

Transcript of Interview with Jennifer Connor By Kit Heintzman

Interviewee: Jennifer Connor

Interviewer: Kit Heintzman

Date: 09/05/2022

Location (Interviewee): San Francisco, California

Location (Interviewer):

Transcriber: Angelica S Ramos

Some of the things we spoke about include:

COVID's impact on the karaoke scene in San Francisco; online karaoke; singing and catharsis. Shifting from working in the office to working from home; the social importance of socializing at work. Being in a poly relationship with a woman before the pandemic and social distancing from her. Connecting with people in-person, over the phone, and video calls. Roommates and rent prices. The early days of the pandemic, how little we knew. Using statistics as a means of assessing risk. Consent and respecting COVID boundaries. Vaccination access in Republican and Democratic counties. Social interaction post-vaccination. Capitalism and the political demonization of marginalized people: the criminalization of trans people and those who support them. Getting healthcare as a trans person; essential treatments not being covered. The difference between queer-scenes and gay-male-scenes. Kink culture and play-parties shutting down. Clickbait; isolation after leaving social media; controlling news media consumption. The pandemic's impact on mental health; mental health's impact on physical health. Pre-pandemic loving horror films, dystopias, and dark sci-fi, moving to happier and lighted content during the pandemic. Catching COVID in December 2021.

Kit Heintzman 00:00

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

Jennifer Connor 00:05

Hi, my name is Jennifer Connor. It is September 5, 2022. It is a little bit after three o'clock in the afternoon pacific time in San Francisco.

Kit Heintzman 00:17

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

Jennifer Connor 00:25

Yes, I do.

Kit Heintzman 00:27

Thank you so much for being here today. Would you please start by introducing yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening, what would you want them to know about you?

Jennifer Connor 00:39

That is very open ended. I, you know, I I honestly don't know. I prefer more direct questions, because that's so open ended and I'm middle aged. I've gotten a lot of life can you pose more direct questions?

Kit Heintzman 01:04

Sure, what do you do this weekend?

Jennifer Connor 01:07

Went to a wedding.

Kit Heintzman 01:08

How was that?

Jennifer Connor 01:10

um, these people are karaoke friends. And karaoke is it's been the most important part of my social life for a while. But since COVID, started while especially the last year, it's been pretty much the only part of my social life, which is one of the reasons I despise COVID Even now that it's like, sort of winding down kind of sort of, it's still had long effects, you know, on the social fabric, at least of my social fabric. So, yeah, they're they're karaoke friends. And they met at karaoke, in fact. But, but yeah, it was it was a good wedding.

Kit Heintzman 02:08

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

Jennifer Connor 02:13

Ah, yes, not exactly. But it was. It must have been December or January, that that first, that first year, some some some time, somewhere, there's abouts where it was like, this thing's happening over in China. There's been a couple of cases here. You know where it was. And so people were worried about it. And that was about it, at least initially. If I recall, like, I don't think people were aware that it essentially already gotten out of control.

Kit Heintzman 02:56

Pre pandemic, what was your day to day looking like?

Jennifer Connor 03:01

Um Well, I'm, I have a normal nine to five job. So I was doing that. And actually physically going into the office with other people. So we actually had like, an office with like, you know, 100-150 people in it. And, you know, you'd go and see them every day. You know, every every, you know, once or twice a week there'd be not work related but you know, some kind of social activity that to do, you know, maybe karaoke, maybe maybe something else, you know, maybe on the weekend, go to, you know, grab four or five friends go to brunch. You know, just, I mean, a relatively typical life, I think for a white collar worker at the time, or at least those aspects of life I mean, there's also this entire, queer kink thing, which is a separate impact but that's that wasn't that's not day to day that's once in a while. You know, that's more like you know, once every month or so, you know, do something with you know, that that social social group, which of course also got killed by COVID.

Kit Heintzman 04:28

Staying in the pre pandemic time period, to the extent that you're comfortable sharing would you say something about your experiences with health and healthcare infrastructure?

Jennifer Connor 04:38

Um relatively positive experiences, except for transgender care. That has been hit or miss depending on the insurer and any other depth mostly dependent on the insurer. You know, I'm, you know, what they would cover what they won't cover. And that's, and that's always been bad. Because, you know, just the healthcare system that we live in, because the insurance of the middleman and they're essentially the gatekeepers of what can and can't be done because people don't have, most people don't have the financial resources to pay it up for themselves. Right? So, like, I need electrolysis, insurance will not pay for that. Pre pandemic didn't matter. Right? You know, but I have to have it, it's a requirement. So I'm gonna, you know, fork out 1000s of dollars for for electrolysis, because I don't have a choice. And so, but as far as, like, actual, like, urgent care of like, you know, accidents where I'm, you know, I'm, you know, I've got something wrong with me, you know, I'm sick, you know, an injury or something like that. My experience with health healthcare systems has been reasonable. I think that was reasonable as it can be in our non single payer system.

Kit Heintzman 06:09

When did it start to dawn on you that the pandemic was getting pretty serious?

Jennifer Connor 06:16

Um, January, February, timeframe that year. That's some, I hadn't read too much about it. But some other people that I trust had, and, and they were relating to me how frightened they were, like, how scary this was, because, you know, they dug deeper than the headlines. And, and that's when I started to get a little worried. I mean, I still wasn't excessively worried for like, you know, maybe another month or so. But, but it was definitely more top of mind than it had been.

Kit Heintzman 07:10

What are some of the things they relate to you?

Jennifer Connor 07:14

I'm just more or less getting to the de details of the kind of, I can't remember what the what the term is the are, you know, the transmissibility, you know, statistic was, you know, it was, was, you know, enough higher than one and, and the disease isn't immediately deadly. So it gives a chance to transmit, you know, it's not like ebola where it kills you, you know, pretty quickly. And that, because I have a math back background and like, oh, okay, okay, that is serious. Enough for growth yet. Yeah, that's a problem.

