

# Transcript of Interview with Lukas Soto by Kit Heintzman

**Interviewee:** Lukas Soto

**Interviewer:** Kit Heintzman

**Date:** 05/30/2022

**Location (Interviewee):** Vancouver, Washington

**Location (Interviewer):**

**Transcribed By:** Angelica S Ramos

## **Some of the things we discussed include:**

Living with their Elder, Dean Barlese; dialysis, diabetic, immunocompromised. Making precautions to protect Elders. Taking risks to protect Elders. Father's death in prison in Arizona, June 2020; traveling to wash and prepare the body. Apprenticing in traditional death work; death work and Two Spirits. Rising awareness about the importance of BIPOC in death work, ancestral knowledge and death work. Training as an End of Life doula. Medical racism and food desserts. Gender bias in diagnosis. Assisting others in getting medical care during the pandemic, amputation. The ripple effects of anti-racism in the wake of George Floyd. The National Guard and Portland police officers terrorizing people during the George Floyd protest. Slowing down. Having been a teen mother, going to prison as a teenager, sobering up, entering higher education and leaving education. Torture in prisons. COVID in the prisons. Trans women in prison. Solitary confinement. Indigenous people having survived several apocalyptic times before this pandemic. Previous individual traumas preparing people for the traumas of this moment. Holistic medicines. First foods. Losing ceremony during the pandemic. Western medicine, insurance codes, for profit healthcare. Trans people as the scapegoat and boogey men of American conservative politics. Trump's erosion of trans rights. Transphobic health inequities and disease disparities. Having friends who caught COVID in Jan 2020; long-COVID. Capitalism determining public health policy. Medicaid. Interstate travel for healthcare. Dating a nurse at the beginning of the pandemic; different risk tolerance thresholds; positionality and safety; positionality and life expectancy. Communication, lessons from safer sex. Shrinking friendship circles. Comparisons with the flu vaccine. Changing ideas about the value of education and credentialism. Missing out on graduation. Losing faith in educational systems. The lived reality of students in poverty. Pedagogical violence. The absence of teachers and professors of color. People of color and other marginalized people in positions of leadership. Racial equity work. The California forest fires. High functioning burn out. White supremacy is toxic to everyone. Seeing health through the lens of the medicine wheel. Cosmology. Comparing stigma around HIV/AIDS and COVID. Touch and health. Spirituality and health. Affection in Latino culture. Mass shootings. Children living with the reality that they could be murdered in the classroom. The mass shooting murder in Buffalo, NY on 14 May 2022. History is not as far away as one might imagine: Elders who are still alive remembering the first hand accounts of the Indian Wars and Snake Wars.

**Kit Heintzman** 00:00:00

Hello.

**Lukas Soto** 00:00:01

Hey

**Kit Heintzman** 00:00:02

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

**Lukas Soto** 00:00:08

Yes. My full name is Lucas Maximiliano Soto. The time right now is 10:07am Pacific Time, and I am currently in Vancouver, Washington.

**Kit Heintzman** 00:00:21

And what's the date?

**Lukas Soto** 00:00:23

Today is May 30 2022.

**Kit Heintzman** 00:00:27

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

**Lukas Soto** 00:00:35

Yes, I do.

**Kit Heintzman** 00:00:37

Thank you so much. Could I just start by asking you to introduce yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening to this? What would you want them to know about you?

**Lukas Soto** 00:00:45

Yeah, so like I said, my name is Lukas Soto. I use they them pronouns in English and elle en Espanol, I'm a mixed race Chile Mapuche, and then Minnesota Chippewa or Ojibwe and Western European. I grew up in the Pacific Northwest, and lived in Oregon for the better part of 30 years. And I currently reside on the Pyramid Lake Paiute reservation in northwestern Nevada, where I live with my elder Dean bar lease, who had been kind of apprenticing or mentoring under when it comes to traditional death work.

**Kit Heintzman** 00:01:29

Tell me a story about what life and the pandemic has been like for you.

**Lukas Soto** 00:01:35

Um, yeah, so in 2020, I was finishing my thesis, I had been in school for five years up until that point, and was wrapping up my degree. And the week before I was supposed to graduate, I got a phone call that my father had died unexpectedly in the prison where he was at, in Kingman, Arizona. And because I was the next of kin, I had to, you know, make some decisions around what was going to be done with his body. And after sitting with things for a bit, what I heard very clearly is that I needed to travel down to Arizona to to wash and dress my father and prepare him for cremation. And upon talking to his siblings, who I haven't hadn't talked to some of them since I was like nine years old. There was a lot of pushback, people were a little bit confused as to why in the height of the pandemic, because that was, yeah, June of 2020, things were pretty chaotic as far as you know, the unpredictability of knowing what what was to come and people were kind of, you know, just stationed in place quarantining. But I knew that it was, you know, the right thing to do. So, I flew down to Vegas and made the drive to Kingman. And went dealt, you know, because he died in the prison, the protocol was a little bit different.

They had to, you know, do a full autopsy and everything. And so, by the time that I got to him, he had been deceased for about a week. And I let them know, you know, we're native, and, you know, this is part of the work that we have to do, and they were very gracious and we're like, you can be in the room alone with him and do whatever you need to have as much time and so we did that and then after that, after we, you know, prepared him to be cremated, I went, I took my brothers up into the mountains, they're, like above the Mojave Desert, and went and smoke pipe. And when we got back to their b&b Later that day, I was like, you know, I really feel like this is work that I'm supposed to be doing. This had been it had been almost a year to the date that a close friend of mine had died by suicide, gunshot wound to the head, and his family had asked me to wash and dress him and help assist them with preparations for for his cremation and whatnot. And so, it had been about about a year since that had happened. And then after losing my father and doing that ceremony for the second time, I was like, you know, I really think that this is something I'm supposed to be doing. You know, I was on the phone with a friend and I said, you know, hopefully, sometime down the line, I can, you know, travel and maybe meet an elder who does traditional death work, and it would be really cool if the elder was also two spirit like me. And not even 24 hours later, I think it Yeah, it was like the next day, I got a message on Facebook from Dean who I now live with, and he had messaged me and said, You know, I saw what you were doing and I think that's a really good thing that you did and I just wanted to let you know that I've been praying for you, and I hope everything's been going well. And so we started messaging and he said, Yeah, you know, death work is the work that that two spirits do. And that's the work that I've done for most of my life. And I was like, Whoa, really. And he was like, yeah, if you ever want to learn, I'm here, and you can come visit anytime. And so I was like, alright, I'll probably take you up on that and see when I can come down and visit. And so the rest of 2020 went on, and it was just kind of like, a slow, everything just kind of slowly fell apart, disintegrated more and more. And then finally, I was able to get vaccinated in the beginning of 2021. And after I got my vaccines, because Dean has been navigating end stage renal failure for the last few years is on dialysis and stuff and it's diabetic and just, you know, severely immune compromised. So I didn't want to go down there without being vaccinated first, and I loaded up my car and March of 21. And I said, Oh, my go down there for a week, a month, I don't know. And I've been there now for a little over a year. And, you know, found that there was a lot of synchronicity to the timing of things and why I was supposed to end up being there.

00:06:24

But yeah, so this past year, you know, I it's just been a big shift. And I went down there with the intention of, you know, really prioritizing my learning with him and working with him and learning the different elements of what he does spiritually, the things that were passed down to him from his grandmother's and the work that the tribe has entrusted him with, because he over the years, you know, when then they would find remains, human remains, and they would they anthropologists would identify that they were indeed Paiute remains, they would call him and he would be the one to go on to the archaeological site, or the dig site, wherever they had found those bones, and he would be the ones to work with them. And he, you know, usually they, you know, rewrap them because they've found he's worked with a number of different remains some over 12,000 year old remains. And, and so I thought that, you know, we were going to be doing that a lot more, but his health just really started to tank. And so this past year, I just kind of became a full time caregiver for him. And was really just trying to stabilize his health, because it's just been, you know, years and years of neglect of medical racism, of you know, living in a food desert in a very isolated area where the Indian Health Clinic, I think a lot of the doctors and staff that work there are just there to collect a paycheck until they can retire. And so there really isn't strong investment in the public health aspects or like the community health aspects of educating folks, so they understand what's going on

with their body or how, you know, different foods and things that weren't really meant for us. That, you know, we're not supposed to consume, there just isn't that type of understanding with folks.

**Lukas Soto** 00:08:28

And so it's, yeah, this past year was a real challenge, because there's a couple of times where I thought we were going to lose him. He went into septic shock, I think in August or September, and he ended up having to have part of his leg been below the knee on his right leg amputated. And so we were just navigating a lot of health issues while trying to avoid the COVID plague. And, and then just you know, and then for me just kind of navigating leaving the Pacific Northwest and being in a new area moving from an urban environment to a rural environment, where, you know, I don't even think there's 200 people in the town that we live in, we live in a very, very small community. So yeah, that's kind of what the last couple years have looked like. It's been kind of tumultuous and unpredictable. And I'm just kind of had to roll with the punches. I ended up doing the death doula certification program through i Nelda. And they, you know, at the time that I came into that network, that's the international end of life doula Association. They were in kind of a stage of growing pains where they had recognized the systemic inequality and then I think, you know, with everything that happened with a Geo George Floyd's death, and then you know, kind of the movement building around Black Lives Matter. And then, you know, Breanna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery.

**Lukas Soto** 00:10:09

And a lot of these other individuals that that were murdered you know, brought a lot of recognition within, I know that there needed to be capacity building around how we're bringing in black, indigenous and other folks of color into the network and recognizing that death work is something that our people have done since time immemorial. And that, you know, the death cycle, or the death aspect in the lifecycle is very much intrinsic to who we are as indigenous people. So for the last year, after I completed that certification, I've been doing a lot of internal capacity building with the network, when it comes to their bipoc Advisory Council, and kind of the role that that will play. So I haven't been able to do as much hands on work as I had imagined I would, when I moved down, and you know, when everything, you know, the, I don't know, in life just is what it wants to and generally, you know, I've found all have the best of intentions and make plans, and then life just kind of does what it wants to. And so that's kind of what it's been, for the last, you know, year and a half, has been more just having conversations around death and dying and grief. And then just being in a lot of reflection, about like, what my particular role is in holding that for the community. And, you know, allowing, you know, helping to give people permission to grieve and to lean into into the shadow. Because I think a lot of people, especially in American society, you know, we're taught to just to really hate aging, you know, we have like this obsession with vanity and youth, and it's like, you reach a certain point, and you reach an expiration date, you're no longer able to, you know, contribute to commodity and capital, and our society just really, like, lacks integrity, when it comes to how we care for our dying and our aging, and for elders. And so yeah, it's just been, you know, I've just been sitting with a lot of different things. And watching, you know, this, the old, the old world die, you know, I think the ideological principles that have upheld the economic systems of these, you know, develop modern economies, is crumbling, before our eyes, and these, you know, ideological systems of patriarchy, and supremacy and imperialism and dominion, are no longer going to be able to sustain us if we want to continue as a species. And so, yeah, I think, you know, I think all of this happen, you know, to get to get us to get me to slow down, and kind of prepare for whatever it is that's going to come and I think there's still a lot of uncertainty amongst you know, the circles of people that I'm kind of in regular communication with and elders that I look to for spiritual guidance, I think there's a lot that we don't know yet about what what's to come and you know, and I think the, the

work that I'm doing around my death practice and death work in general is going to be really integral to the rebuilding of a new world if our species is to, to go on, you know, the next seven generations there's a lot of work that we're gonna have to do to be able to make that that path viable and open for our young people that are coming into this world that are going to have to inherit, you know, a big fucking mess. We've just created a big big mess for our youth and yeah, I think I think the death work is gonna be really integral to the to the healing that needs to happen, but I don't I don't really know what that all entails yet.

