

Transcript of Interview with Nelson Gifford By Kit Heintzman

Interviewee: Nelson Gifford

Interviewer: Kit Heintzman

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Location (Interviewee): San Jose, California

Location (Interviewer):

Transcriber: Angelica S Ramos

Some of the things we spoke about include:

First hearing about COVID in Feb 2020. Supply chain disruptions. Working in K-12 education. Coaching football. Athletics and adolescent developments. Polarized positions around high school sports and pandemic safety. Harm reduction and pandemic safety in team sports; online coaching. Differences between indoor and outdoor sport safety. Having young children during the pandemic, one child born March 2020. Living close to family and having anticipated having a lot of support with the newborn. Living in a highly vaccinated county; prompt COVID vaccination access. Changes in masking recommendations. Watching infection rates to try and predict schools reopening and sports returning to normal. Enrolling daughter in gymnastics, masking during athletics. Wife and daughter testing COVID positive post-vaccination; isolating in a hotel with son away from them. Students losing key aspects of the high school experience. Pandemic hygiene/hair and being confused for being homeless. Supporting small businesses and restaurants. Protests after the murder of George Floyd, and social upheaval. Empathy in parenting, teaching, and everyday interactions. Churches closing during the pandemic and spiritual health. Safety, growth, and taking risks. Comparisons between COVID and Polio, COVID and the flu. The lifting of mask-mandates. The wars in Ukraine and Syria. The Trump presidency as a stress-test on democracy. Public education in the USA and poor distribution of educational resources to vulnerable people. The failure of the nuclear family. Having a brother who is a police officer in NYC

Kit Heintzman 00:02

Hello.

Nelson Gifford 00:03

Hello.

Kit Heintzman 00:05

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

Nelson Gifford 00:11

Yes. Full name is Nelson Gifford. I'm currently in San Jose, California. It is May 2, Monday, May 2, and it is 10:16am.

Kit Heintzman 00:24

And the year is 2022.

Nelson Gifford 00:26

2022, yes. And it is 2022. Incredible, we made it.

Kit Heintzman 00:31

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

Nelson Gifford 00:41

Yes. To all of it.

Kit Heintzman 00:44

Would you please start by introducing yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening to this, what would you want them to know about you?

Nelson Gifford 00:52

Well, professionally, I'm a teacher, educator and K 12. High School. I've been in K 12 education since 2010. So you know, going on, you know, 12 years. I'm also a football coach. I've been doing that longer since 2003. And so those are my two professional passions, and you know, what I hope to continue to be doing in the near future and beyond. I'm also married, I have two kids, two and a four year old, including a two year old who was born nine days after California went on lockdown. So it was born on March 22. And it went on lockdown March 13. So my whole COVID references based around how old he is.

Kit Heintzman 01:50

What's the word pandemic come to mean to you?

Nelson Gifford 01:53

Um, isolation of the unknown, you know, that that was so much of what the pandemic was, at least for me, was, one, the incredible degree of isolation, you know, something I never experienced before, I don't know anybody who had, it was such a different experience. I live in the downtown area, San Jose, so two blocks away from San Jose State. Right. And it's like the pandemic started, right. When I locked down in March. It was like everyone disappeared. It's like one of those, you know, crazy Apocalypse movies where you wake up one day and everyone's gone. You know, so San Jose State's got 30,000 students, all of a sudden, they just weren't there. There were no cars, there's no people on the streets. It was just empty, all the shops were closed. And it lasted that way for probably over a year. Even the birth of my son was so much different than the birth of my daughter. When my daughter was born, everyone was in the labor room, you know, family, friends, just people just coming in and out. When he was born. It was just the two of us. Yeah, my wife and I, for three days, I couldn't leave the hospital. So once I went in, I was in, I could go all the way to the door that was as far as I could get in order to get food. So just a very, very different experience. And of course, when I brought my son home, you know, the grandparents had to see him outside. Right? So he was he didn't meet any grandparents until he was, I think, four or five months old. And then, of course, the uncertainty of it all, like, how long was it going to last? Was it going to be a month was going to be two months? Or was it going to be a year was going to be two years? I'm also going to talk about coaching, I'm also an athletic director. And so having, you know, having those conversations with different coaches, with athletes and parents about what to do, you know, athletics in particular, so time sensitive. And so people were, you know, rightfully so anxious. Particularly, you know, the seniors who lost their senior year all those spring athletes and then those going into the fall I coach American football and you know, a lot of people wondering, will it start again in August? What does that look like? Well, we'll be able to work out. Will we be able to play and there were definitely moments where I was just winging it. I was just, I was just hoping

something good was gonna happen. And just did whatever I could to to ensure that whatever was possible, we're able to get done.

Kit Heintzman 04:56

Telling a story about winging it.

Nelson Gifford 05:05

I don't even know if there's a specific story I just felt like that was my life. From from one from one week to the next. Basically, when we got permission to like, get out of the house and do some, like some small group work for the team that of this is over the summer football team could get together and exercise. But we had all these regulations around, you still had to be socially distant. Right? So you had to be socially distant, had to be six feet apart. What does that look like? How do you do a workout for football that doesn't involve equipment doesn't involve touching, sharing touched equipment doesn't involve mixing of cohort doesn't involve getting within six feet of each other. So that for me that was winging it, that was just trying to figure out okay, how does this work? How can I do it? You know, you spend so much of your professional career at learning how to do things a certain way. And all of a sudden, all that all the rules that you had set up for yourself now thrown out the window, you gotta come with something different. We do, didn't have access to our school facilities, because they were they were doing maintenance on the field. So then we had to go to find some other facilities, but some of them were closed, they didn't want people on campus. Probably a big one was the the pre and post workout environment usually right kids show up before they hang out, talk, socialize, remember, all these kids have been locked in the house. So they are excited to see each other. So they are there. They're right on top of each other doing all that, but they can't do that. So every day was was reteaching, all the normal behaviors. Where we practice there was a bleachers, just an old set of bleachers by the field, and the kids would sit there stuff on there and sit down and talk well, they were within six feet. So we then had to change the protocols, Alright, everyone's gonna line their backpacks across the fence for a spatial allowance. You know, we had to take the bleachers and turn them around, so no one could sit on them to try to keep keep just say, Hey, we're just going to remove that temptation. You saw that restaurants too, right? They just took the chairs away. And so that that, to me, is the idea of of winging it, just adlibbing in just thinking about things that prior to pandemic never even crossed my mind. Just just never thought about it.

Kit Heintzman 07:35

And what are the age ranges that you coach?

Nelson Gifford 07:37

So it's high school, so it's 14-18?

Kit Heintzman 07:42

How did you feel that your students were handling things?

