our families to graduate from college. Our parents didn't, grandparents didn't. That's not true. My husband's grandfather didn't. But parents did not we did. We both put ourselves through school, I got \$1,000 scholarship. Every year we went to the University of Kansas when it was I paid \$1,000 This semester, it hasn't paid 100 We turned these Bachelor's degrees in journalism from the University of Kansas into a really amazing lifestyle. So it's very effortless to say, we did that, you know, like we did that. But because we weren't, we didn't build. You know, it's like if we build it on the backs of anything, my husband built on the fact that you know, his wife from Kansas City. I built it on the back of having a family that really valued education. And just a level of pride. My Mexican family is very proud of what we built as a family. So but regardless of that, the way my husband and I have navigated our lives to get to this point, that's that's still privilege. That's still the sense of whether it's just luck, you know, it's still I feel really lucky. And to not acknowledge that a lot, a lot a lot. A lot of people don't get that luck is It's so be so unfair of me, you know, and so dismissive of the entire human experience. Um, you know, to a certain extent, my son's journey has affected that, you know, there's a lot of privilege for people who don't deal with mental health for themselves or in their families. And it's recognizing that recognizing things, it's very easy to take for granted. And so for me, it would be easy to take for granted the luck and privilege of having a partner who enjoys company who we both have same work ethic, we had same family ethics, that allowed us to get to a point where, when a pandemic happened, we were economically in a good place to have a big house to make it easy to not work outside the home, to have be able to afford having groceries delivered, all of those ticks, were things that would be really easy to take for granted, and how unfair to people who didn't have that luck, who didn't have the choices, who had to work outside of the home, who had exposed themselves and their families, who had to go to the grocery stores, who had to, you know, bring COVID home and have it exposed to Edie who has lived with people who are susceptible. All of those things that I did not have to deal with, not because I'm so smart and perfect, but because of the sheer luck of how my life worked out. So I'm also Catholic, so let's not just sit like I'm not just this big, open minded person. I'm also a person rife with like, karma and superstition, and God will get you acknowledge privilege and blessings. I 100% believe that like a lightning strike. Let's give credit to my whole like a bit I like how like open minded I am also a also a lapsed Catholic. But no, I mean, it's just, I again, I think I've learned a lot from my son's situation and the people the situation. People find themselves in good or bad. We would love we as Americans especially would love to believe that we're all responsible, when we've got to get that we you know, we're all self made, but we're not we are this combination of experiences and things that happen to us and by us and for us. And, you know, on October 13, this is how my day this is how I am. And tomorrow, something else is gonna happen and godliness Robbie then and so I think to constantly if you're having a good day, to give thanks to the elements for that good day is always a good thing to do. Like it's a good thing to do. And it's a good way to keep yourself I don't know self aware and humane and empathetic.

Kit Heintzman 1:57:26

How are you feeling about the immediate future?

Angelina M. Lopez 1:57:29

God personally for our family, you know, I'm, we're having a good we're having a good time about said semester. So you can see, when you I think when you have a child dealing with severe mental health

issues, your days goes there days, ghosts, you know, I think a lot of our travel is with him. And so he's having a great semester, he's back at Rice, he's has overcome, overcome, he has managed to manage and normalize a lot of things that have been incredibly have gotten in his way before. And so he's having a good semester. And so we're doing well, husband's doing well at work, I am a little demoralized, about how my book was doing, but it continues to, to get good reviews. And I am trying to come up with a plan about kind of what's next. And so but, you know, saying all that I'm gonna get off this call and I've got a short story to work on. And I will literally work out. Look at that for 30 seconds. And that's all I'm gonna do for the next two hours. I follow into it. And I feel really, I love being a writer. I don't know what that's gonna look like and I don't know if other people are gonna pay me enough to be a writer but really love doing it. So I'm feeling Yeah, the near future for you know, inside the walls. I spoke to my son, my 21 year old in Chicago on a couple of nights ago, and he's doing really well. Again, he's some things he's gotten the fire coming together for him. So, you know, I think one thing about motherhood is you're kind of as happy as your least happy child is a common saying it's very true. So if my children are happy right now, so it allows me freedom to kind of feel more my own stuff and we'd kind of go through my own journey a lot more, um you know, a bit outside of my home. I in Texas, I have a incredibly important election coming up. I'm terrified of the results we've done. We've walked with Beto, we've given money to beto. We're obviously voting for Beto. But I'm really scared. I'm scared about what's going to happen. I'm, I'm afraid of the gerrymandering, I'm afraid of how the system is being rigged. Yeah, I have to admit, I have to manage those emotions, because they don't help me write books, they don't help me show up for my family, they don't help me. You know, get up and do the walking and not eating french fries that I need to do. Those emotions don't help me reach my goals of health of happy family of my writing. And so I am nervous of the things outside of my house. But I have to I have to manage how much I engage in that information in those emotions, because I've got immediate goals to reach. And those fears are things that can't control are don't help me at all. So yeah.