**Kit Heintzman** 00:14:46

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

**Lukas Soto** 00:14:59

Yeah, I think thing. So I'll preface by saying I'm a person of transgender experience, I was assigned female at birth, and that that identity marker never really resonated for me. And, and I was a teen mom, and I got pregnant when I was 17, my son will be 14 years old and December, which is very odd. It's never thought that I would, you know, make it this far. And I never thought that I would live to see the day where I had a teenage son, but that, you know, that's how things ended up happening. And and then I got sober I got an I was an IV heroin user for many years. And in my early 20s, I was 22 23, when I got sober, and started hormone replacement therapy. So it's been about a decade now, since I've transitioned and living in Portland, Oregon, is where I'd been historically, for the bulk of of my transition years. Access to health care is a lot more available to people of trans experience in Portland, in the Pacific Northwest on the west coast in general, I feel like there's a lot more visibility and understanding and not as much bias, but it still exists. But I think that there's more sympathetic medical providers in in this region than in other pockets of the country. And so I was very fortunate in that regard to be able to find alternative medicines I've mostly stuck with like naturopathic doctors, herbalist, acupuncturist, that kind of thing, because I find that the Eastern medical approach is a lot more holistic, and how they view a person how they do diagnosing. And I think with Western medicine, it and because of the way the insurance systems work, it's a lot more about diagnosing, and having the right code to Bill and then being able to give, you know, people a prescription or like some kind of, you know, regimen to deal with whatever the insurance coding is. And I think that really denigrates the full human experience. And that, you know, you can't really look at, you know, one thing, isolated, you have to look at the whole system. And so, you know, with all that said, I've had to be very strategic about the medical interactions that I've had over the years because of being a recovering addict. There's a ton of stigma and bias around addiction still, even though things have changed a lot in the last decade. And I feel like the conversation around opioid addiction in this country around you know, pills and suicide, and all these different things that are kind of intertwined and really have a direct link to trauma has become more talked about, we still have a very long way to go when it comes to how we deal with support and relate to people that are struggling with heavy substance abuse like heroin, or methamphetamine or just IV drug use in general on so you know, I've had to be really careful, because I've had a lot I've faced, I think of all the different like, pillars of society of like health care and higher ed and the government and all these, you know, that the, by far the worst experiences of discrimination, and just ignorance and bias have been from medical professionals. So I think, you know, that's been an ongoing conversation that I've had with other members of my community, other trans people about the particular risk that is there for us as trans people. And at the height of the pandemic, we were still under a Trump presidency. And while he was president, he had rescinded a lot of the Obama era policies around access to health care for trans and gender diverse people. And so while he was in office, he had actually reversed all that where it was like, okay, if I'm out of the state of Oregon, if I was like visiting somebody, you know, in the

Midwest or the south, and I had a medical emergency that has nothing to do with my gender identity. Now, these people can deny me medical care based solely on my gender identity.

00:19:54

And so I think we've had to be a lot more you know, the trans community as a whole We've had to be a lot more cautious about how we navigate our day to day experiences from like going to the grocery store, to the people that we, you know, interact with knowing that we live in a time and right now with with the political atmosphere that we live in trans people are the the boogeyman, or worthy excuse of, you know, all these other things that people don't want to look at where the scapegoat. And as long as that continues to be the case. I think we all you know, that, you know, for most trans people, and I think it definitely, you know, class is a major factor into the type of care that you're able to get, but I think for a lot of trans people, it's the reality of like, you know, something very minor could happen, and it can be a death sentence for us, based on who we interact with. I think it's something that I've always had to live with. So it wasn't, you know, it was like, adding COVID Into the Mix wasn't really anything different than what I was doing. I think it just the reality of like, you know, we don't understand what this virus can do. It's not going to go anywhere, and has the potential to permanently disable you. You know, I've had different friends that ended up getting COVID before in like, January or February. And we're really, really sick and our long haulers

**Kit Heintzman** 00:21:36

You mean January or February 2020?

**Lukas Soto** 00:21:39

Yeah, of 2020. Yeah, yeah, they had gotten sick, right before all the xinyang, right, because it was in March, when everything kind of hit the fan. And they had been sick already, and then talking to them throughout the year. And these are both people that were physically active, ate healthy, you know, we're doing all the things right. And they're both, they're like, I'm not the same. And so I think, you know, there's been, I think, a lot of people, you know, with COVID, it's become a highly politicized thing. And I think, you know, that just shows the stupidity of Americans that a public health, a global public health crisis has become a politicized, you know, myth. And so with, you know, just kind of knowing how fucking stupid people are, frankly, I think our approach a lot of, you know, like, my core community, or the people that I've, you know, stayed in contact with throughout this, we've taken a lot more precautions so that we don't have to interact with medical systems, because we know that they're not designed for us. With the medical racism, I've witnessed, with with Dean and the lack of wraparound services, the lack of integrated care, just really the, you know, it's just like, and I feel for providers, too, because they're under a bunch of constraints and stuff. And, you know, they are just as frustrated with insurance, but there just isn't enough pushback internally to really make a difference. You know, it's the pill companies, these corporations, its people, you know, these private interest groups and people with lots of money that are able to hide behind closed doors that continue to pull the strings on what happens, I mean, look at the CDC and how it changed its tone on, you know, protocol with quarantining and mask wearing and all that stuff in it, and it all just boils down to capital, you know, of this country wants to go back to normal because it's losing money. And that is what this country, you know, this country is just a bunch of little corporations, you know, private interest, that, you know, pay politicians to do their dirty work. And then the rest of us have to, you know, fill in the gaps that the systems are not designed to kind of address for me. And so, I think, I think now with all this stuff with the pandemic, I feel really grateful for my positionality and the fact that all I've ever known as struggle, all I've ever known is, you know, systems that were not designed to keep me alive. They were actually designed to do the

opposite. And so, while this stuff is like kind of depressing to deal with, it's not really a shock or a surprise, because it's not too different than what I've already experienced firsthand and what I've witnessed of community members over the years, so yeah, I've really, I've personally just tried to take as good of care or have myself as possible and kind of hope for the best. And I'm like, if I, you know, if I end up getting sick or having to, you know, navigate the medical system, then I will, but I feel like I've done a lot of work prior to the pandemic, to establish stable care, and to have a primary care provider in a place where I could do all my stuff in house from like, lab work medication, my therapists who just she just retired, but she was in the same, you know, office, I was able to do everything for several years, just in one place, and they were very trans literate, and, you know, just, I think, generally had a more harm reductionist approach to care, which I think is what a lot of people with with history, like my own need, is just to be able to make, you know, to have informed consent to be able to make informed decisions, based on you know, what is right for the individual. And that's the type of medical care that I have, have personally saw. And yeah, because of, you know, because of the realities that I face, I've maintained residency in Oregon to not lose Medicaid, and not lose my primary care provider, because I knew that that could destabilize me to the point of, you know, not not being able to really protect myself in the case that a medical emergency came up.

**Lukas Soto** 00:26:39

So I've it's been safer for me to travel 12 hours, 600 miles between, you know, three states to be able to get care, that's up to par for what I believe that I deserve. Then trying to navigate, you know, new systems in Nevada, where I think most of the country when it comes to like naturopathic care, like kind of alternative medicine isn't quite on the same page as what you see in the Pacific Northwest, I feel like in Oregon, and Washington and even California, there's just a lot more folks that are more accepting of allopathic care, naturopathic care, whereas in, you know, other kind of more rural, and I feel like Nevada is mostly like, open country, I've, like 85% of the state is BLM land. So there just isn't, you know, the same conversations happening. And I'm like, if I do end up switching to Nevada, which that's what I want to do, eventually, I will probably have to travel to Sacramento or San Francisco, to be able to see, you know, therapist or have different care. And so yeah, it's, you know, it's a household, but it's not anything new. Because I feel like when you know, when you live in the margins, and you're from different segments of the community, that the dominant culture just refuses to acknowledge your existence. You kind of learn that most of the systems that you're going to interact with are not made for a young man, they're not made for you to succeed or thrive. And so I think you kind of grow weary of interfacing with most any system. And you know, I think we, yeah, a lot of times when I interact with medical professionals, they think I'm a medical professional. And they're like, Oh, are you a nurse, or you know, what? And I said, No, I'm just a trans person trained to not get murdered. In America, that's really, all it boils down to is that, you know, for most trans people, if you are not educated enough on like, the stuff going on with your body, or like what you need, this system won't kill you. And that, you know, was abundantly clear. And so I just knew that the stakes were higher with COVID. But, yeah, I don't think that really, my approach to things has shifted a whole lot. Because, you know, I'm, all I know is survival. That's all I've ever known. So it's not, you know, dealing with something like this, I'm like, Cool. Now everybody else gets to know what it's like to suffer. It's not for, for a lot of people, you know, for especially being indigenous. It's like, we've survived many, many Apocalypse times, many times where, you know, our existence was on the brink of, you know, on the brink, and we, you know, my ancestors have survived and so, I will keep doing the same and hopefully it works out but yeah.

**Kit Heintzman** 00:30:00

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

**Lukas Soto** 00:30:03

Yeah, I, because I was an academic and I was in school at the time, I was seeing little conversations pop up in like January. In the winter, it was like December, January, February. And so I was following the news out of China, and early on before the shutdown. And then when the shutdown happened in March, then I started looking at research that was being conducted in other countries, because I had access to those databases with the library. So I was looking at research being done in Australia, in China, in different parts of Europe and trying to really understand what they knew so far with how the virus interacted, what its molecular structure was how was interesting, you know, how was attacking the body. And in August of 2020, I actually ended up flying to Chicago to visit a friend and I went to have dinner with a colleague of mine. And I didn't know until I was, you know, sitting and having dinner with her and her husband that her husband was, or is an epidemiologist and a researcher at the University of Chicago. So in August, I had the pleasure of having dinner with somebody that was on a COVID-19 research team. And they had known that the shutdown, you know, they had kind of known in like January or February that all this stuff was gonna go down the way that it did. So it was really interesting talking to somebody that was, you know, knew more of the scientific side of things. And his focus, he's the he's a pediatric hebedemonologist, with a specialty in HIV AIDS, but then was also doing stuff with COVID-19. So it was a really an eye opening conversation to speak to someone who I think treated his first HIV patient in 1982. Before, you know, it was like very early on, and he has worked with 1000s of children mostly. So it was just very interesting, you know, talking to someone with that caliber of expertise on the reality of this thing.

**Lukas Soto** 00:32:25

And he was very matter of fact, with me, he said, you know, Lucas, this virus is here to stay, that's not going anywhere. You can't put your life on pause, it's really, you know, this thing is going to boil down to personal choice, and people are going to have to assess the level of risk that is worthwhile for them. Don't put your life on hold or think that you have to live in fear. Because of this. He I asked him, I said, you know, do you think everybody's going to get this? And he said, Yeah, eventually I think everybody will. But you don't need to worry about that you need to worry about prolonging getting it for as long as possible, and not whether or not you're gonna get it or not. And so I had, you know, I feel like the combination of being having access to academic, you know, materials, the person I was dating, at the time, was doing a nursing program at Oregon Health and Sciences University. So she was on top of a lot of the research and looking at the numbers and getting updates from, you know, the public health for the Oregon Health Authority. And then meeting with other professionals, I was able to get, I think, a pretty realistic perspective and scope on on what this thing was and how, how things were going to change moving forward. And I feel like for the most part, you know, you know, I've been able to adjust to this, I have been lucky, you know, I haven't gotten COVID Yet I've been I was able to, you know, have access to vaccine and, you know, the booster and all that. So, I, you know, I'm privileged in that regard, that that I was able to have access to not only the education, but you know, the the preventative measures to kind of keep myself safe. So I think that's been kind of our approach is, you know, we're just gonna take things a day at a time and do what we can to be responsible. And kind of think about the collective think about the whole and think about the long term. And realize, you know, there's a lot of divisiveness right now and there's a lot of fucking crazy people in the world that have really bad intentions. And you know, it's just become more pronounced and like, this world sucks, but these babies need us and so I'm like for the people that like you have, you know, some kind of empathy or, you know, care for what happens after I'm gone, I feel like I have to stick around for these young folks because they're going to need guidance, they're going to need help. And I think folks like me that have kind of lived in the margins and know how to survive with next to nothing are going to be really vital and supporting those young



people and being able to create something that isn't so disastrous as what we you know, the American emperor as it as it currently stands, because it's just appalling, appalling Are you know, we've forgotten how to care for one another. And, yeah, I think, you know, COVID has really brought to the surface, the shadow, and, and the work that we individually and collectively need to do to heal. I think this is just a symptom of, you know, things that go a lot deeper, and I don't think a lot of people are ready to have that conversation yet. So, you know, I think this, this, these first couple years, this is just the beginning, this was just kind of the kiss of death, and kind of the beginning of what to expect, and I think things are gonna have to get a lot worse before they get better. Yeah.

**Kit Heintzman** 00:36:25

After speaking with the epidemiologist, what were you doing to appraise risk, and like your comfort with risk.