Nelson Gifford 07:47

Um, I thought they handled it as best they could. But you could tell as it began as a pandemic began to wear on longer and longer, it was causing a lot of stress, a lot of anxiety. It wasn't just the uncertainty of when was school going to start, it was the uncertainty of hey, how grades work, you know, how to college applications work, how does SAT testing work, you know, all things that you expect to have, in the high school experience, we're all

thrown into doubt. In [inaudible] in modern American society, you know, the high school experiences is it's part of that those rites of passage. Becoming a senior, going to prom, you know, doing senior activities, you know, hanging out with friends. Applications, all of that was last, you know, for our freshmen, you know, they they never stepped foot on the campus. So they never had that, oh, man, I'm going to new place new friends. Look at all these old people with beards and stuff. You know, I want to be like them one day, all of that was was missing. That socialization was gone. Talking to, you know, just different coaches in the area, I'm talking about all sports, not just football. A lot of us refer to that freshman classes, just you know, the lost class, the COVID class, you know, numbers were big across a lot of sports with that incoming class. And by the end of it, almost across the board, every coach I spoke to in every sport, that class was unusually small, of students who actually participate in athletics. A lot of them just seem to check out because as as the pandemic progressed, you know, I think they began to lose more and more hope about you know, what was really going on would be possible for them. And, and then, you know, when schools did reopen in this area, you know, they were sophomores. But they were still freshmen in terms of attitude and behavior, they had never been on campus. And so a lot of the behaviors that they exhibited, were similar to the ones that the ninth graders exhibited. And you could see that you can see that there was, there was definitely a strong consequence, across all the groups that came with being isolated, and came with not being able to guess learn all the sorts of social norms, behaviors and cultural values that happen when you're in a communal space.

Kit Heintzman 10:47

Would you say something about the importance of athletics?

Nelson Gifford 10:51

You know, the, probably the biggest thing are that the human connections, kids just wanted to work out, you know, well, I can't say they want to work out, I gotta say that they really want to work out, but they wanted to be with one another. And they would suffer through the uncertainty of working out just to be able to hang out with one another. That that was meaningful. And that showed up, over and over and over and over again, was just the, the role that played in, in, in the students ability to connect, and share values and interests and struggles. Life was still continuing for all of our students. And certainly not all of them had, you know, great home lives, or, you know, they just kind of going through the normal struggle struggles of adolescence. And typically, when adolescents are going through those struggles, they're doing it with other adolescents, right? They're sharing those experiences. These kids lost all of that. So now all of their struggles were isolated. And we know, from our own experiences of adolescence, right, we all think we're alone, right? You know, all adolescents think they're the only ones experiencing the only ones going through it. And no one gets me and no one understands me. Well, in this instance, this was like a grand experiment to say, Well, is it true? Because all of these kids were going through these things alone, meanwhile, their their their guardians, their caretakers, their parents, they're going through the same sort of isolation, the same sort of stress. So not only are the kids alone, but the parents are also alone, right? The people who are taking care of the kids are alone, and they don't know how to deal with it. So it's, it was layers upon layers of anxiety, of uncertainty of a struggle, both emotional and in some cases, financial or both. So it, you could see it reflected in the students and the parents.

Kit Heintzman 13:06

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

Nelson Gifford 13:09

I do I did. When I first heard about COVID-19, it was probably in February. Our superintendent sent out a letter saying that there was some kids had been exposed. This is like early, early early had been exposed to this thing. And an abundance of caution sent the kids home. Just as a side note, I don't know if you probably don't know her, but Sarah Cody. She was on CNN early, early during the pandemic. So Santa Clara County is one of the first counties to lockdown to shut everything down. And Sarah Cody is the Director of Public Health here. She's also a Palo Alto parent. Right teach, and her kids go to my high school. And early in the pandemic, when when our superintendent sent those kids home, she was critical of that. She was like, Well, why are you doing that? It's not a big deal. It's, you know, you know, it's going to be good. So I knew, knowing this, I was like, Okay, we're going to be fine. And again, you know, sports are all about, you know, social interactions connection. So I'm talking to one of my assistant badminton coaches of all things a badminton coach, but he was also for whatever reason, pretty well connected to the medical world. And he was telling me about how UCSF University, California San Francisco was setting up tents, basically triage units was preparing for this incredible horrible pandemic that was going to shut everything down. And and all the schools are going to close and everything's gonna get shut down and it was gonna drag on October he told me all of this, and I looked at him dead in the face and you're crazy there's no way we're shutting down the schools. There's no way for all going on there's there's definitely no way. This is gonna drag out until August. Right? This is February, it's like, you're crazy dude is not going to happen. He was right about every single thing that he said. He knew he knew. And, you know, I tell him like, man, any anything bad happens ever again, I'm just going to call you and ask you, you know, Bill, should I worry? And if he says yes, I'll start worrying. So yeah, I know, I definitely remember when I first heard about it.

Kit Heintzman 15:39

When was it that it dawned on you that something more serious was happening?

Nelson Gifford 15:45

Um, I would probably say like, week or month, maybe three, four, when we started to get into June, and things still weren't moving. And you and you, you kind of saw, alright, there's some challenges. Now that being said, we did, right, we went on, we went on restriction in March, you know, the numbers, at least in this area, you know, bumped up a little bit, but not much, because, you know, people were pretty good about isolating here. And then come the summertime, they kind of relaxed, some of the rules were get together, the numbers had taken a dip down. And at that point, I was looking at the numbers almost almost daily, because the numbers for me dictated whether or not, you know, I can do certain activities, so, So I was constantly looking at our COVID, numbers, the rates, all that stuff, to just try to get a feel of the projection. And so, as we were going through the summer, the numbers were pretty good. So I was actually thinking come August, you know what we might start late, because I, you know, we might start September, we're going to come back. And then all of a sudden, those numbers just started, just, you know, come the fall just started shooting up. And when that happened, you know, probably around September, October, I was I started to really kind of lose hope. I was like, You know what, I don't think we're coming back. I don't think this is happening. You know, up until probably say, August, I've been like, you know, people are gonna figure it out, especially at that time, because there was different discussions around the country about whether or not schools should reopen or not. Right. So you definitely had states that had reopened and that, you know, they were just everyone's gonna go back, everything's gonna go back to normal. I thought that was crazy. You know, but I also thought, all right, well, they're going to open up a really were to see if the numbers you know, go crazy. And if they don't, then maybe we'll open up to, but yeah, when when was September, October rolled around, and I saw there was no budget, there was no movement and the numbers are going up. And by that time, I don't know if they did announce, I don't think they did announced a vaccine. Right. I

don't think there's any knowledge about a vaccine at that point. I was like, Oh, wow. I think we're gonna be here for a while.

Kit Heintzman 18:10

What were some of the ways that your day to day living had to adjust from February 2020 to then like March and April 2020?

Nelson Gifford 18:23

You know, the big one was the the birth of my son, you know, so you know, I had had plans right to take that time off. You know, for paternity leave, but that was probably going to be you know, three four weeks at the most. My parents are around my in laws are around got aunts and uncles. And so there was gonna be a lot of support a lot help with with my daughter, the older one that you know, to watch her so, you know, we knew we're going to have just a ton of support. And then we didnt so now it was, you know, my wife and I, our daughter, my sister in law and her boyfriend did live with us at the time so at least there was you know, four adults in the house. But it was it was just us and so a lot of what I ended up doing was becoming the primary caregiver for for my daughter right so we spent a lot of time together but it wasn't like oh well hey, we're gonna go to the park because all the parks were closed right we couldn't go to the beach or anywhere right because everything was shut down. So we had to come up with like makeshift fun we ended up you know, taking our our backyard of turning it into a little mini playground. You know, we took our dining room moved all the stuff out and set up basically like a preschool in there. It's it's still set up like that, you know, we converted our house into a daycare facility. Because, you know, that's just what we had to do. So I transitioned from being a high school teacher to Yeah, to being, you know, a preK instructor.