Kit Heintzman 2:00:38

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

Angelina M. Lopez 2:00:41

Oh, God, to make more money in my writing, my son gets his we're going to start small and gets his bachelor's degree. My youngest baby figures out he's supporting himself in downtown Chicago, so that is great. It's very nerve racking for me. But um, you know, figures out long term gets a little bit of a break about what's he's gonna be doing long term, um, that Beto wins that there's a push back, you know, when Kansas voted against the amendment to do away with the abortion amendment, like I'm saying that wrong. But anyway, Kansas voted to essentially maintain abortion in Kansas. I was sobbing, like, that was a huge, like, hopefully a huge moment. So I'm hoping we can sustain that. Um, I think everything hinges on that. And if that if, if the next if the next elections go bad. Again, like I can't even like process. If there's elections go bad. I just don't know. My husband regularly talks about leaving the country like moving. So yeah, the Beto wins. I hope that every election, that there's a decent Democrat running, I hope the Democrats win. I hope we don't get Trump back in the White House. I just I'm like, it feels like just looking at the absolute apocalyptic versions of how things could go. I hope it doesn't go that way. hope we don't get the apocalyptic versions of how things could go. I help more people by

room, my room. So it's like, you can just get better and better. And then you're like, and I need to make more money writing these books.

Kit Heintzman 2:02:53

What are some of the things that you've been doing to take care of yourself over the last couple of years?

Angelina M. Lopez 2:02:59

Enjoying too many cocktails, hanging out with my family going on lots, drinking a lot more water. I did a keto diet for about three months. And it really, really worked. But it's kind of an insane thing to do. And I don't find fundamentally sustainable. So I stopped doing that. But now I'm trying to find a I'm trying to figure out what the things that used to work for me, and that the profit was effortless, pretty effortless. weightwatchers the things that used to work for me I have 49 And definitely starting you know, I haven't verified doctor but I'm but I know my cycle. I'm definitely premenopausal, the things aren't working anymore. And I need to figure out what is going to work. So that is the being truthful about my health and needing to address it that I can keep like taking one step and then I got frustrated and then I stopped and I need to like follow through. Um I really I do I talked to my husband and a lot and I lean on him and he's a great resource for making sure that I don't feel too alone and I feel like I'm taking on too much. My one of the great things that happened to the pandemic is he got way more involved in our son's mental health. I mean, it really was following me a lot because he was that the office and take care of other things and he has really only stepped in, he stepped in a lot of ways that he hadn't and probably couldn't have or wouldn't have. couldn't or wouldn't, I don't know. But um, he stepped in with our he's taking a much more active in our sense, being a sport. My sons are sentimental, oh, he's more involved in the house is more involved in cooking, he's more involved. As my career has taken off. He's gotten a lot more engaged and it's been great. So he's done a big just stepping in and that not only does it in actuality helped me but the value I feel from him dying me it's like hugely caretaking. I joined two women's organizations I joined a meet up that's women focused. And then I joined a business organization. And that has been really great. I needed women to talk to in real life I needed non, you know, I might have two dear friends in the DC area. But I needed Nan zoom, seeing the women, you know, other women and and being with them seeing friends. And that has been hugely feeding. I'm a fan of the show Supernatural, just this weird, like the thing I've done to like, put my, my like, I always talk about that. I began reading romance novels when I was young, like sixth grade. But in eighth grade, I moved to San Francisco and they were these mean girls. And I knew I couldn't do anything to affect them. I wasn't doing anything wrong. They just did like me. And I couldn't change them. All I could do was wait till my freshman year when I would change schools leave them. And so what I would do is after school on really bad days with them, I would go to the beadlet bookstore and buy a romance novel, and I go home and I would read it like one sitting like six hours. And I buy a bag of Ruffles potato chips. And my mom would like come to dinner and she like are you gonna come down for dinner and I'm like, I know. And she'd be like, fine, because I wouldn't do it very often. But I really it was those romance novels was the only thing that allowed that pressure of, you know, the injustice, the cruelty, it led it, it released it. Because again, I couldn't change it, I couldn't affect it, I couldn't control it. All I could do was get through it, those romance novels and the intensity of this escapism, that they allowed me allowed me to get through that. And I really I my level of I really have not struggled with the anxiety I struggle with my life is really based on myself. And and not his fault. But some of the scarier times

we've gone through. That's where my anxiety, I really did not deal with a lot of anxiety, a million other things. But anxiety was not one of my issues. I do credit romance novels, for organically teaching me a level of self care. Early on this idea that escapism and getting my brain to relax is a level of healthy self care. And so So I realized early on that I can put my stress in kind of pop culture, again, just getting through these rough periods and being able to relax my brain. And so my latest actually, when my son came home, I adopted and not intentionally, but I adopted supernatural and it's 15 episodes and 300,000,015 season three and a million episodes. So it's like lots to do that. But they had these conventions with the stars. And so I will go and like for this exorbitant amount of money to start will kiss kiss you. They will not kiss you, I'm so sorry. They will hug you though. You can pay for photos and they will hug you and they will like it's 15 seconds. It's the fastest 15 seconds of your life. But they will engage with you. And it's super fun. And it's really fun to like have a hot actor like smiling at you like, and it's just this really wacky. Completely not like, like, not important and valuable way of like just taking care of myself. Like it's really and you go and it's all these people and all they're doing is talking about this show like you it's an alternative alternate universe. And it's really, really lovely. And so I've done two of those. I've done two of those in the last two years. And they've just been so I'd probably pulling back now because I don't know I think I'm it's analyze, but anyway, it's it's been the romance novel. Now that my career is romance novels, I don't find the same escapism in them. I find the escapism in writing them, but it's also my job, but Supernaturals become kind of the romance novel of my 40s.