**Lukas Soto** 00:36:33

Um, for the most part, I, you know, we tried to, like do the pod thing, where we were only coming in contact with the same kind of group of folks. That was the first travel that I did was in, in August of 2020, I hadn't really gone or done anything else. And I felt really guilty because the person I was dating was like, kind of, you know, just like very rigid about stuff. And like, Oh, you're gonna, you know, you're exposing yourself, but O'Hare Airport was the MTSA will probably ever see it in my life, I went through TSA in less than 10 minutes. And I was just like, What the fuck, like, This is crazy. But, you know, Chicago was probably the safest city that I've been in, throughout the pandemic, in different parts of the city, they like on the street poles, they had hand sanitizer dispensers. And everywhere that you went in the city of Chicago, from the city parks, to, you know, a food stand, everybody wore a mask, somebody was walking down the street walking their dog, they had a mask on. And that was something that I didn't really see in other cities that I was in I over the last couple of years, I've been in Washington, Oregon, Montana, Idaho, California, and Nevada, Arizona, Utah. So like most of the western half of the United States, and I found that in the more conservative places, there was next to no mask wearing from you know, 2020 forward, even before vaccines were rolled out or anything, there was communities that I had been in that just frankly, didn't give a shit. They're like, this is not real. Fuck the government, fuck you. We do what we want. And then, you know, being in a city like Chicago, where it's like, super large, I was actually pretty impressed. I feel like the mayor and the leadership there, and the mindset of people was a lot more grounded in in looking at, you know, the whole picture, and not just like my own selfish interests. So that was refreshing. And I don't know, I get updates, you know, I'm, like, stay on top of the public health releases with the health authorities and stuff. So I've been tracking when, you know, numbers are going up. And I think I, you know, we just kind of shift our, this decision making based on you know, oh, there's a surge going on right now. Yeah, we had plans to do this. And if you want to do that, that's fine. But I'm going to sit this one out. And that's worked so far, I've had, you know, a number of people around me that have had COVID More than once already. And you know, like I said, I've I've traveled I've been in a lot of states these last two years, and I haven't even gotten you know, the the only thing that's bugged me as my allergies outside of that I've had been able to stay pretty healthy. And so you know, I feel like I'm be also being a queer person, being a queer trans person. One of the things you know, trans people are four times more likely to contract HIV or AIDS in their life than the general population. So just to know Knowing kind of the statistics around infectious disease and the probability of somebody like me contracting, something like HIV, I think it makes you more hyper aware of the reality of of other things. And I think that's been kind of my approach with COVID is kind of looking at it as like the same thing that you would with, like your sexual health of, you know, how often are you getting tested, can you trust the people that you're, you know, having sexual encounters with, to be honest with you. And I think the same thing was true with COVID of like, are the people that you're interacting with actually being honest about who they're having their

mask off with who's in their pod, like, what their exposure is, and I've found that it kind of mirrors you know, people's kind of sexual hygiene is very similar to people's COVID hygiene. And so I go in with it with the knowing that you can't really trust most people that most people are going to be dishonest, because they don't want to be judged, they don't want to potentially lose out on whatever it is that they're trying to do. And so I just err on the side of caution and assume that people are lying to me about what their practices are. And that has worked to keep me safe.

**Lukas Soto** 00:41:22

I think that's what I'll continue doing is just, you know, it's like, I, you want to trust that people have the best intentions, I, you know, I always try and give people the benefit of the doubt. But, you know, I know myself and I know, you know how easily I can trick myself into believing some bullshit. I know that other people are capable of that, too. So I just, I don't put that burden on other people, it's my, you know, it's my responsibility in my job to, to keep myself safe. And anytime that there's been, you know, a potential risk of exposure, we've, you know, I've taken the the precautionary measures to go, you know, get tested or quarantine or whatever else, and then it's worked thus far. So I'm like, I think, I think I'm navigating the plague. Alright.

**Kit Heintzman** 00:42:18

What were some of the conversations you had with the person you were dating at the beginning of the pandemic about boundaries and needs?

**Lukas Soto** 00:42:26

It was pretty, it got to the point where it was pretty abusive. And that I think, was like the, that's what broke the relationship was like, our beliefs or approach to the virus were different. I think, you know, she is a cisgender, white woman, middle class background, you know, just has a very different positionality than my own. And, you know, where I could hear what she was saying what stuff I'm, like, you know, my life expectancy is 33 and a half. If I make it to the end of this year, I will have beat a lot of statistics to even be alive. So that is the like, framework that I operate in is that like, I'm not even supposed to make it to 40 Statistically speaking, based on the adverse childhood experiences I had based on being an IV drug user, based on being the prison twice, you know, all these different factors. Even now that I've been 10 years out of prison than I've been 10 years sober, it is still more probable for me to die in prison to die on the streets to die a junkie than it is for me to live a clean and sober life to stay out of, you know, systems and, and to just have kind of a simple life, it's statistically, you know, more probable that things will turn out poorly for me. And so, while I take precautions with the COVID thing, I was just like, if I die, I fucking die, you know, and it's my time it's my time. I mean, I don't feel like we really have a say in that a whole lot of the time. And yeah, it just became really, you know, it's like, I wasn't given the autonomy to make the decisions that I wanted to for myself, and it was like, everything that I was doing was being constantly scrutinized and judged. And I was just like, you can do what you want and I'm gonna do what I want. And if you don't like that, then you know, there's the door. And yeah, it was a you know, we had a lot of conversations, but it was very shaming and I don't think you know, I'm like as a medical professional, I don't think that really anybody needs to deal with shame around their decision making much less what's something that like, none of us chose this like this has been a very you know, powerless experience. For a lot of people and, and our you know, in our experiences to it differ substantially based on how much privilege you experience in this society. And I think for people of higher class standing, that don't have to worry about, you know, access to health care or being able to pay for stuff. There's a lot more confidence about, you know, what you can and can't do. And I think for somebody like me, we're supposed to live in more fear. And I feel like there's enough shit in the world

that's telling me that I should be fearful and that I should, you know, make myself smaller that I should, you know, like, tone myself down. And I frankly, don't give a fuck, I'm not here to make others comfortable. I, you know, and so, it. Yeah, it just wasn't, it was a mismatch of values of, you know, not feeling like I was being seen or respected in my personhood, or really understood. And, you know, it's just like, yeah, I get that you're an introvert, and I have a cut, you know, it's like, I have a community of people, I have people that rely on me, that depend on me that need me for all different kinds of support and help I you know, not only do you know, the work around, you know, my death practice, and, you know, grief and bereavement, but a, you know, I'm a community advocate, and I do a lot of stuff with community and, you know, mutual aid and what have you. And so, over these last two years, I've had community members in need, and I feel like her as a white woman just didn't really understand my commitment or a responsibility to my community, where, you know, for me, it would be selfish to prioritize, oh, well, my needs my safety, but I'm going to let this elder go without, no, I you know, if like, if it's between me going to the grocery store, are my elder going to the grocery store, who has emphysema, I'm going to go, and if I ended up getting it, there's a higher probability that I will survive it than they will. And so I'm willing to run that risk.

**Lukas Soto 00:47:17**

And she didn't have the same, you know, belief around that. And I'm like, Oh, well, you know, if I die, I die, and I'm gonna do what I want. And that's kinda, you know, that's just kind of who I am. In general, I don't I don't think I've really ever done well with being told what to do. But I think yeah, I think it was a, you know, I don't know if you've ever seen that. They do the articles where they're like, if you really want to test the strength of your relationship, go to an IKEA store together. And there's like, all this cycle, there's all this psychology research that they've done around, like, what IKEA the way that like IKEA stores are designed, and how it'll like make or break a relationship. And I think COVID was like very similar of like, you know, based on your personal beliefs. And because it became so politicized here in this country in particular, I think it really was a deal breaker for a lot of people. The combination of like, the political, the political arena, and the conversations and the divisiveness between these two imaginary different parties, it's the same fucking thing. It's just rich people working for corporations. But, you know, there's like all this divisiveness between the Conservatives and the liberals. And then, you know, people's approach with COVID. And I think I, you know, I cut out a lot of people out of my life, the last two years, I was just like, this just isn't worth my fucking time or energy. And, and I just realized, I don't care how close to me you are or what your, you know, title is, if it's not in alignment, and it's not, you know, serving our highest good, I don't have time for it. And that's been really freeing. And I think the best the best thing possible of like, you know, I can love you from a distance and you're doing your own thing. And I've, you know, I've had to do the same with family members. My mom is married to an avid Trump supporter that listens to Infowars and refuses to get vaccinated, and I'm like, Mom, you're married to like a shitty Trust Fund white guy.

**Lukas Soto 00:49:30**

That would be fine. If you got COVID He would be fine. Like, probably not sure what happened to him, he would be okay. I'm like you, even though you're an American citizen. Now I'm like, I think you forget, like who you are in this world. Mike, if you didn't have him and his financial security, where would you be? And she's just like a real in denial about stuff. And so when she's like, Yeah, I'm not getting vaccinated. I said, right on, I'm not seeing you. And she was like, Oh, well, why are you making a big deal? And I'm like, well, because I'm not willing to So all the people that I have in my life that are trusting me, and my practice is to be around you, who doesn't give a fuck about anybody else but yourself to see you. I'm like, I'm cool. I don't need to see you. If you want to see me, you can get vaccinated. And if you don't want to get vaccinated, have a good life. And because my argument was

for people that haven't wanted to get vaccinated, I said, Okay, well, how many people have you talked to that have gotten the vaccine that say that they regretted that say that they regret that they have deep remorse for getting the vaccination and they wish they wouldn't have done it? Because I have seen and read reports and talk to people that were one of the like, one, you know, 1000, that had some kind of negative effect from from the backs from the vaccine. And even so they said, I don't regret getting the vaccine. So that's what I said to her. I said, How many people that you've talked to that have gotten vaccinated said that they wish they did it? Oh, wait. And I'm like, you know, to me, and I'm not I haven't gotten the flu vaccine in over 15 years. I am not like, particularly a vaccine person. But with this one, I'm like, I'm just not willing to run the risk. I would hate to have that on me, you know, because I knew the contract stability rate of it. And to know, oh, I was selfish and decided to go to a concert or decided to go out to eat or go to a club, and I didn't want to do the vaccine, and I was asymptomatic and ended up infecting 10 people. And of those 10 people three of my you know, close friends or maybe somebody else's family member died, I would have to have that you know that on my conscience? And I'm like, No, that's that's not worth it to me. So I think it's gotten a lot easier to cut people out and to just say, you know, to each their own and you know, if we if things come into alignment again and we're supposed to be in relationship and we will be but you know, right now it's like no, I'm protecting my energy.

**Lukas Soto** 00:52:00

I'm protecting my peace and and I think that's a super important thing if you want to keep yourself healthy a lot of it is that mindset and so I'm like, I have to cut you know, toxic people out and so yeah, my my relationship with the nurse lasted about nine months. And it just as things got more tumultuous with the COVID situation. Things got more tumultuous with the relationship and ultimately, I was like yeah, I don't think that we're supposed to be doing this. So yeah, nipped it in the bud and and was just kind of like okay, I'm just gonna be out here in the desert by myself and for the better you know, for most of last year I spent most of my time alone I'd be with you know, I live with Dean and Robert, Dean's nephew and Dean and outside of that, because I didn't really know anybody in Nevada was you know, for the most part alone. And I think that's what I what I needed. So it's been a lot easier to you know, navigate the things this year because as the restrictions have lifted and people have tried to get back to like a state of normalcy. There's been a lot more in person elements and different stuff going on with the work that I do so I feel like I've been able to navigate this year pretty well and I'm you know, just gonna keep doing what I'm doing it seems it seems to be working

**Kit Heintzman** 00:53:40

Can you share a bit about how your schooling was impacted by the pandemic both the school that you were doing that you were in before it has started but also your certification and training?

**Lukas Soto** 00:53:49

Yeah. So yeah, with my with my college degree in the pandemic just really turned everything upside on its head and and, and really just fucked everything up. The one nice thing is that it made everything go virtual, which was it lifted the burden of having to commute because the traffic was awful. I lived like in Southeast Portland and I went to Portland State which is in downtown. And with the traffic, sometimes it would take like close to an hour to go maybe seven or eight miles. And so I definitely preferred because as the COVID shutdowns were happening, then we have the Black Lives Matter protests happening and we have the National Guard in Portland. And in that summer of 2020, the Portland Police Bureau was terrorizing the streets of Portland. Those young white cop assholes would just be driving around in the neighborhoods of Portland and would turn on their lights and chase you and then cut down another street and they were just like doing that to just like terrorize people.