Kit Heintzman 20:18

What were some of the ways that you were negotiating boundaries around safety in the beginning, when we sort of, like, we still didn't know very much in the beginning, when you were still living with other family?

Nelson Gifford 20:27

I just, you know, I just said I was gonna do whatever was instructed, you know, I didn't, I didn't have problems with wearing a mask, or isolating or social distancing any of that. I just want to do whatever it took to get the pandemic to be done. That's, that was my, that was the way I started, I was like, you know, what, I don't want this to happen. I don't want to be, you know, part of the reason that this thing gets extended, so I'm going to do whatever it takes to make sure that I'm safe. I'm just going to follow the rules, whatever those rules are. Knock on wood, you know, I didn't catch COVID. My wife and my daughter did funny enough, but my son, and I did not. But they both got COVID in the life got COVID, after she had already gotten both vaccine boosters. So that's just how it goes sometimes. But they're both okay.

Kit Heintzman 21:25

Would you share a little about what it was like when your wife caught COVID?

Nelson Gifford 21:29

Um, so she was a little under the weather. And so it was my daughter. And, you know, we were just about to go back to school. So this is in January of 2020. And we were just about to go back for the second semester. And if you had the test, the take home kits that she got a hold of, at that point, they were shortages, but the schools had

been given a whole bunch, and so she was able to get some, we all took it, boom, sure enough, there it is two positives, two, you know, two negatives. And it's like, oh, boy, well, how does this work? What do we do? So that there's an ad-lib right there trying to figure out alright, you know, how do you socially distance in the house with a four year old and a two year old? Who want to be with the mob? And the answer is you don't? So it was like, All right, well, I guess my son and I were going to a hotel. So now it was, you know, week long the hotel it was trying to figure out, okay, how long do we stay in the hotel four hours, five days, six days, 10 days, you know, all these things that you that you read about, but until you experience it, you don't remember? Okay, so five, can I go back here and the numbers kept changing. It felt like, I'm also trying to work it was it was hard. It was really hard. I didn't like being away from the family. I didn't like being away from the house, from my daughter. Yeah, I started out we had a great time, though. I think he had a great time, he probably got to crush more TV in a week than he had in his whole life at that point in time. So there's only so much I can do, right? I couldn't, couldn't get out. You know, in theory, I was supposed to be isolating as well. Right? So it wasn't supposed to be going out. Even though we tested negative. Because even though I was vaccinated, he was not. Right. So it's a different quarantine period. See, I forget those things too, right? Because the way you gotta treat him is different the way you treat me. So you know, we did it worked out, you know, we're able to come back, but it was definitely tough. And even just the discussion between my wife, not about how best to proceed. You know, we didn't always agree like, the length of time, the distance, all that. So, you know, in the end, it was it was hard. It was it was definitely hard. But I also made me feel really, really, really fortunate. Because not everyone can do that. Not everyone can just pick up and hey, I'm just gonna go to a hotel for a week. I'll be back.

Kit Heintzman 23:57

How much do you think your daughter understood about what's been going on?

Nelson Gifford 24:02

Nothing, she just knows everyone wears a mask. You know, she's just just like, alright, wearing a mask, we didn't really have discussion, like, hey, people are sick, or this is going to keep you safe. I don't think that that was ever a thought it was more like, hey, when we go out, you put the mask on, you know, and you're just gonna wear the mask. When things start to open up a little bit more. We enrolled her in gymnastics, and all her gymnastics classes were done with the mask on. And so, you know, just we didn't tell her why it was just like, hey, you're wearing a mask. And, you know, trying to convince a three year old to wear a mask when she's doing gymnastics. It's not the easiest thing in the world. But you know, she kind of did it. Kinda she kind of I mean, she did it, you know, and it got to a point where we, you know, we pull up and she's like, Oh, my my mask and put it on and then she'd taken off 15 times, but she would put it on initially so she knew, hey, you're wearing a mask. But we didn't have a discussion about why. It was just like when we go to certain places you have a mask on.

Kit Heintzman 25:05

What were some of the things that you remember giving up and missing at the beginning of the pandemic?

Nelson Gifford 25:14

One was the haircut, man, my hair was a mess. You know, I looked awful. I looked bad like, like, you know, and that was part of my thing, right? You know, people were doing like the whole speakeasy deal. And they're, like, go into the back door to go get their hair cut and private. I'm like, No, I'm not gonna do that, I'm hardcore. I'm not gonna make a shave. I'm gonna get my hair cut. I'm gonna show people that I'm isolated. And one day, I'm out walking with my daughter down the street. I think at coffee, one of the coffee shops finally opened up. And, you

know, we just stopped and got some cups to go. I got coffee, she got steamed milk. So you know, it was just one of these fun things. And I'm walking down the street. And this lady in a car drive pass, does a U turn stops, stops. And she goes, Hey, do you want \$20 And I looked at my laptop. I don't want your money. It was just it was just so strange. I was like, if you turned to like, I honestly I was like, No, I'm good. Like, are you sure? I'm like, No, I'm fine. I'm just like, Okay, well have a good day. I'm like, Yeah, you have a good day, too. I thought it was a strange interaction. I started I'm walking home and I thought, oh, she thought I was homeless. She thought I was homeless. This walk with my daughter. So she felt bad. So she wanted to give me some money. So I could go like feed my daughter or something like that. Yeah, after that, I started I really needed a haircut. And probably like, I don't know, like, changed my clothes or something. So no, I definitely. Yeah, I definitely missed getting a haircut, you know, being able to, like you said, shopping that those sorts of things, eating out, going to cool restaurants, traveling, everything. Everything things that I took for granted, it was like, Oh, my gosh, I miss going to the movies. All of that.

Kit Heintzman 27:03

Have you been able to pick any of those things back up yet?

Nelson Gifford 27:06

I have, you know, I gotta be honest, I definitely go out. Oh, and I'm not uh, not gun shy about it at all. Probably, you know, more so than I need to I still don't, I would say probably the thing that I don't, I'm not ready to do as much as travel, like get on a plane and go to different parts of the country. In part because this part of California, this part of the area is the rates of COVID infection have always been low. Even since it started pandemic pre vaccine. Our County's vaccination rates are well above 90%. And so I feel really comfortable just being in this area, just the Bay Area. Because I know vaccination rates are so high, it'd be very different if I went to someplace in the Central Valley, where it's like 50%. And hospitals are at capacity still. So for me, it's it's being aware that the pandemic and COVID is still very, very real. However, it's also in many ways very relative to where you live.

Kit Heintzman 28:20

To remember where you first went out to when you decided to go out again?

Nelson Gifford 28:24

Oh, man, where was the first place I went to? I know I wrote this down somewhere to I can't remember. But I know. I know. We went to a restaurant. I know that. I know when the restaurants opened up my wife and I think I think he might when he went to this this Italian restaurant, that's one of our favorites in downtown San Jose, I think I think it was like hey, that's where we're gonna go. We're gonna go down there and we're gonna sit down and we're gonna eat food inside and this is going to be amazing. Yeah, I definitely know when restaurants open back up. Hey, we're going out.