Kit Heintzman 08:02

When lockdown happened, what did your life look like?

Jennifer Connor 08:09

So horrible. It was the first year was, I mean, it was bad, like everybody, you know, everybody had to work from home, right? So there was no, there was no going out. And because I live in San Francisco, rather than say, Texas, everybody here kind of really took it seriously. Right? It was just, you know, it's just part of the culture here. And so it was more or less, like, my roommate and I were pretty isolated. And both of us working at home, which is not great. Right? Because, you know, my, my apartment isn't that big. And, and my, my girlfriend at the time, she took it more seriously than me. For various reasons, but but she and her, she and her wife, Polly, and she and her wife decided that their COVID Circle was just going to be them. And so our relationship, which we had just started a few months earlier. Actually, no, it was more than a few months. It had been a year and a few months,

anyway. Not too much earlier, went into this kind of weird mode where we would see each other but it would always be outdoors and fully masked and at least six feet apart. So they would drive over. And we would walk on like, you know, far apart on the sidewalk and we walk around the block a few times and that was a date. And that's all we did. For until, until we were all vaccinated. So that was, that was pretty rough. But at least I was still living with my roommate, and I was still seeing. And we were still we were still seeing each other. We weren't just weren't being that close. Does that answer your question?

Kit Heintzman 10:27

What did you notice about how the city and the state was handling the pandemic?

Jennifer Connor 10:35

What did I notice at the time or work do I notice now?

Kit Heintzman 10:40

Or

Jennifer Connor 10:44

At the time, like, the precautions and the mandates seem, seemed reasonable, given what the CDC was telling everybody. And, you know, like, I never got to the point where I was, like, wiping down my grocery bags, for instance, but I know people who did. And, and I don't think they're crazy. I think they were reacting to the information that they had in hand. Right? You know, what the experts were telling them, and they're like, you know, we don't know how this thing is going. And, you know, you might need to do this, right, you know, disinfect your mail. Right. And, and I didn't quite go that far. But I was really, really careful. You know, whenever, you know, my roommate, and I would both talk whenever we went to any other anywhere else, with people, right? You know, like, when my girlfriend came over, and we went around the block, you know, I told my roommate, Hey, Zane, my girlfriend's come over, we're gonna go walking around the block just wanted you to know, you know? And, and so it was. And that kind of behavior seemed reasonable, given what we knew at the time, but then when it became quite a bit later, you know, I guess a couple years later, you know, it became, you know, more obvious that like, the CDC was being overcautious that they just didn't know what the pathogen, how it behaved. And, you know, at some point, they learned that, you know, masking outdoors doesn't really do you any good. Right? You know? But, and I, you know, on the one hand, I understand they want to be overcautious, right, you know, because we're talking about public safety. But on the other hand, when they do that, and they miss, you know, they make a mistake, which is human, everybody makes mistakes. But it can really damage the reputation. Right, to the point where now I think, like, nobody trusts the CDC anymore, because they they fucked up. And that's not a good thing, because they actually are disease experts. You know, we should trust them. But, uh, anyway, I'm just rambling. I don't know, I don't know where I'm going. But. But it's, it's like, now when I hear what they're saying. Sometimes I take it with a little grain of salt. Because, you know, you've been bitten a little bit. Especially given you know, I think this is, you know, just human. You know, maybe it's just a subconscious reaction, but COVID and, and the restrictions around it had a huge impact on my life and in the lives of people around me, and I'm sure most of the people in the country and, you know, to discover, like, Oh, we didn't have to do that. You know, it's like, just so you destroyed my life. You know, with some bad science. You know, it's and I realized it was a mistake. Like, it's not wasn't intentional. I get that but still, it it hurts a little, you know?

Kit Heintzman 14:33

Would you share some of those impacts?

Jennifer Connor 14:37

Um, yeah, sure. Work is a big one. My company went from basically a headquarter centric kind of thing where, you know, we had a hunt, you know, a couple 100-200 people, something like that, you know, in a central office, to fully remote and you can live wherever you want and, by the way, we're just going to kind of push most, you know, almost everybody in San Francisco out because they're expensive. Right? And so, so now now we have a similarly sized workforce, except they're scattered, they're all over the place. Other countries, do you have a bunch of people in South America, few in Central America and Canada, you know, the Midwest, Tennessee, I mean, it's, it's all over the place. And so, but there's no, now there is no social component to work at all, really, some of the teams are a little bit more close knit, and they get to know each other. But like, just the type of work I do, and how senior I am. I don't work with other people directly, necessarily, very often. So it's been very, very isolating. Basically, I work alone most of the day, at home, you know, and I'm either at home, where I'm really alone because my roommate moved out, mid pandemic. So like, literally by myself all day. Or I go into the office, and there's one other person in the office, just one, and it's the office manager, and she's not somebody. I mean, sometimes we chat about stuff, but we don't work together, because she's an office manager, and I'm an, I'm a software engineer. So we're, like, not even close to the same job function, right. So there's no reason for us to talk to each other professionally. And yeah, and work is just very, very isolating, I think it might be less so for a lot of people in some people prefer this model. But I think almost all those people are, they have partners, or children, or something at home, you know, in their socialized so that they don't need a social aspect to work, they don't need to make friends. Because it's just the job, you know, they do the rate hours, they get, you know, maybe 10 or 12 hours or whatever, and get out and, and, you know, and that's that, but for me, a work work at least had been in the past very, very social. And I really missed that. And many of my friends moved away. So four my friends moved to Philly. A couple of friends actually, the the wedding that I just went to, they're moving to New York. Some other of my friends are still living in fear of COVID which is fine, because consent, everybody needs to live their lives the way that they they want to live them, but I haven't seen them for years now. And, you know, now the number of in my in my girlfriend moved to Iowa. And so, like the number of people that I'm social with, is like down to none. Give or take because my, my my queer family just dispersed during the pandemic, and left with a couple people that I see once a week at karaoke, but I really don't see them outside that time very often, once in a while, but but not very often. So, you know, the past year, like ever since my roommate moved out. My life is I go to work. And, you know, I go to the office just so I could see people on a bus or something just so I can see of real life people. And, and I'm and I'm home and once a week I go sing karaoke. And that's it. That's my life. And it sucks. And I hate COVID.