When the protests were happening, and we were going out, you know, we were ambushed and shot by national guards for peacefully protesting for standing in the streets and practicing our rights as American citizens, we were ambushed. And, yeah, with all that stuff, hat, you know, with all that stuff happening, I think it just, it just showed the impermanence and the volatility, and how easily this society, this country is not well poised or well positioned to deal with crisis situations. And so everything, you know, like seeing that, I think a lot of stuff just got put on the back burner, because it was like, you know, the lie of meritocracy and pulling yourself up by the bootstraps, and like doing all this stuff, it's like, you know, at the end of the day, having the college degree, or having the title or the letters behind your name, often means nothing, you know, still, and I think that became abundantly clear. With the work that I do, and, you know, with how I move through the world that you know, stuff like that, really, it doesn't personally hold too much weight. You know, with my father died in the week before I was supposed to graduate, I had to deal with that, that became, you know, that was taking all my time and capacity for much of June and July. And so it was a huge letdown, you know, because I sacrifice I was working, I worked, I went to school full time and work two or three part time jobs. And, you know, did all this stuff and didn't even get to have a graduation didn't even get to have like a, you know, a celebration, a party like nothing.

**Lukas Soto 00:56:53**

And so it was just like, cool, I just did this thing. And like, it's just over now. And she's done. And now you just got to, you know, move on with life. And so, I had been really deep, I was working for a different consulting firm at the time, and I was doing some international research for a client of ours. And the person that was supposed to be the lead researcher, ended up dipping out because he got hired with the county. And so he had, you know, his job kind of took front and center. And so then that research project got dumped on me. And so between being an executive assistant to my boss, and helping her run all the administrative sides and doing her calendar, and personal assisting and helping with her family, doing this international research project, dealing with my dad dealing with, you know, relationship, drama, all this stuff, the thesis kind of went on the backburner, and I was just like, well, I finished all the credits and stuff, and I'm like, I really don't give a fuck about that piece of paper. I'm like, in my, you know, I finished the degree, I gotta still turn in that thesis, I really, you know, I'm just like, I really don't fucking care. I don't think Biden's gonna, you know, do anything when it comes to the student loan debt. And I'm like, Really, the only reason why I need the diplomas if I want to, you know, go on to grad school. And at this point in time, that's not on the table. So I'm like, yeah, maybe I'll get around to submitting that thesis at some point. But at this point, I was just like, fuck it. I don't I do not care. And I, you know, I have my advisor reached out the beginning of this year, and I never emailed her back, but I'm just like, What do you people like, what do you fucking expect to like I, you know, have lived on next to nothing.

**Lukas Soto 00:58:38**

Basically, since I got sober and stopped dealing drugs, I've lived on poverty wages and live severely below the federal poverty line. And with everything the last two years, and like, last year, I was just trying to stay afloat. Like I just felt like I was, you know, like, somebody's flushing down the toilet. And I was just trying to, like, keep swimming from like, getting flushed, complete, completely. And so I'm like, this stuff doesn't take precedence in my life. Because guess what, it's not going to make a difference anyways, I'm still going to be broke, I'm still going to be stressed out, I'm still going to deal with transphobia I'm still gonna deal with people not taking me seriously. I'm still going to be taken advantage of and so why put time and energy into a system or institution that frankly, doesn't give a fuck about your success anyways? You know, and it's, it's, I think that statement would probably be hard for a lot of educators and administrators and academics to hear but I think it's something that needs to be heard because that is the lived reality for way more than just me You know, I know that my

experience is not unique and and I have the privilege of, you know, in a lot of times people assume that I'm white people assume that I'm straight. People assume that I'm cisgender. People make a lot of assumptions about who I am in this world, and even so, whiteness and perceive male privilege and perceived heterosexual privilege has never protected me from the violence that those ideologies create

**Lukas Soto** 01:00:10

You know, create in our communities and so I, I am a lifelong learner, if I could stay in school solely for selfish purposes to learn and be in a classroom environment, I probably would just because I personally enjoy it, I don't give a fuck about the prestige of you know, the title or the school, you know, it's all that I don't know, the veil of illusion was just ripped painfully off over and over and over again, every time that I try in, kind of, in mesh myself or, or delve further into these systems, these systems made it abundantly clear that they were not there was enough space for me that it was not designed for me. So I yeah, I think, you know, I finished all my credits and stuff, and I finished the degree, you know, to my level of complete, you know, where I'm like, I'm fine. And if I decide to go back then, you know, submit the paper. And it's not that I'm, you know, I know how to write papers, I know how to do research. And the, you know, the problem for me is that a lot of the questions I was coming up with, they were like, This is great, but this is PhD level, you know, work, you're just doing a bachelor's thesis, it doesn't need to be that complicated. It's, you know, oh, my god, I just need to, you know, go and do it and get it over with but a Yeah, I think, you know, being in college was an extremely traumatic experience for me, and I've been burnt out since 2017, or 18 been operating with like, a high, high functioning, high level burnout and depression. And I just needed respite. I'm like, I don't want to think about you know, I was like reading a book a week per class, and, you know, like heavy stuff like books, where most people even with high literacy skills, you have to read three or four times before you actually understand the content because of the way that it's written. And I'm like, I don't, what is that doing? For me, it's just, you know, it's just like, shortening my life. Experiencing all this toxic stress, I'm like, geez, I, I really think that going to college probably shaved off at least a couple more years of my life. So it, it's unfortunate, it's unfortunate that that's the experience of like millions of people in this country specifically. And there's so many people that I talked to, because I said, you know, like, like I said, I do a lot of community work. And so I'm often with, you know, lay people and people that, you know, don't even have GED is, and I always have the same conversation with folks, people think that they're dumb. And it's not that they're dumb, it's that this system is designed to only celebrate, and uplift certain types of knowledge, certain types of people that can perform in certain ways. And to me that, I don't want to be a part of that, you know, I believe in education, I believe. You know, that people should be empowered to learn. And to think critically, I'm big on critical thinking and critical consciousness. And I think that a lot of the times, it's not possible to happen in the classroom because of how violently that our systems, our institutions are set up. And so I've really just taken my experiences from from college, and, you know, the clients that I've worked with, and I have just been trying to design accessible ways for community to gain entry to this type of information, and this type of conversation. And, you know, I'm designing some anti racism leadership curriculum right now, and doing that with a client, but I'm going to just start offering once a month, people can sign up and register and I'm just going to give classes virtually for free to members of the community, because

**Lukas Soto** 01:04:04

I think everybody, you know, I think everybody should, should have access to education and to learning if that's something that they want for themselves. And that's just not, it's just not there for people. I mean, now, even with scholarships and stuff, and there's like grants for bipod grants for you know, LGBT or, you know, for natives or

this, that and the other, even that is still so inaccessible, you know, everything is just so all the hoop jumping and stuff, it's just like people can't even ever make it to the door because of all the barriers that they have to face to even get there. So I you know, I see it for what it is, and I'm just I'm like, Well, I'm gonna, you know, take these things and try and make something of it in a way that makes sense to me. And really, it doesn't I don't really care what other people think about my degrees or what I did in college because it's not about them. It's about me And, you know, I'm grateful that I made the choice to go back to school because I had gotten my GED when I was 17. And then went to prison and, you know, had all this stuff happen. And after I'd been sober for, like, a couple years, I was like, Well, I proved to myself, I can now stay sober. When I went back to school, I had really, you know, no, I was like, I don't even know if I can do school, I don't even know if you know, because I, I, really, I think I checked out a school and like the fourth or fifth grade one, because of how violent the schools are, had the classroom setting for people that are neurodivergent for people that are, you know, who don't speak English in their home, primarily, you know, I had all these different things I have, you know, a disabled younger sibling, and immigrant Mother, you know, working class, all this different stuff. And so, the learning, you know, classroom environment was not a place I wanted to be. It's not a place where I felt seen or encouraged or supported. And I was able to seek and find a different experience in college I, that was the first time that I had professors of color that I had men of color, who were my teacher, and I didn't realize that that was something lacking in my life, or that that was something that I needed. because prior to that, you know, the only woman of color I ever had, as an educator was, it was the same teacher, I had her in first grade. And then in third grade, and up until college in my early 20s, was the first time than that I had a male of color. And, and it was profound. And so that, you know, it's like, even though I didn't do school, really in the way that I think it's expected or assumed I did it in a way that worked for me. And I've been able to take everything that I've, you know, gotten from it and use it in a positive way to support my community and being healthier and more empowered, and you know, more able to meet their needs. And that's really what's important to me. And then with the Nelda program, like I knew I need it, you know, I'm like, I want to like do something. And that to me, was like, Okay, now, because of the pandemic, they want to doing it all virtual, so became more accessible. And then they had the scholarship funding for it. And so I applied for that. And so it made it free for me. And that was really the only reason why I was able to do it, because I wouldn't have been able to afford it and then being on their bipoc Advisory Council, that gives me free membership into the international network, because that is also another, you know, you have to pay fees for everything. And, you know, I get it, they have to have, you know, their their costs to keep things running. But I'm glad that the conversation now is is happening more frequently that people realize that there isn't a pipeline for people like me to be successful. And even though we have so much to give and contribute, and if we had, I feel like proper mentorship and sponsorship and people, you know, really looking out for our best interests, I think people like me could be not only be success stories from like, the kind of background that I come from, but actually be able to do a lot in the community. But you know, we have a lot of work to do before people fully embrace folks like me, or really see the importance of having folks like me be in decision making processes, or be in positions of leadership. And yeah, we have a long way to go. And so, you know, college taught me I can write really a great scathing email, I can articulate myself when I'm pissed in a very professional manner, which helps for you know, the advocacy work that I do. And, and I, you know, I feel like I'm a

**Lukas Soto** 01:09:13

good inspiration for the underdog. So, you know, I think my experience was what it was, and I am just honest and transparent with that, because I think that that's what people need is like authenticity, they need to know that like, well, you're, you know, they have like, whatever judgment about me, and then they hear like my actual experience and they're like, well, wow, school was hard for you and you struggled and you're like smart or whatever, then I

guess it's there's nothing wrong with me for it being hard for me. And then you know, like, until I got diagnosed with ADHD when I was in college, and I strongly attribute the fact that I'm male masculine presenting now that I was able to get that diagnosis and this was something that I've dealt with my whole life but as a young girl and a teenage girl. I don't think that would have ever been on anybody's radar of like the adults that I was around that that's what was going on. So I had internalized all these, you know, things about how I was as a learner that I was lazy. And, you know, I didn't realize until I got the diagnoses, and that I could get disability accommodations. That one, you know, everybody has the capability of being successful in the classroom. And if you're a good educator, you should be designing pedagogy in a way that everybody can access it. And that regardless of what you know, if you're dealing with like anxiety, or depression, or you're on the spectrum, or you have ADHD, or PTSD, that you should be able to have the tools to be successful, and to, you know, get an education if you want. And so yeah, I think I'll just cut, you know, I'm continuing to advocate and I'm just trying to do more community based education, give people what they need, and be an advocate, because I kind of play in like a lot of different worlds where I do get to be in spaces with people with high influence and power and credentials and titles. And because of the fact that I went to college, and I have, you know, a pretty impressive CV people do, they're more willing to listen to me and hear me out than maybe somebody else. And so I'm like, if I, you know, if all that, you know, like, all in all, if all that shit is to just move the needle forward just a little bit more so that, you know, the next person that comes in, it might be just a little bit more accessible a little bit, you know, less challenging than I think it's worthwhile. But yeah, yeah, school. School. Yeah, it's just kind of a fraught, fraught relationship. And I think, eventually, you know, who's to say how the, the next year is, go, but I think, you know, down the road, I would like to go back to school and continue and get an advanced degree solely because I like, learning. And because I think it's, you know, representation matters. And I think it's, it's important for other people with similar lived experiences to meet someone like me, and to hear, you know, the things that I lived through and to see, oh, wow, you know, this person is a sixth time convicted, felon, IV, drug user, Teen Mom, raised by immigrants, you know, mental health, you know, all these different things, and, you know, you're successful and educated and confident, and, you know, okay, and living a self determined life, you know, your, you know, being able to live in the way that you see fit. And I think that is extremely powerful. And I think our youth need that, you know, I think young people need examples of the underdog. Because there's just, I think, you know, a lot of, I don't know, you know, our youth are just, they're so anxious, and they're a lot more depressed. And they live with a lot more fear. And rightly so. I mean, you know, just like this, I was talking to my friend the other day, and, you know, my son was born in 2008. And I'm like, these kids live with him reality of being murdered when they're in the classroom. And so I know that for a lot of black and brown kids going to college or continuing to be in a place that is so violent and so scary, that that can seem really impossible.