Kit Heintzman 29:02

And how did it feel?

Nelson Gifford 29:04

Oh, it felt like the best thing ever. It was like it was it was freeing. You know, it felt so nice to be sitting next to and around other people. It felt good to have that that freedom back. It also felt good to support other people right it during the pandemic, eating out stopped being I wouldn't say like an act of selfishness, but it stopped being

entirely self serving or self centered around me and when my needs it was also about hey, I've got to support these people so they could keep their doors open. There was a business coffee shop that opened literally they bought their place. Pandemic hits, they're shut down. Right and they were going to close. They did some GoFundMe stuff. You know, to try to keep, you know, just try to stay afloat during that time. And then I remember when they opened up, they had a line like two blocks long, just to get coffee, because people want to support this business, and now they're doing real well. But I remember standing in line saying, hey, when they open up, I'm going, I'm gonna make sure they stay open. So going out to a restaurant was really all about, hey, we're gonna support these businesses was really about supporting these people, and making sure that they can keep their lights on and they can stay in their residences. And as somebody who works in education understands, you know, the pressure that these parents were under it impact that it had on kids. I felt like, that was part of my duty, right, was to go out and support people.

Kit Heintzman 30:54

How are you feeling about the state of the pandemic right now, where do you think we're at?

Nelson Gifford 31:00

Oh, I think everyone's done. I think I think there's, you know, there's probably 10% of the pilot, I always, you know, I kind of take a 10% view, you get 10% that they could didn't exist, you got 10%, that you know, want to step out of the house, you know, without, you know, fully covered PPE, and you got the other 80% that kind of waiver back and forth depending on, you know, what groups they find themselves around, but I would definitely say the vast majority of people are leaning towards, Yeah, I'm over it. I'm done. You know, I'm ready to move on and get get back to life. Yet. You know, I know a lot of people that that died from COVID. I know a lot of people that were hospitalized for extended periods of time that the I know people that are still struggling with for the consequences of COVID. So even though I can say I'm probably pretty casual more so that I that I should be probably I also understand that it's very real. And to be dismissive about it, or inconsiderate about someone's, you know, genuine concern about contracting and COVID are bringing COVID home around the family is being incredibly insensitive, but on empathetic to other people's situations. And that was something that I had to professionally deal with on a regular basis. When athletics restarted, you know, you had you had some people that that thought that restarting athletics was akin to just having a COVID super spreader event, you hated everybody just wanting everyone to die. So how dare you have any athletic events, you know, it's shallow and trite endeavor, so who cares, versus you had the other side, they were like, whether or not they believe COVID or COVID was real or not going to lie, kids aren't affected, you're hurting kids, you're isolating them, that you're damaging their psyches, you need to get the back in school, you very, very least need to get them back around their friends socializing in sports, you know, and trying to deal with with those two battling groups. And you could see where both sides would come from. And for me, it was trying to navigate the you know, the middle road where I was saying, You know what, I'm gonna do everything I can to get kids back playing. And I'm gonna do everything I can to keep everyone as safe as I can.

Kit Heintzman 33:38

What did that look like?

Nelson Gifford 33:41

Um, a lot of repeating. put your mask on, wash your hands, setting up physical barriers, you know, right, you know, covering stands, so people aren't sitting down. ordering things like, like, we ordered, like 1000 water

bottles, right. Whereas before, most athletic, you're putting water bottles to share with all the students now it's like, hey, everyone's gonna get their own water bottle, don't share. The way we scheduled practices was different. When we went to indoor sports, setting up testing protocols, so we had to do indoor and start with basketball, it was testing three days a week. So getting with a company learning how to test learning how to read active learning how to report the testing, all these things, never even thought about, you know, prior to pandemic now all of a sudden became part of what I did sending out messaging about the changes in those COVID protocols. deciding about whether or not we should allow fans what does that look like how far apart we are and how do we regulate those adults? Right? How do we ensure that that that we're protecting people, we're allowing people to have access to their kids and be able to see them play, but we're also ensuring you know the safety of the community and ensuring that staff members who are there who have to monitor those fans don't get put into positions where they're in constant conflict with the fans. Because no one's trying to do that, no one wants to go to a high school game and have to go fight with parents about putting their mask on. So, so we had to be, you know, ahead of a lot of those things. And, and be aware of where there were going to be some struggles. And, you know, try to be as upfront as consistent, we kind of able to overcome some of those objections. And certainly says, We just, you know, we just said, Hey, we're just, it's gonna be a problem, we're just going to, you know, cut off the fans, and we're gonna make it about the kids, that's the most important thing. We kept that as the priority, you know, recognizing that the most important thing was getting the kids to be able to play.

Kit Heintzman 35:48

How are the kids responding?

Nelson Gifford 35:52

They want to do it, they, you know, the compliance amongst the kids, at least in our area was was fantastic. It really was, you know, it was definitely harder, I would say, for the indoor sports. Because of the degree of testing, they had to do some of the outdoor sports in some school districts did test. But for the most part, the kids want to do what they had to do in order to play. They were ready, particularly amongst the student athletes, they were ready to get back out there. So really, almost no issues, and incidences of COVID, or COVID, outbreaks amongst our students amongst our teams was low. And, anecdotally speaking, where we saw the big explosions of COVID outbreaks among students, they typically had to come from family gatherings. So all all the when I talked when I talked to coaches, and they had shut downs and COVID cancellation, like, hey, well, what happened? You know, what's going on? Like, oh, well, someone still had a birthday party, or so and so had a family get together and you know, 10 people there and got COVID. So we're all shut down. Right? So it was it was also, in some ways reassuring to say, hey, parents, just so you know, it's really not what's going to happen here on campus for the hour, hour and a half, it's really what's going to decide whether or not we have seasons, what happens the 20 hours when they're not here. So it was all about educating parents, but also educating the kids and letting them know, right, hey, this one's got to do. And as a result, when we came back in the spring of 2021, they also began to, some teenagers are able to get vaccinated. And sure enough, we had a lot of kids getting vaccinated. Early, fast, which I think also just speaks to this area, right? Where parents were just like, hey, we're, you're getting vaccinated. You know, even if we don't believe in it, you're getting your vaccinate, because we don't want you to miss any more school. So so getting vaccinated keeps you in school. Right? That's what we're to do.

Kit Heintzman 38:01

Tell me about the vaccine culture where you are.

Nelson Gifford 38:05

It's high. I mean, like Santa Clara County's well over 90% vaccination rate. I mean, it is not in any way controversial or thought negatively. It's, I mean, in this area, right? You got Google, Apple, LinkedIn, all these tech companies, they send everyone home. You know, I mean, everyone was working remotely, they weren't bringing anybody back into the office. And there was definitely expectation like, Hey, you're going to get vaccinated before you come back. And considering a lot of the kids, you know, are the children that people work in those industries around those industries. No, vaccination rates were extremely high, you know, amongst all all different economic groups, because everyone was kind of linked together. In the, in the, in the businesses, so you saw it in restaurants, you saw it. In like I said, in schools, you saw in private business, you know, vaccination rates were extremely high and had been right from the beginning. And I do think that also was a good reason why we didn't have the sort of hospitalizations, rates that a lot of other areas had or in or incidences of death or runs on the hospital.