Kit Heintzman 18:59

What was it like transferring from being someone with a roommate to no longer having roommate?

Jennifer Connor 19:07

That that was that was hard. And that. That was that was actually a side effect of it was an unintended side effect of COVID that that happened. Basically, my roommate is actually kind of a hermit and prefers to live alone. My roommate at the time, but he couldn't afford it because San Francisco is really expensive. And like about a year into the pandemic, a year year and a half rents dropped in San Francisco. Unfortunately, they're backup now but by the time and this was like the very, very first time that that that Zayn could afford a place by themselves. And so they jumped at it. They're like this aint gonna happen again. And then they're probably right. So so so they

found a rent or rent control place that they can afford and they're happy and they're in their little hermit cave. So, so in that respect, I mean, it's, it was good for them. Not so much for me because I'm very, very social. And I haven't been able to find a replacement roommate. Mostly because of the honestly, the physical structure of this unit that I'm in is, it's just not not a room that's desirable to most people. And, you know, like, no, windows only has three walls lacks privacy, which for some people's is perfectly fine. For most people, it's most people it's not. So that that actually, that's a yeah, that's, that's been, that's been hard on me. Because it simultaneously with all the other loss of social work social, roommates social, friends social, all disappearing at the same time. Okay, and zoom just doesn't cut it. It's not the same. At least for me.

Kit Heintzman 21:14

Tell me about that. Tell me some about something about what's different about the kinds of interactions you've been able to have pre pandemic, in contrast to the kind are doing now.

Jennifer Connor 21:26

This, I don't know whether this is an effective, my just an aspect of generational difference. You know, like, I didn't grow up with this kind of thing, right? You know, smartphones didn't exist. You know, the internet was just, you know, some DoD thing, you know, and maybe at a couple universities, you know, there's no World Wide Web. And you know, people actually call each other on their telephones and that's how they kept in touch, but there's certainly no video interaction like this. And and I just don't I don't connect in this medium with people very well. Really, at all. It just, it feels this feels barely more personal than a phone call. To me it's not Yeah, it's, it's just, it's not sufficient. I need real world. Like, you know, sitting with somebody, you know, to feel like I'm getting you know, social goodness I out of out of the interaction. And that extends to things like dating and stuff like that, like I've never done electronic dating. You know, online dating. I just, I just don't like it. I just don't like interact. I don't like interacting with people that way that much. Or not saying I don't like it, but it's not the same it's not nearly as fulfilling to me

Kit Heintzman 23:17

What are some of the things that maybe you noticed about San Francisco and the queer scene with things shutting down? Have there been things that haven't reopened? What's it like are you going to the same bars now that things are opening a little What's that looking like?

Jennifer Connor 23:32

I'm actually a lot a fair number of things closed down. There are definitely still some shuttered storefronts you know bar fronts down have done and done in Castro where I live that that we're definitely open pre pandemic and they still haven't opened but the the scene that I was in was not gay. It was more queer you know, more more more definitely much more on the on the FEM side and that I'm not sure that exists again yet. I a the, the gay male scene is thriving. Well, maybe not thriving. It's it's probably not back where it was three years ago, but it's doing reasonably well. The gay bars down and down and Castro are the ones that are open or doing doing fine. And and the euro. I don't know how explicit we want to get in this. Okay. So in San Francisco there is in especially in the queer scene, the queer culture there, there's a kink culture and pre pandemic. There were parties parties have a you know, sexual and intimate nature and, and kink nature like BDSM. And these these things happen all the time, like every week, you know, there's three or four that you could pick from and go to. And that of course, ended, right, you know, that was boom, done. And many of those facilities closed permanently, where where were these, these types of events would be hosted. And, and they haven't reopened. For the most part, there are a couple that

are still around, but not many, it is much, much diminished. And definitely, from hearsay, because I don't attend male gay play parties. But from hearsay, those things started up again, like a year ago. Or a little bit more like, I think gay guys had just had enough of the isolation like, fuck this shit. I'm gonna go to a sex party. But the but the non gay male parties haven't really come back. And the queer, like, in there were never that many places that had a queer scene that wasn't mostly gay male. That's, and I'm not 100% sure why maybe guys just like to go out to bars more than women do? I don't know. But, you know, it was, it was never a really important part of the queer scene in San Francisco. And now, now it's even less so. I'm not I think there's might be one like femme leaning gay bar that's opened in San Francisco now. So yeah, the it's not really back yet. I'm not sure when it will be. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 26:57

The past few years have had so much going on. That wasn't just COVID-19 I'm wondering other than the pandemic, what have been some of the other social and political issues on your mind?