**Lukas Soto** 01:14:03

And, and, and we need, we need to be building leaders from all different parts of the community from all different walks of society. We need young Muslim leaders, we need young disabled leaders, we need, you know, Jewish people who are proud and in the open, gay and trans people, you know, all these, you know, the wider array of differences. We need that we need each other more, more than ever, and you know, and so we have to make that space, you know, understand, you know, how to make it a little bit better for for these kids, because they're going to need all the support that they can get to be able to deal with these challenges that are coming when it comes to the climate catastrophe that they're going to have to deal with and all these other unknowns that humanity has never had to deal with. You know, we're entering an epoch of time that humanity has really never faced, and and we're going to Need a lot of strong leaders a lot of compassionate, empathetic, strong, grounded leaders. And, and so that, you know, I'm like that's what I'm committed to doing is to helping bring that forth and in whatever way



possible to just make that opening so that, you know, whoever is supposed to come in after me is able to. Yeah, that's that's been my experience with with school.

**Kit Heintzman** 01:15:42

Are there any insights that you could share about how you saw the government? Pick whichever government, I'm addressing COVID in prison populations,

**Lukas Soto** 01:15:57

it's been absolutely egregious. I think they're, you know, there's so much stigma and misinformation. And when we think about the carceral carceral systems in general, and the prison population, and then the general public, there's a total disconnect, the way that the United States has kind of built these systems to exist is that it's out of sight, out of mind. And when you become criminalized, it's like you get this this marker of being unworthy in the society that you are a second class citizen. And if you experience inequities or injustices that it is based on, you know, the choices that you made, that you're deserving of experiencing this type of violence, and I think it's such it does such a disservice to the community as a whole, because we're all impacted by carceral systems by surveillance by policing, whether we're consciously aware of that or not. With the prison population before COVID. We were already not given our humanity, we were already a population that was dehumanized. And then with COVID, it just became abundantly clear. You know, the, the way the power structures exist, and that until the dominant culture, and society as a whole realizes the role that carceral systems play. And I think if most people knew the reality of what went on within the walls, or what people's experiences were with dealing with the courts or with police, I think they would have a different point of view. But because the media and politicians, and these different entities have a certain narrative around criminality, and criminal behavior, and people who are convicted of crimes, there's a lot of misinformation about what actually goes on. A lot of times, you know, and I think, you know, when we think about, like how we deal with punishment, and harm and accountability, and healing and forgiveness, we're not a society that really often views people as redeemable, and that is a travesty. Because I believe everybody is deserving, and forgiveness. And I think that anybody, and this is based on you know, I went to prison when I was 19, the first time. And it showed me some painful truths about reality about the real world about being an adult. And I was in a women's prison, and I was in the women's prison in Oregon, and that there's only one women's prison. So I was in there with all the murderers with all you know, all the wide array of people. And I heard a lot of people's stories, I got to know the women in there and I got to hear their stories, and I was friends with a lot of murderers with a lot of lifers. And the reality is, is that given the right set of circumstances, in the right environment, I believe that any one of us is capable of anything in the, you know, in the human experience, that there's nobody, you know, when we think about like, good and bad, it's subjective, it's situational. And any human has the capability of doing any act that any other human is capable of doing. You know, from the spectrum of like, highly violent and, you know, kind of like things that we look as like deviant or evil to being like very great or good actions. I think anybody's capable of any any array of thing. And you know, we really have to look at Our ability to handle handle interpersonal conflict and the fact that we do not as a people really know how to deal with conflict in generative ways, how to hold people accountable for the harm that they cause, and be able to move forward meaningfully to be able to grow from, from tragedy, you know. And with the pandemic. People have been stripped of their humanity and their ability to protect themselves, they were not given, you know, there was people that were trying to like, send in supplies to send masks, and they were physically not allowed to even cover their face. They were not, you know, they were,

**Lukas Soto** 01:21:00

you know, going through intense human rights violations and torture. And that's what happens inside American prisons. And that's what's hidden from the public is the torture that taxpayers that I think a lot of people that if they knew, this is what I'm working, I'm going to work, and I'm paying taxes and my taxes are going to torturing pregnant women in prison, that when they have their children, they don't even get to hold, they're handcuffed to the bed and they have give birth, and the child is taken right away. That I'm funding that. How is that? How is that accountability? How was that righting a wrong, creating more harm. But that's the thing that people don't realize is what actually goes on, you know, they don't know that, you know, we get shipments when I was in prison in 2009, we got a shipment of cat fish that it had expired in 1995 ship from Vietnam that I was then forced to cook for over 1000 inmates to consume and eat in 2009 fish that had expired in 1995. And that's like a normal thing. I had scabies for nine months, and was told that I had psoriasis and that I was making it up when I had bugs eating me alive. And it wasn't until I had infected almost half of my unit, myself and everything. And I had my mom I said print out the WebMD with the picture and stuff of scabies and send it to me that I went to medical and cussed the woman out and said give me the fucking cream. What it what what is it for you to just write me a prescription to put a fucking cream to kill these bugs? What the fuck is wrong with you. And that was in 2009. This was far before any pandemic. This was the treatment that I was dealing with as a 19 year old I was a child. And I went to prison for possession of marijuana and a fake ID. And I then went through all kinds of state sanctioned torture and violence at the hands of the prison guards. The prison guards were far more vile violent than the inmates that I was in there with. They were and there's no accountability, you know, but we don't have the conversations of the reality, you know, like the reality of stuff and the cost of keeping this veil of illusion that, you know, the police make us safe or that imprisoning people and that doling out punitive punishment makes our communities safer. Because the reality is that it doesn't, I don't know anybody that deals with violence, and judgment and hate and turns that into, you know, a positive, especially when that's all you've known. I don't know how somebody can heal. With being met with that. It just, it doesn't, you know, it doesn't comprehend to me and with the pandemic, a lot of people have died. You know, there was just I've heard all kinds of just like awful stories of people that, you know, I met this trans woman who had served a 25 year sentence and parole two years. And yeah, I think in 2020, she paroled and she had gotten COVID while she was in prison, and she was in San Quentin, in California. And she continues to advocate for inmates in there. Because of the the intense human rights violations that are happening right now. This is very much, you know, this is happening in real time. You know, right now, it hasn't gotten better. And I don't think until the, you know, larger society realizes that the prison population isn't what it's made out to be that these are actually very vulnerable people that most you know, I feel like if they were given the tools that they need, and the love and the care to be able to heal, that they could redirect their life and not go down, you know, the path that they've had to to survive. And that's the thing that people need to realize about criminality is that for a lot of it, it's for survival. You know, it's not people don't have a choice, they're not given a choice. And that, you know, when I think about my heroin addiction, I was

**Lukas Soto** 01:25:20

everything in my life laid out a path for that to be the only option for me. But then I was made to feel like it was my fault. Even though everything you know, in my life had set me up for that. And it wasn't until I was in college. And I've seen you know, the statistics that you know, people with an ASA score, like mine, I have a nine out of 10, that I am 7000 times more likely than the general population to become addicted to opioids. That's a death sentence. Because of the trauma that I went through, I was 7000 times more likely to become addicted to opioids. So the fact that I did heroin, for the first time when I was 16, was not, you know, a transgression on my part, society designed as such, the school, the President, you know, all that stuff. And it wasn't until I really saw it, that I was able to pull myself out of the situation and go, Oh, I was made to think that I was a bad person, that I wasn't

worthwhile, that I wasn't deserving. And that the reason why all this bad stuff happened was because I'm a bad person. And I think even if you make mistakes, that doesn't mean that you deserve to be tortured. I think, you know, if somebody is doing their time, and is in prison for a crime that they were convicted of, isn't that enough? Why can't you know, why can't they protect themselves and have access to vaccines and these different things that, you know, people are desperate for, there's people in there that are severely immune compromised, that, you know, had maybe two years left to their sentence or months. And the governor wouldn't give them clemency wouldn't grant them early release, and they died in their, you know, as a ward to the state, taxpayer money for a petty offense, and they died because of COVID. That, to me is a is a is a is a travesty. And we're gonna see the impacts of this for years to come. You know, because we've lost over a million people just here in the US. There's all these long haulers, people that are permanently disabled from this thing. And the level of cognitive dissonance and disconnection from our own individual humanity is what we really need to look at more than trying to find a boogeyman or a person to point the finger at is, you know, looking in the mirror and asking ourselves, why has this reality become okay, and why has violence become normalized? Why has you know, children, you know, there's been more children shot and mass shootings in schools than there have been police casualties of officers dying in the year of 2022. You know, there has been more mass shootings in the United States than there has been days in the year. Why is that normalized? You know, I think that's the thing that, that people need to ask themselves, you know, before trying to really delve into a lot of this other stuff, because then when you you know, if you went into the prison, and you sat down with like, any one of those people, and sat with them and asked them to tell you their story from start to finish, I think the reason why they were there would make a whole lot of sense. And, and I think for most of those people, if you sat down and took the time to learn their story, you would see that most of those people are victims of a system that demonize them and vilified them. And that now this virus is being used against them. And it's, it's warfare, it is warfare, and it is violent, and, and it's wrong. It's wrong. And it's not, you know, it's just like our No, you know, it's, uh, it's not making anything better, you know, me going to prison. And all it did was make me hate myself more, and made me learn how to be a better criminal. And it just fucked me up more going to prison did not rehab me in any way, shape, or form, I rehab me, I decided that I wasn't going to be statistic. And that's the only reason why I've stayed out of prison for 10 years. It's not because of anything that any of those systems offered me. And so I think that's what people need to spend time with is really taking the time to get to know people's individual stories and then asking themselves is this is this narrative that I'm being given actually real? Or is there a reason why we have this story about this population of people and I think most people would find that they've been very misinformed. And yeah, it's it's unfortunate because prisoners are not able to protect themselves. If you don't have outside resources, people on the outside to fight for you,

**Lukas Soto** 01:30:13

you're just a number, you're just a number and anything could happen to you in there, and there's absolutely nothing that you can do. And the state has set it up as such. And that to me is wrong.

**Kit Heintzman** 01:30:30

You'd mentioned a few already. But I wanted to ask, other than the pandemic, what are some of the social and political issues that have been on your mind over the last two years?

**Lukas Soto** 01:30:48

I think the bait I mean, the where I spend most of my time, my, my consulting business, I do equity work, racial equity, and anti racism. And so that's where I spend most of my time is dealing with race and racism issues and

systemic inequality and inequity. And, you know, I think the I diversity, equity and inclusion work as a whole is very performative in nature. And in the corporate world, a lot of this stuff is just looked at, like another rubric or another box to check off. And people don't realize that, you know, equity work, really what it what it means is to choose to be in right relationship with people that are fundamentally different than you. And that requires ongoing, you know, hard, often painstaking work and our work, and then interpersonal work with people that are different than you. And as I see, you know, the ongoing violence that, you know, continues to be normalized, and it's abundantly clear that, you know, the vast majority of the American people would have such a blood hunger, that it is more important to them to have access to ammunition and weaponry than it is to preserve human life. Then until we start looking at the causes and conditions as to why, you know, this violence exists, and why this divisiveness and the separating and the other end exists, then it's gonna, it's gonna just continue until, you know, until it completely unravels itself, or until we just offer ourselves as species because we can't, you know, figure it out. Um, so that's the thing that I spent a lot of time with is the, you know, racism in our country, anti blackness, you know, the denial amongst American people, the denial of admitting the reality of the truth of our country. And you know, it's just funny to me, all these people that claim to be patriots and nationalists, and this and that, and they don't even know their own history. I'm like, you don't even know US history? If you did, you know, maybe you would have a different point of view. But that's Yeah, I think that's the thing that I spend a lot of time on is trying to figure out, you know, how do we bring these movements forward? How do we move out of where we're at, with the infighting with the misappropriation of funds, you know, that are collected that are supposed to be going back to community for mutual aid, but then these leaders are caught under fire for you know, misappropriating funds, and you know, nepotism and all this stuff. And, you know, the growing inequality, where, you know, the wealthy are making tons of money and the poor are just getting poor. By the second. You know, we are going to have to deal with some major structural issues in the next decade, when it comes to the climate crisis. And our lack of being able to mitigate things in a in a transformative way. I mean, I think we're just really stuck in doing things the same way we've always done and that's the definition of insanity. I'm like, Y'all, I don't know who this is working. Like, you know, white supremacy isn't working for anyone. It might, you know, like, we might be under the illusion that it is when I'm just like, this is sick for all of us. You know, we often in our communities, like in the black or indigenous or other communities of color, there's a lot of conversation around historical trauma, intergenerational trauma, and how you know, the traumas pass on epigenetically and as a mixed race person, I've always wondered, well, what happens to the perpetrators of that violence? Don't they inherit something epigenetically like, isn't being violent and murdering people for no reason other than And to steal their land or to force them to, you know, perform labor for for your own benefit. Doesn't that impact you? epigenetically as well? Isn't there some type of lived or inherited trauma from being a colonizer? And so I, you know, I wonder what you know what it'll take for us to