Kit Heintzman 39:30

What was access to vaccination, like once you decided to get vaccinated?

Nelson Gifford 39:36

For for me personally, it was really good. You know, our school districts and districts in the area did a real nice job of running COVID clinics. So you know, people were able to go on there, you know, get them immediately. I got my vaccination the very first day I was eligible to get one. My wife has had a friend who was a pharmacist and got us an appointment like right away. So the very first day shot was available, I got one. I promised myself that, that when the COVID so that when, you know, when the shutdown happened, I said, You know what, I want to get out of this as fast as possible. So the minute vaccination becomes available, I'm getting, like I made that decision months before it existed, I knew I was gonna do that. And so when it did, here goes, got the vaccination. And then you know, got the second one as soon as I could and got boosted, you know, almost immediately, you know, whenever that was available. And particularly as a as we got through that first wave, that first set of vaccinations, you know, a lot of hospitals, in the area had them available and you know, had different COVID clinics and CVS and Walgreens and all these places had it. So I thought it was pretty accessible.

Kit Heintzman 40:53

And what was access to things like testing and masking, like earlier in the pandemic?

Nelson Gifford 40:59

Early in the pandemic, testing and masking? I mean, testing was impossible, right? I mean, testing you couldn't, you couldn't? Yeah, getting a test was impossible, which was not good. The masking piece I just remember early pandemic, everyone was trying to figure out like, what is it good mask? You know, yeah, then 95. Right, everyone's hoarding the toilet paper. No one knows what's going on. I think I went out and bought like, 18 cans of beans. I don't know. It was very strange. Yeah, but but, you know, I had I had a, what was it called a gator had to get a mask. And if I already can't wear the gator, and you got to do this other mask, that people had all the stylist style stylish masks and all that with the valves and all that it didn't do that. So I it felt like early on, people were just trying to figure out like how masking works. And getting all this cool stuff. And then eventually everyone if I don't know where it's like near people here, either where the blue surgical or the board now in restaurants, a lot of restaurants wear the black ones, like that's it. Right? All the other custom novelty masks, those have all kind of gone out of fashion for me. You know, I just carry these around. So now it's my life. I have a bag of these in my

backpack in my car in the house. Just Hey, we need a mask. Here we go. It's just ends. It's like I don't know, it's just part of the daily routine now. Right? You have to have a mask on you. Because you just never know.

Kit Heintzman 42:31

Remind me what that like early stage of like, either doing it oneself or witnessing the mask panic buying was like in the beginning.

Nelson Gifford 42:41

Oh, it was It wasn't just masks. Right? It was all cleaning supplies. I remember going to the grocery store. You couldn't get wipes. Right? You, I couldn't get gloves? Like surgical? Like, why? Why couldn't I get surgical gloves? They were all gone. You know, I tried to order some, they were like on like, like, six weeks back order off Amazon, couldn't get spray bottles. I mean, it was crazy. The supply chain was just destroyed. So, you know, for a while its like, we just got to stay in the house. And just wiping everything down. I'm looking at four bottles of hand sanitizer right now. So there's just hand sanitizer everywhere it was. Yeah, is way different way different. And just things that were in the store at one point, you just couldn't get it just went away. It was it was lost.

Kit Heintzman 43:42

2020 Beyond being sort of the year of the pandemic, which then became the years of the pandemic had a lot going on that wasn't just COVID I'm wondering if you would share a little about what was on your mind over the last few years?

Nelson Gifford 44:00

So you know, we had the protests, right? Particularly surrounding George George Floyd and his death. There were protests here in downtown San Jose, two big ones. Both of them went past my house. So we had huge protests for about a week out here. It actually my wife, my daughter, my son and went to one. You know, it was right here at City Hall. So we moved going there and, you know, had our masks on outside and you know, that was part of it. We ended up putting a mural of we have a wall just out here and putting a mural on our wall, just kind of commemorating that that experience. Shoot, I wrote you know, a letter to our school district, you know, addressing some of the social, you know, and racial issues that had existed in our own district. Ended up ended up in the newspaper need another coach in the newspaper because of that. So kind of found myself with a lot more time on my hands thinking in and enacting about those things that were important to me. So it did definitely gave me a lot of time to really consider what my values really are, you know, that it, it paused everything. In that pause, there was a lot of opportunity, at least for me to think about. When I returned to normal, when we could return to normal, what was really going to be my point of emphasis, what was really going to be, what I cared about, and what I pursued, I can definitely say that when when I went back to work, you know, one of the things that I didn't want to lose was a time with my kids. You know, I had, I had a great time with them. So I said, alright, you know, I've got to really make sure that this is a priority for me. You know, I, this is it's important that I'm around. So how do I do that? How do I structure my day? Time with my wife, the importance of families, communicating, you know, with them, you know, recognizing just how critical that is friendships, you know, just personal relationships, all those things really stood out to me. And in Yeah, not not being afraid to speak truth to power and communicate.

Kit Heintzman 46:39

What was it like being in a protest space during a pandemic, when there's all this anxiety about proximity?

Nelson Gifford 46:46

Oh, it was super weird. It was like, wait, are we supposed to be far away from each other? Why are we so close? I don't understand. But it also felt something that was really, really important. Right? Two things were happening, right, you had this huge social upheaval happening across the country. And you had huge social upheaval happening across the country because of this, you know, medical emergency. And in both cases, depending on your perception of things, you treated them vastly different. You know, in one end, you're like, Oh, well, everything's got to change. And we've got to write, yeah, people defund the police and all this and all you know, and then other people are like, you just want chaos. And there's no such thing as systemic racism, and it doesn't exist. And you have people, Hey, we've got to shut everything down, everything's got to be closed, we've got to protect, you know, our most vulnerable population of people like Well, it's, it's make believe, it doesn't exist, it's not real. So I'm gonna go to North Dakota for a motorcycle rally, and hang out with 200,000, my closest friends, it'll be fine. In recognizing that, at least for me, as an educator, feeling like, okay, you've got to do a better job. We've got to figure out a way to teach people how to discern, you know, not right from wrong. But how to think logically, and clearly and with reason, it doesn't mean we're always going to agree on you know, the best way to proceed. But we need to be present at the very least in the same reality, you know, our our, our facts, cannot be alternative. We, we have to be able to recognize certain truths, be empathetic with one another and be able to talk civilly. Those are the things that kind of really stood out to me. But I would probably say that that was probably more the biggest thing was the empathy. You know, learning to be empathetic.

Kit Heintzman 49:17

How do you think educators can teach empathy?