Jennifer Connor 27:11

I'd say I'm not sure how much I want to talk about that. Just let me just say for the record the the direction at least that you know, 30-40% of the country wants to go in give or take is horrifying to me. The the insurrection, horrifying to me the you know this, and I'm not, you know, I'm not a law and order kind of person. Because there are lots of laws that I think shouldn't be enforced. But, you know, trying to overthrow the government. Yeah. So, that one I care about and the, and everything that's gone along with that, because there's a basically, queer people, women mino, minorities of any stripe, right? You know, black people, Hispanics, Asians, Muslims, have all been kind of targeted these these past few years more than, than they haven't in the recent past at least. And, you know, I mean, I know, it's definitely worse than, you know, the 60s and 70s. But, but it hasn't been this bad in a while to the point where even like, the legislature's getting in on it. And that frightens the shit out of me. You know, when when the when, you know that a state elects a bunch of people that do things like makes being a trans kid a felony, right? You know, like, that kind of thing really infuriates me and makes me not want to live in this country. A lot of times it's because, like, Why do I want to live with people who want to kill me? And, and it's depressing. And that's the primary reason I got off of social media like, I don't know, probably about a year and a half ago now. And was just friends, friends who are really well meaning have friends who are not and they apologize for not she's really a good person. You know? But, you know, she's telling me that, you know, I'm a child molester or, or something, you know, and and I just couldn't take that anymore. So, I have intentionally kind of tuned out what's going on politically. Because I, I know that I can't take that, that much distress. At the same time I'm going through all this other distress. I have to limit the because otherwise I would, I don't know what I do. Is I you can only have so many, you know, so many catastrophes going on at once. And that's catastrophe and I can't do anything about it. So I'm just going to kind of ignore it as best I can. I don't know if that answered your question.

Kit Heintzman 30:54

Would you share something about what it felt like when you ditched the accounts. I'm sorry. What did it feel like when you ditched the social media accounts?

Jennifer Connor 31:10

It was it was kind of liberating for awhile, I mean, life. I mean, I won't say life got better because that's not quite right. Because nothing about like my day to day living changed, it was just what changed was, you know, my

daily you know, scrolling through Facebook feed being like, getting enraged. Right, and, you know, you know, hate responding, you know, like, like, you know, what the fuck is wrong with you? How could you treat your, you know, whatever, like not having that on a daily basis that just and a lot of people in the country live like that on a daily basis. They thrive on it, but it's I can't I can't do it. I just I just I just can't I don't have that kind of fight in me anymore. Maybe I did when I was like 25. But no, I just I just can't do it. And so in that respect, you know, and then I still haven't gone back on social media for the for that reason. And in that respect, it's been I would say it's been necessary it's it's a it was a it was a way to survive because I wouldn't have survived if I'd stayed on social media I think I would have either lost hope completely and just given up on life like like given up go kill myself on life you know, or I would have you know, flown into some kind of rage and you know, go you know, point a bazooka at some assholes and either way either of those outcomes is not good. It's so so I what I needed to do for my mental health, but it also means that I've lost connecting with people that I care about, because that's how they connect that's how they keep up with with each other doing like, you know, I find out about you know, hey, we had you know, we had a party last week and why didn't you coincided? Well, I'm not on social media, I thought you knew that. Did you explicitly invite me if you want me to come to your party, you know, like that kind of thing has happened a lot and that is an unfortunately that's also something that I'm craving for my mental health. But the trade off isn't there for me yet. Like I am willing to live without the social interactions as long as I don't have to be in that hate cesspit cesspool

Kit Heintzman 34:10

How have you been going about getting information sort of more intentionally and in a more controlled venue?

Jennifer Connor 34:19

I'm doing just public you know, staying informed associated press it's Associated Press. Sometimes BBC News. Not video like I just you know, I have I have apps on my phone. I just you know, scroll through news. Like AP Reuters, BBC and sometimes NPR once in a while. Just trying to stay away from extremes on either side. I mean, I'm I'm a tree hugging liberal. But the liberal news media is just almost as clickbaity As the right as the far right news media, like, you know, I don't see much of a difference in profit motive. I see much I see a huge ethical difference between say MSNBC and Fox News. But as far as like the way they conduct their business and trying to grab headlines with, you know, sensational, you know, language and, you know, I don't want that I just want that I just want the fucking news. And AP and AP AP and Reuters do it. They're reasonably good, good job at that. So that's how I keep up with what what middle of the road people think is going on in the country.

Kit Heintzman 35:45

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

Jennifer Connor 35:49

Health? I don't know if I've ever thought about it. Um I haven't really thought of I mean, other than, like, physical and mental health are both important. I don't think I've thought about it more deeply. I mean, I know that I'm not living a healthy life. Right. I that's very clear to me. Like, this is not psychologically healthy. The way the way many people are living now, including myself. Which can have, you know, impacts on physical health too, like, you know, I'm not eating as well as I should be. Because, you know, I like cooking, but I like cooking for people. And there are no people. So, you know, I don't cook and you know, eat frozen dinners or whatever. And but, yeah, sorry, I haven't really thought about what that word means that deeply.

Kit Heintzman 37:05

When you say that, what, what are some of the things you would like for your own health?

Jennifer Connor 37:13

I'd say the, the three. For me, I think the three things I need are really all social. I need I need a roommate, or cat, I could live with cat that would be an acceptable alternative. Like someone to talk to you if they don't understand what I'm saying. A job with people actually in an office, which might actually be kind of hard to find. Now in my field. And an outside of work, social group of friends who do things together outside of, you know, like, the ones that we karaoke, you know, people that actually you know, go to brunch with, or go see a movie or, you know, whatever, get together a place playing play a board game. You know, that's, uh, I mean, these are all social things. These are all I, I want real people to talk to in real in, not in not just in real life, because this is in real life. But you know, like, in person. That for me, that is by far the thing I need the most. Because without these things, it's difficult to do anything else. To summon the will to do anything else, like I, I could probably, I could probably do with a different job. But I'm kind of depressed and I don't feel like looking for a job. I, I could I could do with a different apartment because this room is impossible to rent. I've just kind of depressed I don't want to look. You know, it's it's kind of a catch 22 And I realized that but it's still, you know, it's hard to overcome one's own psychological barriers. I don't even know if I'm answering your questions anymore. I'm just rambling.