**Lukas Soto** 01:35:33

be okay with the messiness of forging something different of really learning how to be with one another in a different way of learning how to love the unforgivable, you know, how to forgive the unforgivable how to be with shit that is just impossible and finding a way through anyways. Yeah, and I think, you know, it might get to the point where we're just kind of forced into situations where we're have to, we have to deal with them, because we're not going to do it on our own accord. And I can't blame people because I know with like, my own change process. It took, you know, I had lots of bottoms lots of times where it was like, I've hit rock bottom, like shit clearly isn't working like the cars on fire, you need to jump out and I was like, you know, I think I could drive it a little further though. Like, the tires haven't blown up yet. So, you know, the car is on fire, but like, I think I can still get over there. And I think, you know, the same is true with with our society is that we're just gonna keep

doing it until the wheels fall off. Sorry, my, I got a puppy, like three days ago, and he's freaking out about something. But um, yeah, I think that's what I spent a lot of time thinking about is like, stop. What a snap. He got, he got scared. Yeah, that's what I think about is like, the race issue, the environment issue. The food issue, you know, like, how are we going to feed ourselves? The supply chain shortages have been happening more now. But I don't think people are really thinking about like, global economics, or political economy, or a lot of these different topics that I kind of delved into disciplinary wise, and you know, I kind of thought to myself, because once you know, stuff, you can't unknow it. And so, I studied a lot of stuff about the nature of like, our, you know, build society, I'm a sociologist by trade, and so I'm just like, man, we are in quite a pickle. And and it's hard to know, you know, it's hard to discern the right way forward, or where to put your time or energy and realize, you know, I'm just one person, there's, you know, I only have so much lifeforce, so much vitality, so much energy, you know, to give in a 24 hour period, I surely hope that the things that I'm investing time and energy in are, you know, working towards the collective, you know, towards something bigger, and hopefully more generative or healing, then, then what presently exists, but yeah, it's just hard to say, it's hard to say where any of this stuff is gonna go.

**Lukas Soto** 01:38:39

And I think a lot of the times with, like, you know, myself, and a lot of the people that I'm close to, who are also folks of color, I think people are just waiting for everything to fall apart, they're just waiting for the social fiber to just fall apart and, and to be a civil war, you know, and it's just sad to me that, that for humanity, and I do work around abolition, that it is much easier for people to think about what they would do in the zombie apocalypse, or what they would do in like, you know, oh, the worst case scenario, like we can think of the most like dystopian future, and come up with all the things and the strategies and how we would deal with it and what we would do and this and that, but if you sat down and asked him, you know, what would we do in a world free of police, free of prisons, free of rape, of sexual violence of you know, you know, Child Sexual Abuse of these different things that you know, plague our communities, people struggle, struggle to visualize, to envision a world that we wouldn't be able to deal with harm differently. And I think that's where we need to spend our time is really sitting, sitting with the discomfort of why it's so hard to fathom. A world where people's needs could be met, where people could live in the abundance of what is here for, you know, for all of us, and that's what we need to really, you know, challenge ourselves with is going in there and figuring out like, Why is this person irredeemable? In my mind? Why is this person unforgivable? In my mind? Why is this person oppositional ly different to me to the point that the only thing that I can think of is to kill them? is for them to assimilate, or to die? Why is it that that is my belief about this person that I view as other? And I think that's where we need to spend the time is looking within ourselves to figure out why that continues to be the thread. And if it's possible to move away from that, you know, I don't know if it's possible to live in a world free of violence. I don't know if that, you know, if it's in our nature to be nonviolent, in, you know, I don't know, I know that we have lived in the world before free of prisons, I know, there was a time where humans were here living where there was no police were there, you know, like, our indigenous my indigenous culture, we didn't have words in our language for right, because it didn't exist. That was not something that what's happening, you know, in our interpersonal relationships, and so I feel like if if there was a time where things look different, there's a time where it can look different again, you know, where we can really transform the way that we build our societies and the way that we interact with one another, and that it could look different. I don't know, you know, I don't know what that would entirely look like, but that's what I'm working towards creating.

**Kit Heintzman** 01:41:48

I have somewhere between a few and 1000 more questions I could ask you. I wanted to check in about time, because we were scheduled to stop in 10 minutes. So I wanted to see what your needs are.

**Lukas Soto** 01:41:59

Yeah, I can go a little bit. I don't think I have anything. I think we're just gonna go take the dog for a hike. So he's, he's surviving. Right now.

**Kit Heintzman** 01:42:08

Is it? Okay, if I request a quick bio break?

**Lukas Soto** 01:42:10

Yeah, yeah, that's fine.

**Kit Heintzman** 01:42:13

I will be back in three to five.

**Lukas Soto** 01:42:15

Okay, cool.

-BREAK-

**Kit Heintzman** 01:42:21

What does the word health mean to you?

**Lukas Soto** 01:42:25

Um, health? Yeah, I think it encompasses a lot of different aspects of, you know, our being what I have based a lot of my framework, and the way that I understand things is through the medicine, well, the Medicine Wheel is something that a lot of tribal nations of Turtle Island, you know, the continent of North America have have utilized, but that's the thing that is the easiest to kind of go back to and make sense to me, because it just breaks down, you know, quadrants of your life. So like the mental, the physical, the social, the emotional, but then it's also rooted in the directions. And so there's an animal and usually, you know, a different plant or food that's associated with it, in addition to, you know, the four directions, like it has the seasons, and you know, it just kind of like a framework for how everything works in a cycle. And so to me, I've always looked to the medicine will understand my health, and kind of do take stock of what I'm doing or what needs to be adjusted, because, you know, it's like, Oh, if I'm spending a ton of time on the social, and the physical, but not really doing anything on the emotional, then, you know, stuff gets out of whack. And so I think the medicine was an easy way to kind of look at things and see, oh, my health is actually kind of out of balance right now. I like it too, because it looks at things, again, from a very holistic point of view, that it's not just you, the individual, but it's like, where you fit, like cosmologically speaking and like where you fit in the hole, not just in your, you know, community, whether that's like, if you're a tribal person, you know, within your tribal community, within your family, within, you know, the place where you live, but you know, how you interact with the plants and animals around you and, you know, even the cosmos, I think it's a really expansive way of being able to look at the micro and the macro. And then kind of map out where you fit into it at any given point. So that's really Yeah, I feel like for since my early 20s, when I got sober. I, you know, was taught about the medicine wheel and that's the thing that made the most

sense to me. And the thing that I go back to when I need to make sense of things and then, you know, outside of kind of like the indigenous framework, I think health It incorporates a lot of different elements, it's, you know, your environmental factors as far as, like, where you live, are you caught? You know, are you You know, you know, in an urban environment where you're close to a bunch of factories that are, you know, dumping toxic waste into the air or into the water streams? You know, do you live in a food desert? Do you have access to, you know, healthy food, are you able to eat or have access to your first foods, the foods that traditionally your people would eat, I think, for us, as indigenous people, and for my own, you know, journey of reconnecting because I was raised in my Chilean culture primarily, and was around mostly, you know, Chilean immigrants and other Latino immigrants. It wasn't until I got sober that I started reconnecting with the indigenous side. But I found that being able to have access to first foods, even though you know, because I like grew up here off of the Columbia River Basin, which was home to many, many tribal people, but not mine. But learning the history of, you know, the place space history of where I grew up, and being able to engage you in ways that I found to be really healing, and to really help with my overall health of being able to know what time and want to gather, you know, certain medicines and foods, you know, berries and roots, and, you know, continue to do that, even though it was other ancestors that were, you know, collecting those seeds and whatnot, that I found that that has really been, you know, that's really filled my cup of seeking that knowledge. The other piece, I think, you know, as

**Lukas Soto 01:46:57**

the, like, psychosocial emotional, and how much I think touch goes into being in relation with others. And I think that's something that we often exclude, or we look at, like physical intimacy as only being sexual in nature, or that it can only be expressed in certain ways, especially for masculine presenting, folks, for people that are assumed male, or that identify as male, that there are, there's a lot of rigidity around how one can express their emotions or love for another person based on you know, how we express things physically. And as I've navigated the world, you know, like, you know, I lived in the world for 22 years as a woman. And that's how, you know, I was being socialized and perceived and viewed and then shifting from being viewed as a woman to being like, kind of gender ambiguous or like, for a while, I think, you know, people usually would assume I was a man until I talked, and then they were like, Oh, I'm so sorry. And I'm like, there's a reason why I look like this to chill. And then, you know, being not only, you know, sober, but like nearly transitioning and being perceived as a young, white male in a lot of spaces. And to really challenge a lot of the stuff because you don't get like an FAQ on how to be a man or how to be an adult. But you're just assumed to know how to do it and know the like, right? social cues and stuff. And I really struggled with a lot of that stuff. And like, I feel like I should be able to be physically intimate and like, close and loving with people and like affectionate. That's like a big piece of my culture. We're affectionate, like loving people. I'm like, Why does it have to be sexual? Why is being a man, you know, you can either be violent, or you can be sexual? I'm like, is there a space in between those two extremes where I can exist. And so I think that's a big part of health, especially for men and like, the conversations that I have with cisgender men with other people have trans experience with other masculine presenting people, I have lots of conversations around the role that touch and intimacy and like, what is allowed, and how that impacts our health, how that plays into things. And so I think that that's something that I think, you know, and then like working with elders to and people that are, you know, ill, and you know, what the topic of COVID have, like, you know, we've seen a lot of similar responses to how people have treated folks with COVID, the same way that they did during the AIDS pandemic, that, you know, it was like, I don't even want to be in the same room as you because if I breathed the air that you're breathing, I'm gonna get it, I'm gonna get HIV, I'm gonna get infected and I'm going to be dirty like you'll and that disconnection that like punishment and not being able to have that type of intimacy, I think is very damaging and creates a lack of health and And I think yeah, I think as people, you know, like thinking of my elder

who I live with, it's like, he needs physical touch, she needs love, he needs, you know, to be caressed, and pet and you know, even if it's not like, doesn't have to be sexual in nature, but like we, I think we as humans need that. And I think that's why a lot of people, you know, turn to having animal companions, because they don't have that interpersonal connection with other humans, it's so lacking. We live in such an individualistic society where, you know, people just don't know how to people that they would rather just be around animals because at least then they can get their needs met. And that's, you know, I think that animal companions are great. But I also think that it's really sad that, you know, we've become so averse and kind of forgotten what what it means to tap into our own humanity, and then to allow other people to witness that vulnerability of our own, you know, personhood, and then to, you know, to lay witness to others. So, I think touches a big piece of health.