Nelson Gifford 49:22

Man, outside of demonstrating and outside of practicing it, you know, outside of, you know, showing empathy to the students into the community, I'm not sure you know, I'm not I'm not trained and trained in teaching empathy. We probably all need a class in it. You know, I become, I've come to believe that the more empathetic we are. As a society, the better off we are. Right? Empathy is right I guess if my understanding is correct, empathy is all about putting ourselves in, in the, you know, the shoes of somebody else, somebody that we don't know and try to try to understand their perspective. I think people with high degrees of empathy can be a lot more compassionate, can be a lot more reasonable, a lot more patient, a lot more understanding. I can tell you what, I've got to be real empathetic with my two year old. You know, when he pees all over the floor, he's not doing it on purpose. It was an accident, right? So I could get mad and frustrated. Or I could just say, oh, yeah, that's just an accident. It happens. You don't realize, two year olds really don't want to pee on the floor. They really don't want to pee the bed, it's not, it's not their favorite thing in the world. Right. So let's talk about when a kids acting up in class, you know, when they're when they're not showing up, and they're not doing their homework or, you know, they're acting out, okay. Are they doing it because they hate you as a teacher, or are they doing it because stuffs bad at home? You know, and taking a little bit of time to, really not treat the symptom, but go to the cause. Like, why is it that this person is behaving in this manner? And what can I do? What can I be accountable for to help them through, you know, these these sets of circumstances if they're willing to accept that help so that empathy.

Kit Heintzman 51:36

Could you give me an example of a way someone has shown you empathy over the course of the pandemic?

Nelson Gifford 51:51

I have not, I don't know. I don't know. I haven't thought about that. Man. You got me stumped. I don't know, I'll have to think about that. But.

Kit Heintzman 52:01

What does the word health mean to you?

Nelson Gifford 52:12

I think, you know, now you say it, health feels just as general as like, the word culture means. And people talk about culture. I had a professor said, you can ask 10 people what culture means you get 10 different answers. Because culture is just a catch all for everything. How we dress, how we talk, you know, everything culture, culture is everything, which means it really is nothing, right? It's just in health is the same thing. Right? Health is how you feel, your mental your physical, you know, health is the food health is everything. And I guess when I think of health, I just think of universal well being, you know, of being okay.

Kit Heintzman 53:04

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

Nelson Gifford 53:10

Things that that would, that are I'm focusing on for my own health is one spiritual health, you know, that that's a journey that was kind of cut off a little bit, you know, in the right, all the churches were closed, you know, what does that mean? You know, that, that that community piece, and so being able to reconnect with that is important for me. Physical health, you know, the act of just being able to physically move and get out and, and go. I would say probably one of my big priorities is that is just mental, mental well being mental health. So seeing a therapist, recognizing that the struggles that we have aren't unique, they've happened before to other people. And there's people out there that are trained professionals, and know what they're doing, and can help us through those struggles. And as a coach, I understand that everyone needs a coach. Even the greatest athletes in the world, still have somebody next to them saying, hey, try it like this. So if that's the case, for the greatest, most functional people out there, then I'm far from that. I am far far far from being great or functional at anything. So I will take as much help as I can get. So yeah, that's what health means to me at this point.

Kit Heintzman 55:03

What does the word safety mean to you?

Nelson Gifford 55:13

When I think of safety, I, I think of growth. So what I mean by that is in order to, to learn to grow, to improve, right, we have to step outside of our comfort zone, right, we have to push to the, to the boundaries of what we know and beyond we have to go to areas where where there is real discomfort, but we have to feel safe in those areas, and knowing that we'll be able to make it back. So, in order to take risk, we have to feel safe in that risk. It seems contradictory. But, you, you see, again, I use my kids as an example, but you see it all the time, they take risks, but they also want to feel safe from those risks, they want you to there help them spot, you know, make sure they'll be okay. But they keep pushing and pushing and pushing, they always they always know, hey, I'm gonna be able to make it back. You know, I may fail, but I really want to make it back. And so safety for me, is really

means the ability to feel good, being outside of what I know, outside of my areas of comfort, so that's, that's what I am trying to get in terms of safety.

Kit Heintzman 56:52

What are some of the the things you think we may have learned from the pandemic?

Nelson Gifford 56:58

I hope we learned that we all need each other. I hope we learned that but that we are, we are not islands unto themselves that, that there is no action that we do that doesn't have an impact on somebody else. I hope we learn that people can come together and do incredible good things, you know, incredibly good things, you know, when they when they decided to share and collaborate, you know, set aside their egos, you know, when I think about, you know, this, the vaccine and it coming around, and how it changed the landscape and how they were saying, hey, the vaccine is going to take two years to come. And it came in nine months. You know, and how amazing that was life changing that was. And what a difference that made in our lives versus, you know, less than a century ago, when you had the polio, you know, you know, epidemic and what that meant, you know, they didn't have a polio vaccine for for decades, right, you know, and how that impacted so many people's lives. So that's, that's the big thing that I hope people realize is just how important it is for us to, you know, look out for one another, you know, and support one another. And recognize that, that if we even when we do little things, like going out to eat, you know, visiting a business buying a shirt that does something important for somebody else. It provides for that person. So that's, that's kind of what I've done for that.

Kit Heintzman 58:46

What are some of the things that changed pretty quickly for you after vaccination?

Nelson Gifford 58:52

I just, I just felt, you know, safe again, going back to going back to the idea of safe, but again, now I feel more comfortable taking certain risks, again, getting outside of my comfort zone. So prior to vaccination, I didn't want to go out. Then I got vaccinated. Okay, now I feel more comfortable going out. I feel safe in that, again, going outside my comfort zone. So yeah, no, but vaccination gave me confidence.

Kit Heintzman 59:22

What are some of the ways your social relations changed during the pandemic?

Nelson Gifford 59:27

Everything was digital, everything was FaceTime, everything was zoom. Everything was was was virtual. And I realized that I am not built for the virtual world. I did it, you know, and I did it, because I had to. But I'd much rather have a face to face meeting. You know, I did learn the value of, you know, the Zoom meeting of the Google meet and how often that is what a great tool it is. And it definitely changed the way I did business once I was able to meet that in person, and it's made me realize it's a valuable tool. But the ability to be in a room with somebody else, to share their energy to be able to create and think, together collaboratively. I just, I just, I don't see how it can be done. You know, at a distance like this, there's just there's there's something about how we've evolved as human beings that that necessitates us and sharing sharing space.

Kit Heintzman 1:00:38

Was any of your coaching done online?

Nelson Gifford 1:00:41

Yeah. Some of it was, so some of the the instruction trying to learn plays, trying to guide workouts, I'll tell you what, you want to be an effective coach, try to guide a workout online, and you're gonna find out how ineffective you are. That's, that's the truth, you know, so no, online coaching to me is an oxymoron. It just, it just, it just doesn't doesn't work. You know, coaching is all about relationships, its all. It's all about, you know, auditory and visual feedback, you know, seeing what's happening in real time getting all the angles that you need, sometimes even moving a person in that position, well, I can't do that, if I'm in a virtual space. Also, that loss of accountability, right, the minute, the minute, I can turn that camera off, or Oh, hey, I lost my connection, you lose that you lose, you lose that piece of social accountability. And when when kids came back, you saw that, I mean, you walk into classrooms, that part of the pandemic would be loud and boisterous as they want to talk, and you go in there now, you would think they were still all on Zoom, all on mute. All these kids have forgotten how to talk. They just sit there silently. So you know, you teach them when they came back, like, hey, this how you talk is that you share information. So you raise your hand. This is how you communicate. Just, please talk about anything. Talk about nonsense, doesn't matter, just talk. So yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:02:26

Did they start to get back into it?