Kit Heintzman 39:27

Fun Facts about oral history interviews. There's no such thing as rambling. Everything you're sharing is, so long as it's an honest answer. It's an answer. So there's no rambling and you really can't do anything wrong. I'm wondering if there's anything more you'd be comfortable saying about sort of depression and inertia?

Jennifer Connor 39:56

Beyond what I've said already, I'm not, I'm not sure. I mean, I have thought about killing myself a few times or over this pandemic, then, you know, I stopped myself, and it's like, No, you really don't want that. And it's, it's just, you're in a bad place right now. And that's, and that's very, very fine. All. Right. And, and, you know, I, you know, I hope that the future is different. You know, that we that we recover from this, that everybody just isn't scared to come out of their homes permanently, because that would be I don't know how a society can live that way. That, that that feels like I think that that's how a country would die. Right is if you know that, that kind of thing happens. So it has to get better. Hopefully, it won't get worse before it gets better. But but it has to get, it has to get better because people can't live like this. And I know I'm not the only one. Yeah, I don't think I have anything else that there.

Kit Heintzman 41:27

What are some of the things that you are hoping for in a longer term future?

Jennifer Connor 41:40

Look, that people start, stop being afraid of being out outside. And some people unfortunately, have legitimate reasons. I know a couple of people who are immunocompromised, can't take can't take the vaccine. I know another person that has a congenital respiratory problem. And COVID scares the bejesus out of them, you know. But I'm hoping most of us can, can get to the point where, you know, we're actually doing things together. Instead of individually, like even this, we're doing this interview together, but it's not the same. You know. That's one and politically completely unrelated to COVID. I just wish politicians would stop using minorities as as something to

attack and inflames their base that I wish we could actually debate taxes or, or health care or any number of other things, but we can't talk about those things. Because because we're talking about all these all these social things. And, and then that's also not good for the country. Because that we got 300 and something million people, there's going to be some diversity, we're not all going to be the same. It's inevitable. In any population, that's reasonably large. And we have to learn to live with each other, if we can't learn to live with each other, we will not survive. And right now, it feels like we can't learn to live with each other. That that's kind of where we are, and we seem to be going. That doesn't seem to be stopping. That and I'm certainly on one side more than the other, but both sides to an extent are like not willing to share the country with you know, with with some subset of people. And and, unfortunately, it has to stop on both sides. Right? It doesn't work if one side stops, right. You know, it's a turn the other cheek doesn't work when the other person just keeps hitting you. Right. at you, and I don't know what the solution to that is. And I don't know if there is a solution to that. Honestly, in our current system. I don't know whether the failure of the United States is inevitable. It feels like it might be and that's that scares me because I think As long as there's money to be made by politics, this is just going to keep happening in one way or another, because somebody's going to see, you know, somebody's gonna say, hey, you know, if I demonize these people and get these votes, then I'll stay in office longer, and I can give kickbacks to my brother, or whatever. Right? You know, as, as long as politicians have incentive to demonize, demonize a subset of the population, they will, so the incentive has to go away. And I don't, I don't see how that can happen. Because the people who are in power benefit from the incentives. They benefit personally, it's a greed thing. And people are greedy. And I don't know how you can convince people to not be greedy. Anyway, far beyond topic of COVID Now, I don't have a lot of hope for the United States to be perfectly honest.

Kit Heintzman 45:49

How are you feeling about the immediate future?

Jennifer Connor 45:58

Cautious. Um I mean it still feels like we're balancing on an edge. And it could go either way. I'm hoping it comes back to sanity. But I wouldn't place a bet on it.

Kit Heintzman 46:40

What are some of the ways that you've kept in touch with people over the course of a pandemic and sort of Who are some of the people that you've chosen to keep up with?

Jennifer Connor 46:50

Um my family. Ah. Other Other than the people that I go to karaoke with who I don't really keep up with outside of karaoke. Actually, very, very few people will, like, I'll text some of my friends. That's honestly about it. And not many of them because I'm not on social media anymore. interactions are pretty minimal, they need to be deliberate. You can't just share somebody and somebody sees it. Right, passively, you have to actually text a specific person, you know, which takes a lot more deliberate action. And that's more difficult to do when you're kind of depressed and don't want to do anything. Like, you know, oh, I could try to catch up. You know, I could try to you know, ping this person that I last talked to two months ago, I could watch this thing on Netflix. And most of the time, Netflix wins out, unfortunately.

Kit Heintzman 48:06

What have you been watching on Netflix?

Jennifer Connor 48:13

For the first part of the first couple of years, I went away from my so I love horror movies. I love bad movies. I love bad horror movies. And I love dystopian future kind of movies like dark, you know, dark science fiction, you know, kind of stuff. And after the pandemic really got in full swing, like about the same time I dropped off social media. I stopped watching those things. And like, I want to see fluff. I just want to see happy things. And so that's one of the first couple years so I watched a bunch of like, I've seen just like a bunch of like, stupid bad teen teen stuff, you know, young adult things and you know, things that are related to like, you know, maybe a little dark but not really dark. Like Sabrina the Teenage Witch, you know, kind of level stuff, you know, it sounds like a horror, but no, it's not really. And that's pretty much continued. I have seen like, a couple horror things since then. Like in the past few months, but not many. I really haven't gotten back into it. into the darker kinds of things that that I would watch before. Like one of my, one of my favorite movies, actually, that I haven't seen quite a while is like Brazil. And that's really dark, like the ending is like, oh my god that, you know, I couldn't watch that now. It's it would just, it would just be too much. And you know, and I'm watching, you know, more just light hearted, you know, comedic happy things. You know, sometimes it's usually like a little bit of a dark streak, but not not not that much. And I don't think I'm gonna get back to, although they don't, it doesn't feel as difficult to watch those things as it did a couple years ago. I don't know if I'm going to get back into like, the full swing of that until, you know, until things are some semblance of normal, whatever the new normal is, hopefully the new normal isn't everybody staying home. But you know.