**Lukas Soto 01:51:22**

And I think, you know, from like a life course, perspective, I think, mindset, your perspective, your view of things really boils down to people's like, overall health, I think people that stay engaged and are committed to being lifelong learners, and are, you know, actively showing up to their life and are, you know, working on themselves in whatever capacity tend to have more longevity, than those who kind of, you know, stop developing certain aspects of themselves, I think, with the folks that I've known, because I've always been around older, you know, I've always been around people 2030 4050 years, my senior, since I was a child, I'd been around, you know, elderly folks and people with different health diagnoses, and you know, would just watch, you know, how different people would age and the people that I would see that age more gracefully, if you will, or were able to continue with a similar lifestyle that they did in earlier years were people that kept their mind busy. So reading books, doing puzzles, really engaging, you know, their, their mind to get it to work to do more complex problem solving, that that helped a ton with, you know, your memory, with, you know, just a lot of like, psychological things are really based on you know, whether, if you don't use it, you lose it. And, and I think that happens a lot with people that are, you know, maybe they weren't good at school, and their outlet is watching TV, and kind of like, mindless for, like, you know, whatever else, they're not really engaging, I guess, that left part of the brain and so then you lose that elasticity over time. And then with like, the other factors of like, your diet and physical activity, I think plays into it as well. But it was, you know, folks that I saw that kept their mind busy, that kept their body busy, whether it was just like walking a set of stairs, or like going on, you know, going on a nature walk or walking up, Pat, that that makes a big difference long term. And then, you know, what you consume what you're putting into your body. So obviously, people that consume a lot of alcohol, a lot of different substances tend to not age as, as well as people that you know, limit their their usage. And, and people that have a spiritual practice, too, and I think that's also another major piece that I think often isn't as considered, because often people connotes spirituality with religiosity, and those are two very different things. But I think people that have a connection to a power greater than themselves, and have an ongoing spiritual practice, whether it's like, through animism of like connecting with nature and animals and believing in the power of the natural world, and kind of like more pagan based practices, I guess, or, you know, people that study a more, you know, culturally specific religious system, you know, when we're looking at like, Hindu community, Buddhist, Muslim, where, you know, it's more culturally embedded, you know, their, their religious and spiritual practices, more culturally embedded in, you know, the, the lived world that they're in, but I think people that have some type of spiritual, you know, foundation, one, I think are able to deal with like grief and life and you know, the challenges that come up as you age in a way that they're maybe able to make deeper meaning. And I think that's what causes the healing. Or it's like it when we don't have that spiritual connection, I think things can kind of build up, and they have nowhere to go. And so if we can't really tend to those things that resentments or the fears or the you know, the losses or the disappointments, I think that can fester. And that's what makes people sick. So I think the spiritual connection for



me is probably one of the most important things for me as an individual. But I do think that that plays a role in health. Um, and then I think the rest of it is really just up to like, person, you know, what, you know, what works for the individual, I think, you know, where you're at globally, like, where you are environmentally

**Lukas Soto** 01:56:01

plays into, to what, you know, your lived experience is going to look like and I think what works for one person isn't gonna work for the other. There's some people that you know, are avid runners, and they jog and they, you know, they do triathlons and marathons, and that's how they're able to keep you know, healthy. And then for someone like me, I have arthritic knees running all the time would not be the healthiest thing for me that would probably like work in my detriment, even though you know, would be good for like, my heart and other parts of my body. Being you know, an avid runner would probably not be the best thing for me, but it is for lots of other people. So I think, yeah, autonomy, self determination, and personal choice and really being able to, like do what, what works for you as an individual, and then having people around you that support that and see, that leads to healthier outcomes. I think, even if, you know, if your like, ideal situation is just living a very hedonistic lifestyle and like smoking pot all the time, and, you know, maybe taking psilocybin or LSD and like camping and kind of that might, you know, they might live longer than other folks because they live a fairly low stress lifestyle, you know, so, where we could say, oh, you know, consuming, you know, mind altering substances isn't, you know, the best thing for the human body, I would, I would argue that, you know, depending on your whole situation that, you know, for some folks that might lead to healthier outcomes, but it really, you know, boils down to the individual. So, kind of the mindset, you know, live and let live and to each their own. And I think we can kind of see patterns and similarities amongst people, but we're all uniquely different, you know, we're all kind of work on all the same and all different at the same time.

**Kit Heintzman** 01:57:59

How's your relationship to touch change during the pandemic?

**Lukas Soto** 01:58:06

Um, part of the pandemic, I was a lot more active and engaged in community events of like, being in public spaces with people I went to a lot of like live shows and like festival, you know, I was like, out in the world with people. And since the pandemic that is pretty much stopped, I think we just want I just want to like my first concert in Yeah, since 2019. The other day, so I haven't been doing a whole lot of like outings in public spaces where you know, in like gathering spaces where there would be people where I'd be like, in a concert, like touching shoulder to shoulder with like, some other random, sweaty person, that's not something that really happens anymore. And that's been my choice. Because stuff, you know, there's stuff happening again, and I think I've just kind of stuck with my gut of like, Man, I'm gonna sit this one out. And I really feel called to like this or that and then doing more like curated and intentional spaces with people that I you know, I trust and they trust me. And you know, I think I've continued like the people like my core people I've continued to like see. And so I think for a lot of like, the closer people the relationship dynamic really hasn't changed.

**Lukas Soto** 01:59:36

I think I am caught, you know, like what like, like I said, I'm affectionate Chilean people are very affectionate Latinos, I feel like in general, tend to be maybe a more affectionate culture than like what you would see in other cultures. But you know, like, I think a lot of people would think it's very weird me, they'd see me Oh, you're a grown man. But the my mom or my uncle, when they greet me, they kiss me on the lips. And that's not like, weird

or creepy or anything that's just like how we show our love and affection. And that's only something that I would do with like, my like family, like my mom and my uncle, or like, my mom, and my dad, and my cousin is like, my sister. And so it's not weird to me, that, you know, I would like be in the store with my mom and I still to this day, you know, my mom's What 59 And I'm be 32. And I'll still hold my mom's hand in public, I don't give a shit. And so, you know, that's like, that stuff is like normal for me. So I'm like, I feel like, what the people I'm close to, I still pretty much am the same way that I've always been with some caution, because like, my cousin Jenny has preschool age son, who is in a preschool with other infected little children. And so I'm like, Yeah, I'm probably not gonna, like, be, you know, like, licking your fingers. Or like, you know, like other stuff that maybe I wouldn't be as bothered by normally. But I'm like, probably not. So I've been a little bit, you know, like, situationally more cautious, again, based on like, risk. And if I know, like, I'm going to be away from home for two weeks, then maybe I would like, you know, lick my my nephews, my nephews fingers or something. Because it's like, Oh, I'm not going home to Dean for two weeks. So if I was to get sick, I, you know, would be before I ever went back home. And then, yeah, as far as like, the community based stuff, I've really just tried to do things virtually. And I feel like a lot of the folks that I work with and do stuff with are also very Disability Justice minded. And so we've had, I think, better hygiene around supporting community members who are immunocompromised. And so I think my behavior has changed in that sense that I really look at a lot of things more through like a disability justice lens, and think about all because I have a lot of friends that you know, it face, you know, not only medical discrimination, medical racism, you know, I have friends that experience, you know, fat discrimination for being obese, and there's just all these different factors. So I think, to me, being socially responsible to protect them, so that I can continue to be in relationship with those folks, has often been more important than kind of engaging in the way that I would have, historically speaking, when it comes to like, physical touch and intimacy. And I think slowly over time, I've become more like open to but I think the people that I'm around are pretty consent based. So like, when I see people that I haven't seen in a while, they ask, like, are you okay to hug? Like, are you up to that? And most of the time, we can like talk through, it's like, okay, we're both vaccinated. I kind of know what you're doing. Like, yeah, I'm a hugger. So like, that's what I would prefer to do. But yeah, it's been very, like consent based. So I think it's like situational, and depends on the context and the relationship. And I've tried to stay true to myself while also navigating this new world that we're in and doing things in a way that is good for the collective good.

**Kit Heintzman** 02:03:25

How was the concert? What did it feel like going back into a crowd?

**Lukas Soto** 02:03:30

I'm trying I'm like, which, like, which show did we go to? I mean, going into public spaces, it's been clear people's level of seriousness about things or like just watching other people's practices has. I have a high level of skepticism, I think, in general, based on my experiences that I think it's pretty, I think it's a pretty healthy thing, the level of distrust that I have in general for the outside world. And yeah, I think with the people that we've like, gone and done stuff, I'm like, This is my level of comfort. What do you want, you know, and we like have, we kind of know what our game plan is going in. And so like, if we're collectively like deciding, we're all wearing masks, like that's something that like our whole group is like on board with and we like respect that and it's like, okay, we're going to do that because we all collectively decided that's what we're going to do. And then being another situations where we're like, oh, we feel kind of more comfortable. We'll have masks offer whatever. But yeah, being in, you know, spaces and enjoying or going into activities that I would have normally enjoyed in the old world, it is different. And you can definitely see the nuances of how things have kind of shifted on. Often, and

I think it could be less pronounced where if you're not really looking for the nuance, you could say, oh, everything's back to normal, it's so great that it's back to normal. But I do think that there's a different energy to, and just seeing people's carelessness and the anger and especially like, that's one of the things that my partner has said, cuz she likes to go to like punk rock shows and stuff. And that's what she's noticed with Gen Z is the angst that they're just a very depressed and like anxious and even the way that they like Mosh is different. The way that they like go into the pit is different than the way that you know, I would have when I was 15 16 17, going to shows. So seeing stuff like that, where it's like, if you didn't have the context of like being a show go or for, you know, 20 years, and then taking a pause and going back and being like, oh, not only have like things changed because of the pandemic. But now, there's this whole new generation of kids coming in, there's this whole new generation of youth. And that was the funny thing that like shifted, that I think there was the shift in the pandemic, where I stopped being viewed as like, a 20 something or like a young person to then people started looking at me, and I'm like, Oh, they felt like it kind of happened overnight. Where then being around younger folks, I'm like, oh, yeah, we're not, we're not the same, like your lived experience. And your worldview is not the same as like, my friends that are, you know, between their 30s and 40s. Like my friends that were born in 1980, I feel like I relate to a lot more than, you know, people that I talked to, that were born in maybe like 97 98, or 2000. It's, and I always tell people, I'm like, we really, you know, the world changed after 911. And the people that were alive, prior to 911. Remember what the old world was like, what the old old world because after 911, the war on terror, surveillance, the tech boom, all these things, you know, really shifted how we viewed ourselves and how we viewed one another in relation to one another. So I often I, that's like, a marker that I often reference to in the work that I do, because I look at things through an intergenerational lens of, you know, psychologically, we are different. You know, the silent generation is different than the boomers, the boomers are different than Gen X, Gen X is different than millennials, and millennials are different than Gen Z. And we can say, Oh, we're all the same. But now our you know, like the stuff that was going on historically, at the time where our minds were developing, or where we were having these experiences, really does play a major role into how we move through the world and relate to one another. And so that's been really interesting going into public spaces, is seeing the generational differences, post pandemic life.

**Kit Heintzman** 02:07:58

How are you feeling about the immediate future?

**Lukas Soto** 02:08:03

Oh, it's unstable, it's uncertain. And I think it's really unpredictable. And I think making a five or 10 Year Plan is kind of laughable at this point. I think it must be a very nice privilege to be able to confidently make a five or 10 year plan, none of the people that I'm like, close to, can I it is laughable to like, think about that stuff, because it's like fuck, you know, I don't even know what's gonna happen next month, you know, really, it's like I come, you know, I have like stuff planned. But things have changed so many times where I think what the pandemic has shown me is, how much adaptability flexibility is a really valuable skill set to have. And, you know, people have needed a lot more compassion and forgiveness and I think understanding and that's something that people feel like shame about, like, you know, like, oh, I, you know, I couldn't like show up to this, or I've just had, you know, this or that going on, and I'm like, Well, yeah, like, the fucking world is on fire. Like, all that, you know, we're like dealing with like, egregious issues, and we're not given the space to grieve. We're just supposed to like, be okay. And I think because of the life that I've lived, I'm really well positioned to deal with the stuff that we've been dealing with the last couple of years. I feel like I have a much stronger ability or capacity to deal with these uncertainties, because like I said, All I know is survival, I know survive, and I know how to stay alive in a world

that has been designed to watch me fail. And so with all the unpredictability of like, what these stupid ass billionaires are doing, and what our elected official, you know, what the, you know, oligarchy is doing, how, you know, every day, we're trying to go back to the ideal of one, they thought America was great, which is when you could forcibly, you know, marry 12 year olds and forced them to, you know, bear six children for you. That in a lot of people's mind is when America was great is when you could own other people in indentured servitude, or as slaves. And we're seeing that with our Supreme Court justices trying to resend things that you know, is kind of incomprehensible to other countries and talking to people that are in it. And you know, like, even in the United Kingdom, or other parts of the world, I think a lot of people are kind of looking at the United States, like what the fuck is wrong with these people? And I, I am asking myself the same thing. A lot of times, just like, What is wrong with people? So yeah, I think there's just a lot of uncertainty, I think the world is going to change a lot between now and 2030, because of the climate issues that are not, you know, at this point, it's a lot of stuff is too late, there's not, you know, it's like the Greenland ice cap is going to melt. And when that melts completely, the earth is going to be a very inhospitable place for humans where you know, the earth overall, because we've been able to keep it and that plus, plus or minus one degrees Celsius range, the Earth has been a pretty great place for humans to be more going into an era where that's not going to be the case. And I think my gumption is that we're going to become a more nomadic people, once again, the reality of becoming a climate refugee is something that I think all people, the global population of people needs to reconcile with that, then the fact you know, becoming a climate refugee is one of the things that the literally anyone can become fall victim to. And the other thing that we need to the flip side of that is that most modernized, democratic westernized nations, the biggest policy issue that they're dealing with, and the biggest, like kind of societal issue that most of these nations are dealing with, is immigration policy, and xenophobia, and anti Muslim rhetoric. Islamophobia is a global crisis. And when we look at the climate issue, the people that are going to be displaced, the soonest we're already seeing this happen. Our folks in Southeast Asia, demographic wise, the highest populations of the of Muslim people are in Southeast Asia.