Nelson Gifford 1:02:28

They did, they definitely did. They definitely did. I mean, you know, you could see a lot, particularly this semester, again, as we moved through pandemic and you know, again, more more people vaccinated in number stay down, you know, got through that little winter spike, now hitting the spring and the numbers is at least in our area have kind of trickled down and kind of flattened out. And so yeah, people are outside kids are doing stuff, you know, together socially, you know, restaurants are pretty open, shoot, now, they've lifted the mask mandate. So now stuff is really open. And so yeah, people are talking more, they're sharing more, they're experienced and more. I think that awkwardness is beginning to decrease, but, but you know, it still exists, there's still consequences, there's still COVID consequences, there's still consequences from all the isolation. And, and I think, you know, it's gonna be someone like you that's going to study it, and see, you know, what are the long term impacts, you know, particularly for some of our young people, you know, as they move into adult life and how this isolation has impacted them.

Kit Heintzman 1:03:42

How are you feeling about the immediate future?

Nelson Gifford 1:03:46

Um, in terms of what? You know, I'm an optimist. You know, I, I think that humanity when, when, when, up against it, you know, were able to overcome, you know, this was again, that this was the pandemic, right? Worldwide pandemic. We're all in the same same boat. Everything's terrible. What are we going to do? Right, you know, us against the world. It's like a, you know, a really bad B movie, but we did it right. Got a vaccine done. Three companies produced it. You know, we got the vaccines out people have done it, you know, it's not perfect, but it makes you feel good to know that that, Yes. While it may be messy, the process we can still overcome huge obstacles when we decide to work together. So no, I do I feel optimistic because I know that human beings can

when they decide to do really great things. Also know when they decide to isolate and you know, and you know, lose empathy or selfishness when terrible things can happen. I mean, look at the war on Ukraine and what's going on there and what happened in Syria. And it's just, it's heartbreaking. And you wonder, you know, what can we do? You know, how can we help? And does the does any of the lessons that we got from the pandemic tie into what's happening there? Because, you know, I, I've heard plenty people say, hey, you know, what's happened, Ukraine is terrible and awful. We can't get involved because it's not our not our problem. Right. It's not our country or, you know, they're not part of NATO, whatever it is, but then I think the pandemic teaches that we're all connected, that it doesn't matter. You know, that, that those atrocities are going to reverberate throughout the entire world for for decades to come. And that there's no avoiding any of that. And we can't we can't isolate ourselves. So it doesn't, it's not possible anymore, not in this world. So that's just my take on things.

Kit Heintzman 1:06:12

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

Nelson Gifford 1:06:17

Oh, man, can't we just all get along. That's, I mean, that's, that's what I would like, you know. I mean, when you ask me, you know, what, you know, why am I hopeful? I think about, you know, Donald Trump, and that presidency, you know, and what a disaster that was. And, you know, and he was awful, he was terrible. We overcame it. I felt like there was a stress test for like, like democracy in the United States, like, Okay, let's see if we could put the worst possible human being, you know, with all the worst qualities in office and see if this, Republic can make it through. Instead, it's pretty robust. You know, as there's still some scary stuff out there. Heck, yeah. But there's enough conscientious people, enough caring, empathetic people that, hey, we can still go out there and make a difference. We just need to continue to have that energy all the time. And continue to talk and I hope, I hope we can improve and support our education system, such that we can avoid these these sorts of extremes swings. Although I would say right now, at this moment, I don't feel very good about where our education system is going, it's definitely it's definitely getting pushed for these public education push in a really negative direction. Really, really restrictive. So I am a little worried about that. But I also again, I'm hopeful, you know, in our ability to correct.

Kit Heintzman 1:08:03

Are you willing and able to say more about that worry?

Nelson Gifford 1:08:10

What I'm worried about in terms of public education in general, is who participates in public education. It's the most vulnerable of us. Right? It's, you know, what did the pandemic reveal? If you have means you're gonna be okay. You're gonna be okay. You know, I, my wife and I, we were blessed. You know, we were still getting paid. And when we were at home, had my sister in law here, boyfriend, house, here, we were good. Had a little play structure here, we were fine. Life was okay. Right? It's uncomfortable. Sure. But we were fine. We didn't worry. Other people. They had to decide, do I go to work and risk killing myself because I contract COVID? Or do I stay at home and lose everything and end up in the street? Man, I can't imagine having to make that decision every single day. And how awful that is. So when I think about public education, and how it's under attack, I really think about all those kids and all those families that are part of those systems that really don't even have a voice. In any of those changes any of those arguments. They're just left at the mercy of people's you know, political leanings. And they're the ones that are going to suffer the most. Right because If you have means you just leave it okay.

Yeah, I'm just gonna go. I don't like the way the school is going, I'm just gonna go over here this private school is good. Right? But if I'm in, you know, rural Texas, right? Or, you know, somewhere in the Central Valley in rural Central California, I just have to, I'm gonna take whatever's in front of me. And if it's good, it's good. But if it's not good, man, I'm gonna have a hard time. Because I do believe in the power of education, the transformative power of education. And, and you can, if it wasn't important, listen to what I'm about to say. It wasn't important. Why did all these rich privileged, entitled people pay Martin Singer all that money to get into these elite schools? Right, because those people didn't need to do it, they already had the money. They had won, their kids didn't need to work. They didn't need to do any of that. But they still went out and cheated anyway. Because it's that important. So no one can tell me it's not important. You know, and I work at Palo Alto High School, I know exactly how important it is. You know, I work with the 1%. I know what they do. To get on top and to stay on top. So no, you know, I do worry about the immediate future of public education in the country. But I do hope that that people smarter than me can continue to fight for it and in pushing in the right direction, so that so that, yes, the most vulnerable in our in our country. Get, you know, the opportunity to reach their full potential. Because that, that, to me is what makes America great is is that you can you can in a single generation go from complete poverty and anonymity to be, you know, being able to create generational wealth and transformative change, transformational change for everyone in your circle. That was true for my father. It's true for a lot of people that have known and, you know, I hope it continues to be the truth.

Kit Heintzman 1:12:18

What are some of the ways that you've been taking care of yourself over the last few years?

Nelson Gifford 1:12:25

I would say I hadn't, you know, I would say I kind of forgot how to take care of myself. You know, I would say, particularly when athletics started back up, for me, that became everything, everything about me kind of fell to the wayside. That was, for me, one of the hardest periods. Starting in the spring of 2021, basically, right to this point, it's been nonstop. You know, again, I'm football coach. So we play football in the spring of 2021, and played five games. And then in August, almost seven weeks later, we played another full season. So you played two seasons in a calendar year, man. By the time that second season ended, I was I was done physically, emotionally, just like worn out. So it also made me realize, like, hey, we have we have these seasons for a reason, or the column seasons, you know that the Earth needs seasons. Humans need seasons, you know, we need a time to rest, we need a time to grow. Time to recall all that good stuff. All those metaphors just say, hey, you know, we need balance in our life. So that's what I've been trying to do right now is just bring some of that balance back. You know, again, empathy, right? Just thinking about how other people could also be kind of empathetic to myself, self empathy.