Kit Heintzman 51:00

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

Jennifer Connor 51:09

Not enough. The only thing that's kept me sane is actually karaoke. The person who runs the karaoke that I go to every week, did an online karaoke, first once a week, then twice a week. And for a while. That was the only social interaction I had, was once or was twice a week doing karaoke over zoom. Which is not ideal. But it was something you know, it was, it was some kind of social interaction, where mostly it's listening to the people singing. But you know, because everybody's feeling kind of lonely, there be some conversations in between songs and stuff like that. So you know, there's a little bit a little bit going on. And I think that was really, I really, really needed that, because I wasn't really getting that at work. Because, you know, through [inaudible] zoom calls at work or not socializing, we're talking about work. And my wife and kid who, who I don't live with, sorry, I guess we haven't gotten into this, but I'm married and have a child, but they live on the east coast. And, and my wife doesn't like talking on the phone or video calling. She just doesn't like it. She prefers to text. And my son has no attention span. He's, he's, he's, he's 11 Now, but you know, he's like, you know, he wanders into, you know, when I do have a zoom, you know, video calls my wife, you know, he wanders in frame says Hi, and walks out. And that's it. That's the extent of our interaction. And so I didn't, I couldn't really get because we video called so rarely, I couldn't really get a social, you know, needs met that way. Just because she doesn't like do that. So, you know consent, in all things. I don't know did that answer the question? And in the weekly walks with my girlfriend, and until we were until until we were vaccine, both vaccinated, then then we then we could actually share space with each other that that helped a lot, actually, vaccines came out and we all got vaccinated and boosted and can actually spend time. I mean, it was still cautious. You know, we were still like not being intimate. But we were at least, like, indoors in the same room, you know, kind of thing and that's a vast improvement to you know, let's take an hour walk around the block.

Kit Heintzman 54:11

What was it like being on the other coast from your son during the pandemic?

Jennifer Connor 54:17

No different than pre pandemic. I've been living here for eight years. So ever since he was three and he's always had that attention span. So that actually didn't didn't really change at all. I mean, I guess both of our mental health may be different because of the pandemic but our you know, the amount that we interacted online didn't really change, and or for or for my wife and I there was nothing really changed about that is pretty much the same at that I think the only thing that really changed was the life situations that we were, we were all going through. And because she's a school teacher, and that is a whole nother can of worms in the pandemic. And, you know, she's living in, you know, relatively affluent white suburb, although her school isn't particularly white and affluent, but the county is and, you know, and there's all that rage about mask mandates and keeping the kids home from school. And, you know, like, I, I don't, you know, I don't want to see these kids, you know, all day long. You, you, you take them or else, you know, it was, it was, I'm not gonna say violent, but a lot of angry parents and it made made her life kind of stressful, but it didn't. I don't think it really affected. Like how often we communicate or the way that we communicate.

Jennifer Connor 55:58

Can I ask you to tell me what it's like to try and sing karaoke through zoom?

Jennifer Connor 56:06

Sure. It was an adventure. And in fact, it's still going on, she's still hosting, I think twice weekly. I don't, I don't typically go to the online karaoke anymore. Because she also is in person once a week. And I much prefer in person I like moving around. I like being emotional singing for me is cathartic. And I sing songs that I'm feeling at the moment. Very, very often, sometimes it's just like, hey, I want to I want to sing the song because I want to sing the song. But usually, it's like, you know, something's happening in my life or in I'm in singing is like therapy. So I choose music that resonates with the way that I'm feeling at that time. And helping me work through issues. And so in that respect, it was it was, it was, it was good, because it didn't, it wasn't just a little bit of socialization, but it was also a chance to kind of vent, you know, or, you know, in some way, not necessarily like venting, like, you know, anger vent, but you know, or being, you know, you know, showing your depression by singing a really depressing song or, you know, whatever, however, you need to work through it. Right. So in that respect, it was, it was pretty good. But it's, it's not the same as like holding a mic in your hand onstage, and moving around and seeing the audience and how they're reacting to what you're doing, which you can't really do in like a zoom thing, because you've got like the lyrics on the screen, and you can't see what can't see everybody because the lyrics are blocking them out. So it's, it's not the same, but it was it was sufficient. It was an adventure to get to work out the technical aspects of making that work smoothly. It actually took we kept trying different things out, like, well, like how but if you play the music here, and did you know, and you know, just because there's there's lag when you're when you're online, and when we finally figured it out, but it took a few months to figure out like the technical solution to actually being able to sing, and have everybody hear your voice and the music at the prop properly synchronized. That's actually that's actually a good like in the Zoom chat. That's actually a good, you know, full column of instructions on how to do that. But it can be done.

Kit Heintzman 59:03

You'd mentioned getting vaccinated when you decided to get well first, how did you decide to get vaccinated? And then once you did, how easy was it to access?