Kit Heintzman 2:09:14

What do you think scholars in the social sciences and humanities so departments like, media studies in sociology and political science, what should we be doing to help us understand the human side of the pandemic?

Angelina M. Lopez 2:09:28

God, I think this these conversations with real people, and all the nuances in them. I mean, there is even when I did an article for I did an article for an online magazine called frolic magazine, which, which focuses on the romance industry romance genre, and I did an article about COVID. We call it our that books that we wrote and came out during COVID. We're calling them our pandemic babies. So what was it like writing your pandemic, baby? And it was I talked to eight authors, and their diversity of experience was wild, you had people who had never been more productive in their lives and loved COVID. Sorry, they loved that time there that the pressure of seeing other people and the distractions, all of that was gone. So they just had never been more productive in their lives, to people who, you know, missed. Just, they were losing family members, they were under so much stress that their families were under so much stress, they missed multiple deadlines. We had people walking away from the industry during that time. Absolutely could not the not only the pandemic and our response to it, but societally, what was happening was so overwhelming, that they like how do you write happily ever after during a time? It seems like the last thing humanly possible right now, you know, and so just the diversity of these eight authors and their experiences was so wild that I think, recording what these people went through. But then it's like, we're so divided in the, you know, I mean, we're divided globally, but we're definitely divide the United States. And what's the solution? You know? And it's not that I expect social scientists to figure that out. But what, how do we fix where we are? How do we stop this retraction of like, human rights and social justice United States and get back to a fairer place again, it's a really scary time, I find it to be as intense a scary time we have these End of Days literature that we

see playing out in real time, and why don't we do you know? What's the solution here? And again, it's part of me thinking that somebody else has somebody can come up with one. Um yeah, but this is definitely the first step is talking. You know, I guess maybe it's the diversity of of reaction, but it's also what what are the commonalities? I mean, maybe that's it. It's figuring out as diverse as people's reactions are, what are the commonalities and what what can we as a society drawn as those commonalities to kind of come up with, with ways that we can start building blocks back together again, you know? Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 2:12:47

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

Angelina M. Lopez 2:13:28

I think it's it's how insane insidious. The need to align with power is that it's hard to imagine people behaving against their neighbor, their family themselves. And yet if you take a contingent of people who have a venue to be heard, and you have those people say over and over and over again You want to be like us. And the reason you're not like that, like us, is because of them. And if you align with us, against them, maybe you could be like us. And if they say it enough times in the right way, with the right venue, you can actually get people to align against their own lives, communities, interests, families, and their neighbor. And it's something that's happened repeatedly throughout history. So this isn't a new thing. But we thought, all of our knowledge and our technology and the easy spread of information was going to curtail this, but it actually has made it much easier and much, you know, it's much easier to spread, and it's much more, it's much easier to kind of isolate and, you know, kind of cordoned off. But the idea of, of, of, if you will, the idea of power. And if you align with this power, you can actually get people to vote against, you know, to work against their own survival, their own ability to stay alive. And that's, yeah, unfortunately, that's actually not a new new lesson. We're just seeing an IT, what looks like kind of a new way because of of the technology and the information around us.

Kit Heintzman 2:16:24

I want to thank you so much for the generosity of your time, and the thoughtfulness and wisdom in your answers. Those are all of the questions I know how to ask at the moment. But I'm wondering if there's anything you'd like to share that my questions haven't made room for? Please take some space and share it.

Angelina M. Lopez 2:16:52

Yeah, I mean, I think the idea of people in the future listening to this when you began the previous question, what would you tell a historian, just that and not what can't be forgotten? But what we I'm so sorry. I do think there was a level of conflict, complacency. When things seem to be going in our direction, are being a society aiming toward social justice, and equality. I was complacent. And that's why I feel responsible. I do think to a certain extent, some of us are seeing the fruits of our complacency. And I'm really sorry. And I don't want to end on that sad note, especially as a romance Rothery supposed to promise happily ever afters, but I don't. Yeah, I just feel like we're seeing some of the fruits of our complacency. So maybe that's what I would tell future historians. Don't be complacent.

If things are going well in your society. Embrace them, teach that lesson. Stay active, stay involved, stay engaged, stay passionate about it. Don't take it for granted because I feel we did.

Kit Heintzman 2:18:32

Thank you so much.

Angelina M. Lopez 2:18:34

Thank you, Kit. It was lovely.