Kit Heintzman 1:13:56

What are the things you've been doing to restore that balance?

Nelson Gifford 1:14:00

Um, well, after this, I'm gonna go to the gym. I'm gonna go to the gym. I just, I just scheduled again, scheduled the haircuts. So so so no one tries to give me \$20 on the street. So I got a haircut tomorrow. You know, my wife. She, not this past birthday, but my last birthday, she she got me hooked up with her esthetician got a facial for the first time, man. Life changing. I gotta tell you, you gotta gotta get gotta get the facial gotta do it. Man, I got all these creams now. You know, I wish I had known back in my 20s my skin would be much better than it is right now. So, so things like that, right? Just just kind of like alright, you know, I've got to take care of myself. You

know, I've got to, you know, make time for that, you know, therapy, you know, saying alright, this is what I want. You know, I can't always just try to white knuckle through every battle on my own, the spiritual side. So that's, that's where I think I'm trying to get to is, again, take some time for me. Not in a selfish way, but in a restorative way that says, hey, you know, sometimes just being quiet and still is actually the best thing in long term, it's hard, hard to do, I still can't get myself to go sleep on time, one of these days, I'm still gonna get it and I'm gonna get like a full night's sleep and wake up. But, you know, baby steps, gotta practice self forgiveness.

Kit Heintzman 1:15:32

I'm coming up to the last of my questions, and they're a little odd. So we know that there's been all of this biomedical scientific research happening right now. I'm wondering for people who are in the humanities in the social sciences, so historians, literary professors, people in poli sci, what do you think we should be studying right now to help us understand the experience of the pandemic?

Nelson Gifford 1:15:59

I would just wonder, you know, I know you had a lot of people move, right, because of the pandemic, right? The you know, again, they shifted their priorities. All sudden, you had people moving so they could get more space to work at home or moving so they can move in with their families so they can have more support. I'm wondering, does this any have any fundamental change on like the order the nuclear family, there was an article that came. I'm sure you saw an article on the failure of the nuclear family? Did you see that? Yeah, some New York Times New Yorker, I don't know, my parents are nerds, they read all sorts of stuff. So they share that. But, you know, it was, it was a whole idea that, that the nuclear family as sold to the American public in the 19 was the 1940s, right? Post World War Two, you know, go out on your own happy little, you know, your two and a half kids and a dog white picket fence that that is a failed social model, that the pandemic revealed that, that we cannot do it alone. And in this, this sort of extreme isolation, that independence that Americans seek out and treasure and value is, in fact, detrimental, particularly in these socially dependent situations. And so I'm curious, you know, when you see more American like, you know, American generation American families, you know, be multi generation, you know, my wife is Mexican American. So her parents are from Mexico, she's first generation. So Mexican families, multi-generational households are expected. And in most countries outside of the United States, it's very common, right? Asian, South Asian East Asian families, very common. So. But those practices were kind of snuffed out, you know, once you come to America not supposed to do that. Well, maybe you are. And maybe people are seeing value in that. I don't know. I'm just, I'm curious as to how this this is going to shape the social landscape of the family and how people, you know, how people live.

Kit Heintzman 1:18:17

I'd like you to imagine talking to a historian far enough in the future that they have no lived experience of the pandemic at all. So they like everything they know, they learned about in a book.

Nelson Gifford 1:18:28

Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:18:30

What would you tell them you really don't want them to forget about this moment, that if they're gonna write about now, something that they absolutely have to hang on to well, thinking about this thinking about the pandemic from a historical perspective.

Nelson Gifford 1:18:59

I would want them to understand that the pandemic wasn't just about a disease. It was about belief and trust, or the lack thereof. And that people's ability or inability to discern truth from fantasy, facts from fiction. Put many people in harm's way for no reason, other than as cynical as it sounds, profit, money, power control. And how do we avoid that? How do we avoid Why people being led so far astray, that they put themselves in love a loved one, in harm's way. hurt themselves in real, tangible ways. Unnecessarily so you know, when I think about all the fights that came over masking, I just think to myself, why? Right. No one likes to wear a mask. But why is wearing a mask? And he's different than wearing a seatbelt. Right? Well I don't like wearing a seatbelt either, but I do it. And I understand some objections to it. But there's also a certain degree of a social contract. You know, I don't do it. Because I inherently believe in and I do it because I care about you. And I want you to be okay. Again, goes back to the idea of empathy. So for the historian, I want them to remember that, that that's so many of these these deaths after you know, the huge outbreak in New York City. Were probably many of them. Very preventable. Have people, you know, had faith or trust in their institutions. My brother, my brother, is a police officer in New York City detective, you know, he's been there 30 years. And he took a picture of himself in Times Square. It was empty. Standing in the middle of Times Square, empty. He's like, it was like the apocalypse. He was like, it was the scariest he'd ever been scared as he'd ever been. And he was there for 911 He was at Ground Zero. He said this was scaryer. Yeah, just bodies everywhere, you know, piling up in these trucks. Yet, in that same city, you know, you have people don't want to wear masks don't wanna get vaccinated don't want to do it. You're not talking to another teacher friend. He's like, in one apartment building. Like, he's, like, there was 600 people total. Like he had, like 15 deaths. That's a, that's a crazy number. You know, I say, I know, for people that have died from COVID. I don't know anyone that's died from the flu. I don't know how anybody could say, oh, COVID and the flu, the same thing. My whole life don't know one person that had the flu.

Nelson Gifford 1:22:47

So historians have to understand like, why, how do we get to this point? And I know the answer is complicated. But I know there's a lot that goes into it. But we have to understand, because something worse is going to come along. And we have to be ready to be able to say, hey, you know, this is what happened. This is how we get in front of and I think it was just education.

Kit Heintzman 1:23:21

I want to thank you so much. Those are all of the questions that I know how to ask at this moment. But thank you for the generosity of your time and the kindness of your answers. And at this point, I just want to open some space, if there's anything else you'd like to say about the pandemic or your experiences of the last few years. So please take that space to do so now.

Nelson Gifford 1:23:42

You know, I said everything I probably talked too much. I want to say thank you though, this is really cool. Made me think about the pandemic think about the past two years and currently and into the future. So yeah, I'm very, yeah, I'm grateful. You know, and, and, yeah, the pandemic has definitely shaped my own life, and even how I'm doing things, you know, I'm changing, I'm changing jobs. You know, I want to work closer to home, I want to be close to my family, I want to be close to my kids. You know, I was thinking about moving away and moving out of the area. My wife and I just tried to go someplace cheaper, we're not going to go anywhere, because our family is here. And that's really, really important to us, you know, that that community connection and not being isolated,

is really important. So the pandemic definitely, for me has changed, you know, my own capitalist, my future. So I think this is important, you know, very rare do we live through history. You know, and you know, all of us, right? We all can say, Hey, I know exactly where I was during 2020. You know, I know how we handled and all that stuff. So this is it's monumental.

Kit Heintzman 1:24:51

Thank you.

Nelson Gifford 1:24:52

Thank you.