Jennifer Connor 59:12

Um, that was a no brainer. Like that was patiently awaiting, you know, my chance to get vaccinated. Like, hey, you know, I'm 55, Can I do it? Where I wasn't at the time I was, I guess was 52/53. But you know, can I do it yet? Can I do it? Can I do it? Um, and getting to remember the first vaccine actually wasn't that hard. Although it was definitely harder here than it was in red counties. Just because the supply you, You know, the demand and supply was was very, very different. So, so I, I wasn't able to get it. Like, as soon as I could hypothetically have gotten it, you know, as far as like the regulations around round, you know which subset of the population is okay to get it now. It was probably a couple months after that. But yeah, it wasn't too hard and booton the booster was, was was easy I was she just walked down the street into, you know, the Street Clinic and got the booster. But it certainly, but I remember during the first couple of months, and I mean, a lot of us weren't able to, and most of my friends weren't because most of our friends are younger, younger than me, they're 30 somethings, so they were, you know, for much further down on the priority list. And, you know, I had a lot of friends who were like, you know, driving, you know, three, four counties over, you know, some somewhere, you know, where the demand was less. Because people because people weren't getting vaccinated as a matter of political identity. And so they have all these vaccines that are, like, you know, like, especially the ones that had to be like, refrigerated, and you know, that that had a shelf life to them. And, like, please come take a vaccine. So, actually had a, I knew quite a few people who did, who ended up doing that. But I just, I just waited a little while until the supply was better in San Francisco.

Kit Heintzman 01:01:15

And it sounds like being vaccinated had a really positive improvement in terms of opening things up for you.

Jennifer Connor 01:01:21

Yeah, yeah, it did. It did. I mean, I, I was never actually that worried about catching COVID myself and I did catch it once post vaccination and boost just because I'm not that old. And I'm not that unhealthy. Like, I don't have any conditions other than being slightly obese, that are real risk factors for for COVID. So I wasn't I wasn't really terribly worried about catching it myself because I was pretty sure I wasn't going to get that sick. But I do worry about giving it to somebody else. Right and and, you know, and I don't want to be responsible for somebody for you know, for some old person's death or some homeless person on the street that I'm walking by, or, you know, who doesn't have access to health care and is higher risk. So getting the getting the vaccine gave me a bit more peace of mind about about how much of a danger I would be to others. And, and it also opened up the possibility of actually spending you know, hugging my girlfriend which I hadn't done for a while. So that was a past. Hugs. Hugs are necessary.

Kit Heintzman 01:02:57

Has your relationship to touch changed much?

Jennifer Connor 01:03:02

No, personally, no. With many people I know. Yes. So I certainly get a lo participate in a lot less touch than I did pre COVID. But my like, I don't fear it personally.

Kit Heintzman 01:13:33

When you coughed COVID, what was that like, and when was that?

Jennifer Connor 01:03:38

It was December. So this past December? Might have been this past December. It's hard to remember it to this past December or the previous December.

Kit Heintzman 01:03:52

If it's postvaccination it's December 2021.

Jennifer Connor 01:03:56

Okay. Yeah, yeah. Okay. Good point. Um it was it was not for me it wasn't any worse than like a flu I was really not not much I more or less, very rundown. So just tired all the time for like a good week, give or take. So maybe not a flu actually, that that's maybe a lot more like mono in that respect, you know, just just totally wiped out. And, you know, I mean, there was some coughing you know, is respiratory illness and but nothing Uh, no, no really bad symptoms. Lost my sense of smell for and that continued for another month or two after it after I got through COVID. And it probably took about two to three weeks until most of the symptoms, everything except for the smell had gone. So it wasn't it wasn't wasn't horrible. I mean, there was nowhere close to hospitalization or anything like that it was just like, I'm really tired. I want to go to sleep.

Kit Heintzman 01:05:26

You think of this pandemic as a historic event?

Jennifer Connor 01:05:30

Yeah. I mean, you know, maybe not, I don't know, it's hard to say, ah, oh, not having been alive in 1918. It's, it's, you know, it's hard for me to compare it to the last, you know, major one that happened that the Spanish like a Spanish flu, I guess was. But it feels like it had a it had enough affects enough effects to the world outside of the medical problem. Right, so there was just a huge amount of not even political infighting within within countries, but also between countries like, you know, other countries relationship with China changed. For instance, based on their handling, and the you know, that pots is maybe this came out of a lab or whatever, right. And, and the way that different countries decide to tackle the, the epidemic, you know, like, you know, Sweden took a different approach than most of the rest of Europe, for instance. And in that respect, it feels almost like COVID is almost more historically noteworthy, because of, not necessarily because of the effects of the disease itself, and how many people were killed. But for all the impacts that it had on society at this time, because we are so much better connected, both physically and virtually, than we were at the last epidemic, you know, like the Spanish flu, but like, you know, people didn't fly across the country. Right. And, you know, you couldn't go around the world and hours. And we're just, people are just so much more, they travel much longer distances, and they interact with many more people than just, you know, their little village that they live in. And also, the internet has given us cheap and easy connectivity for most. I'm not gonna say most people know, because I'm not sure whether that's true, but at least most of the First and Second World, you know, citizens. And this, the ease of communication, and the ease of travel, I think made the effects of this a lot worse than, than, then then if this had happened, you know, 50 years ago, or 100 years ago. It's just because the, you know, the social media, the internet, you know, amplifies all voices, including the crazy ones. And that, you know, didn't have that so much in 1918. You know, so it's an and it's fast, you know, if, you know, some state did something wonky, you know, in 1918, you might

not learn about it for a month, or something, but now, now, it's immediate, you know, you know, exactly, you know, literally immediately and it feels like the speed with which people connect with each other. Made both, both virtually and physically made this a lot worse than it would have been. Which is, you know, one of the drawbacks to technology, I guess, diseases can spread a lot faster. If you can move faster.

Kit Heintzman 01:09:20

What do you think scholars in the humanities in the social sciences, so disciplines like sociology or literature or film studies or poli sci, what should we be doing to help us understand the human side of the pandemic?

Jennifer Connor 01:09:40

The kind of thing that you're doing right now is actually I think, I think, really, really worthwhile because otherwise, history is, I mean, history is so often written by people in power. And but their views don't generally reflect the populace or lives of populace in the way and way that they live in what their day to day existence is like. You know, like, if, you know if, you know, Katrina were written by, you know, President Bush, right, the story of Katrina, right, it's like, I don't understand why these people just just didn't just hop into their SUVs and drive drive away. Right, you know, because it total disconnect with the way actual normal, you know, average people live that aren't, you know, wealthy, or, or even, you know, middle class, right. And history isn't written by poor people. Right, it's, even professional historians, generally aren't, you know, below the poverty line, necessarily. You know, they're probably living, reasonable middle class existence, you may or may not own their house, but you know, they're not, like, you know, you know, worrying about where their next meal was coming from. And the only way to know what the lives were like, for the actual masses is to record what the lives are, like, for the actual masses in some way.

Jennifer Connor 01:11:21

And not that I'm necessarily in that demographic, either. I mean, I'm, I'm pretty well off, I do fine financially. You know, but, but but I have a lot of friends who don't. And, you know, I think it's important to tell not just my story, but their stories to, you know, people who you don't have the means, and who, you know, I have, I have plenty of friends who COVID did affect much more severely than, than it affected me. I mean, it definitely affected me, emotionally, psychologically. But it didn't really affect me physically, that much, and I didn't lose any, anybody very close to me. In fact, I'm not even sure if I know anybody who's who's died of COVID I mean, I probably do, but I don't know of anybody that, that I know, that style of COVID Certainly no immediate family, no, none of my close friends. And but I certainly have friends who do have, who have lost family members to COVID, and I've lost good friends to COVID You know, people who are from, you know, different different backgrounds and, you know, came came from poverty, one of my, one of my friends grew up in the desert in Southern California, and, you know, some tiny podunk town and, you know, like, two of her cousins died or something like that, and, you know, the family next door, they had like four people who died, you know, it's, and I, and I think the only way you're gonna get not you specifically, but you in the royal you are going to get comprehend that, or, or teach future people how to comprehend that is to actually go to those people, and talk with them about what their lives are like, and what happened. I think that's, that's the only alternative. Otherwise, you're only gonna, you're gonna, you know, historians are just gonna get what, what leaders, what leaders said. And I think we have the ability now much more than we did, you know, before the internet and the advent of these kinds of the technology that we have to actually do that. I mean, I, you know, not, not that that kind of thing hasn't been done in the past, but I'm not sure that it's the normal thing to do for historians. And, and it would require, you know, back in the, you know, the 60s 50s earlier, you know, would have required, you know, beating the pavement, right, you know,

you'd actually have to get out and you know, go door to door and visit barber shops, and you know, whatever, to get those stories, and that's a lot of work. It's it's easier to do it like this. So, so please continue on. Find more people of all socio economic backgrounds to, to do this kind of thing with.

Kit Heintzman 01:14:31

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. What would you tell them they cannot forget about the pandemic?

Jennifer Connor 01:14:58

Give me a moment, I need to think about this. I need to think about how I'm going to say this. As much as possible. And I realized this is an almost impossible thing to do. The science should not be political. I think that is, by far, the biggest pothole, we stepped in and not just the United States everywhere, is that it became political, that whether or not you get vaccinated became political, whether it were a mask became political. What, you know, it's, it was no longer like, it felt like nobody actually cared. What we should do to be safe. That that was actually not part of the discussion, it became a matter of, of identity, on whether facts were true or not a political identity and that I think, is the most dangerous thing about this, this pandemic, if we'd been able to have a rational discussion, public discussion about this, and you know, if the CDC had been able to come forward and say, Yeah, you know, those things we told you last year, we, we actually screwed up. You know, sometimes sometimes the science is science, science gets it wrong, and that's fine. And scientists, scientists know this. Right. But if they'd been able to explain that better, you know, and it made made it not. Public policy should not be a matter of political identity. I think that that, that that's my, that's my big takeaway. From this, but I don't know how you make that happen. I don't I don't have any advice on how to actually achieve that.

Kit Heintzman 01:17:15

I want to thank you so much for spending this time here with me today, and for the kind thoughtfulness of your answers. Those are all the questions I know how to ask at this moment. So right now, I just want to open from space, if there's anything you want to share that I haven't made room for, please take some space and share.

Jennifer Connor 01:17:40

I just miss people, just really miss people. That's a, I mean, it's, it's damaging. I mean, I think I think we'd be it's, I don't know, I feel like compared to a horrific things that have happened in the past. To wide swaths of the population this is, this is not so bad. But it still hurts. You know, it's still painful, it's still something. You know, it's something I'm relatively old now. But even if I were young, you know, if I were 10, or something, I would remember this for the rest. This is, you know, one of those things that you just remember, like, you know, I remember where I wasn't yet, when I heard the Challenger blew up, right, you know, or, you know, it's, this is not something that any of us are going to forget about. We're going to take this in, and the, you know, the things that happen in the way that we felt, are going to be permanent fixtures of our lives in in like, you know, I think much the same way that say, The Great Depression was perfect reflection for my grandparents lives. That had affected everything that they did after that, living to that, and I think that was, that was a far worse situation than the one we've been living through. But, but I think similar in that respect, and that it's, you know, it just kind of changes the world and it changes the way the way the way you behave and and maybe, you know, maybe it changes your goals, or you know, what, what you want to do with your life. I know, like after the like, for instance, after the Great Depression, like that generation became serious savers. Right and financially right it changed changed the

way an entire generation conducted their personal finances. Right, which has a huge impact, which then got undone by, you know, their kids. Right. But but, you know, that was that was a huge lasting change for decades from from that experience. And I think I think COVID is going to maybe not as not a substantial effect, but I think it will have an effect, like, as long as these people live through it are alive. Anyway, maybe that's it.

Jennifer Connor 01:20:23

Thank you so much.

Kit Heintzman 01:20:25

You're welcome.