**Lukas Soto** 02:13:20

So if you're thinking people are going to be forced to move, and all these western countries can't deal with their immigration policy, and with xenophobia, and anti, you know, Muslim rhetoric and anti blackness and all this shit, how are we going to deal with these challenges when it's going to boil down to do you want to eat? Do you want to live? And we're, like, caught up with, you know, stuff that really, you know, I'm like, we've we're mighty humans have always migrated, humans have always migrated in all different, you know, points of time, and the policing of the nation state, and you know, all this stuff that goes along with a nationalism and how extremism is fed into it. I think that's the place where we need to be spending more time, because that's what's going to make things a whole lot more volatile, when the world continues to change. And we're not bigger than the climate, we're not bigger than the Earth. We're not bigger than, you know, unforeseen factors that that, you know, could change things in a blink of an eye. And I think COVID was a prime example of the volatility, the impermanence, the instability of the built systems that we have, that are, you know, we have this built world that's supposed to be so secure, you know, more than ever with technology and, you know, multimillion dollar budgets for police forces, these militarized police forces. And what COVID showed us is that like, as humans, we're not really good at working together. We're not really good at dealing with crisis and And when shit hits the fan, you know, what a lot of people's go to is denial and blame. And that to me just makes for a whole lot of unpredictability. So I'm just kind of like, well, I'm just gonna roll with the punches, and I'm kind of used to dealing with very ideal situations and with a lot of bullshit. And so we'll just keep, you know, I'm like, I'll just keep showing up.

**Kit Heintzman** 02:15:04

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

**Lukas Soto** 02:15:09

Um, I think a more localized economies, we need to have more place based local economies built around how we interact with one another. US agriculture, is killing our, you know, it's killing our planet. I think we have to support more small business corporations are killing our planet, you know, single use vehicles, like all these different things that we built in our mind is like, this is the right way to be like, we all need to have our own house, our own car, our own, you know, we have to have our own shit. And it's like, why? What, you know, like, what is the necessity of single use vehicles? We've just built a society in which that is the only possibility. But is that the only way that things could be? I think not, I think we can, you know, we could come up with, with different solutions to how we move through our world. But I do think that having more local based economies where things are not so globalized is what we're going to have to move towards. Because you know, what the supply, you know, just all the stuff that I think, you know, with all the markets and supply shortages, and now with the like food shortage, you know, the baby foods, just storage and stuff, we have to find solutions that are going to be accessible to people and people are not going to be able to travel 1000s of miles, you know, we're gonna have to figure out solutions, you know, right in our backyard. And so I think that's what we need to, you know, I think it's important to pay attention to larger scale issues, to be aware of world issues and what's going on and in different parts of the world. And I think that, you know, collectively, we can change things. But I think it's far more impactful to deal with the things closest to you to work with the lived and built environment around you. I think it's a lot, it's far more radical to tend to, you know, that, even if it's just a few relationships, but that's what you spend your time, you know, wholeheartedly on, I think that oftentimes is a lot more impactful than trying to like do some big, you know, some big shift. Because I really think that the change does start with with you as an individual. And so I think kind of moving away from like, globalism, I don't think that it, you know, like, I think Americans are very ignorant in that they're not aware of, you know, most Americans like struggled to speak the English language, let alone read and write, whereas you go to lots of other parts of the world. And most people are at least bilingual, if not speak, you know, three to four languages. And that's kind of common. And then here, it's like we struggle, you know, with English literacy. And so I think that it's, it would be important, especially for Americanism to be more open to stuff outside of the little bubble that we're in and realize that the way that our re our bill, reality is in the United States is not the same even you know, if you go into Central or South America, it's a very different reality. And I think people need to be more aware of what other people's lived experiences I think now with like social media, and the way the news is, is that it's very easy to surround yourself with only information and people that agree with you. And I don't think that that is what we I don't think that's great. I think we need to be around people different than us. I think we need to be have our beliefs challenged, I think we need to have, you know, differing points of view. And I don't think that we need to agree on everything. I think that we should disagree on stuff and I think we can still, you know, find a common ground in a disagreement, you know, and I think that's what we need to kind of work towards tending more is like how we're being in relationship with one another one on one, and really cold of eating a more loving and connected relationship with the self. And then pursuing that with other people.

**Lukas Soto** 02:19:47

But, you know, kind of keeping them more place based, I think we can, you know, if we were worrying about, you know, what do we need to do to me, everybody, you know, in my street? How do I know that everybody has their needs met? Everybody's, you know, you know, they have food on the table, they've got, you know, what they, you know, they got the stuff that they need, I think if we spent more time thinking about, Okay, I'm one

person, but in, you know, this community of these people on my street, maybe there's 20 People that live on my street, I think that 20 of us together would come up could come up with solutions so that all of us could have our basic needs met, and then from there, you know, built and I think that has to be more of the priority of like, how do we ensure that everybody is least getting like a basic, and I think we have to agree that you know, shelter, food, clean air, clean water, that these are human rights, and that they're non negotiable, that having access to clean water is something that we collectively believe, is a right that all people should have. And that's something that we don't agree on, right now. And so yeah, I think kind of looking at that stuff of like, Why this s&m thing persists, and how that ties to power and why we feel so threatened by other people having their needs met.

**Kit Heintzman** 02:21:18

What are some of the ways that you've been taking care of yourself?

**Lukas Soto** 02:21:24

Um, I know, you know, it's funny, because I feel like I've taken pretty bad care. Last couple years, and you know, everything I Yeah, things just kind of switched around prior to the pandemic, I was somebody that would travel throughout the year, and I was doing a lot of traditional ceremonies throughout the year, and that was like a big piece of where I was able to fill my cup. And so then that stopped, and there was like, nothing to take its place. And so I think what I've seen for myself, and like, a lot of other people is just like, Oh, you're stuck in the house more, you're like work, you're doing basically everything from home, and you're bored. And so I think a lot more people have been like drinking, which is something that I've fallen into, and, you know, it's like, I lowered my cholesterol lower than it's been in like five years, and then, you know, through shit out of whack from drinking too much. So it's like, you know, you improve some stuff, and then other shifts, gotten out of whack. And then, you know, it's like, the stuff that I did before, like going to the gym. wasn't really possible. So it's like, okay, now you kind of have to find new activities to meet those needs. And I think it's just been a lot of trial and error. And I think the other thing that, you know, like, as far as taking care of myself is like, realizing that I'm doing the best that I can, even on the days where I'm doing, like, awful. And like not taking care of myself well, at all, in my opinion, I'm like, That is the best that I am able to do that day. And it's not the like, I'm intent like that. I'm trying to, like, do things that are bad for myself, I think sometimes, you know, you're just doing what you have to, to get by. And I think meeting yourself then with judgment is not helpful. But I think being compassionate about like, Okay, well, you might not be happy with where you're at or what you're doing. But this is this is the best that you can do. And like that, I think sometimes has to be enough. And I think it can be really challenging when you face economic barriers, where it's like you're fully aware of like all the things that you need to do to be healthier to meet your needs. And like there's literally nothing in your power that you can do. It's like yeah, I can't like snap my fingers and like, fix, you know, my poverty issue. I wish I could, but you know, I haven't been able to think my way out of poverty. So, you know, I think what some stuff like that, that you really have to like, get right sized with things and realize that even when you're not meeting your ideal of your best that that might still be you know, your best effort given the circumstances that you're in. So I think that's been a whole lot of what I've had to do is just been like, not happy with like, the way things are going or what I'm having to do but then realizing that like that's me giving my best effort and if I had a different or if I was able to then I probably would and so that needs to be okay, um, And that, you know, acceptance me doesn't mean that like you're necessarily okay with something. But like acceptance means that you're just like, acknowledging, this is what it is. And if this can be the baseline, then I can like build on this and kind of work towards shifting it. So I think, you know, now, my, my partner lives in Vancouver, Washington right now with her house may. And so we've been doing the long distance thing, and I have clients up here in Portland, so it's worked out because I come up here for work, but it you know,

it just sucks being, you know, three states away. And after this shooting that happened in Texas last week, both both my all of us are Lepine, they're both Mexican American. And after seeing all that, and then everything else that's been kind of going on in the news, and then the, you know, the buffalo shooting as well.

**Lukas Soto** 02:25:39

They decided that they're extreme, they're like, I don't really want to do another eight months in Portland, we don't feel safe here. We, you know, it's like, the only thing keeping us here is the lease. And our jobs and like, our jobs are kind of, you know, sucking, too. And so last week, they decided, we're both quitting our jobs, and we're breaking the lease, and we're moving in with you, and something like cool. So I'm really excited for that. I'm excited that we're going to be able to merge homes and I think having multiple people with incomes and multiple people who are like able bodied and kind of more socialized to dealing with the built world, whereas the two people that I live with have only ever lived on their reservation, and have been really removed from stuff. They lack the knowledge to know always how to navigate these systems. And so it's been a huge learning curve for everyone. Because they've just it's been like years and years and years of neglect and seeing the impacts of the Indian Wars, the snake wars that happened in the mid to late 1800s, which would make it seem like, Oh, that was so long ago. But it really isn't, then because Dean talks to me, Dean was raised by his grandmother and his great grandmother. And they experience that you know, like they are living remnants of the genocide that the American government has enacted towards First Nation people. And so then moving in and living with my elder and living with his nephew, who have only ever lived in Pyramid Lake have only ever lived in that very small community. And then seeing Dean's health and Roberts health and all that, you know, and just seeing that they are very much a product of American genocide. You can't really get frustrated at times when they like don't know how to do shit that like you're expected that's like seen as common sense and American culture of like dominant culture that you're just supposed to know how to, like do this stuff. It isn't common knowledge to everybody. And and so that's been really challenging. So I think having Marquez and Lily move in will help to support Dean and Robert to be able to live a more empowered life where they can find the middle ground of having to interact with this outside world while staying true to our traditions, to our values and who we are as a people. So I think that'll be really good to have, you know, we'll have a very intergenerational house, we're, you know, we'll have three cats and then my puppy and then we're probably going to get another dog. So I think it'll be really good for us to just, you know, be in this mess together. And kind of fight you know, fight in the bullshit fight in the fascism one day at a time together, I think it's a lot less disheartening than, you know, doing it from like, an individualistic place where I think that's been a challenge for folks is that a lot of people have been completely isolated. And I think the pandemic was maybe the first time that people had to really be what themselves. To me, I'm like, I've been in solitary confinement. You know, I've been in prison. And so the pandemic, really, I'm like, it couldn't be worse. And so that was like my ongoing I have kind of a dark sense of humor. And when people were complaining and I said, Well, it's abundantly clear that none of you people have been to prison. And this is just like, whiny nonsense. And so you know, I can kind of laugh about Hmm, the stuff that was like very traumatic to me in the past has now been a silver lining with, you know, dealing with climate collapse and global pandemics and, you know, race wars and like all this other stuff, I'm just like, well, I feel like I'm actually pretty well positioned to deal with this stuff now. So I'm like, I guess it, you know, there was a reason, that was a reason why. So yeah, I'm looking forward to what the next, you know, few years brings. And I think you know, the thing and going back to like, the death work thread is that people are so afraid of death, but they forget that with death always comes rebirth. You know, you look at all these forest fires that have happened here on the West Coast. And I've been able to, they've been closed, I've been able to go back through some of the forests that I grew up, you know, that I've been going to,

you know, since since the early 90s, have spent time getting to know these relatives, and going and it was like, being in a mass grave of

**Lukas Soto 02:30:40**

family members and knowing in my life, I will never see these forests again, the way that they are, but don't continue on, you know, these forests will rebuild themselves, they will regenerate. And it's us that are really impermanent, you know, we're not, you know, the light, even if we live now that we have longer life expectancy, 100 years, it's a very short period of time, when you think about the grand scale of things and how little we are in history, you know, and how little we've been, you know, recording human behavior throughout history. There's, you know, there's not a whole lot that we know, but with, with death comes rebirth. And so I think with all this craziness, there's a lot of hope. Because these things need to die. And with the death of these things that are no longer serving us will create space for new things to be birthed. And I think that is the really exciting piece is that we get to, we get to be the ones to lay down those foundational blocks for what's to come next. And I don't think that in my lifetime, I'll see racism eradicated, or I'll see, you know, a lot of these things that I'm fighting for, no longer cease to exist. But, you know, I had a mentor, say, you know, if you're in this work, because you think you're going to change things in your life, you kind of find a new career. Because this is a long haul and changes slow, especially when it comes to humans, I mean, God just look at, I just think about, you know, I'm like to be born and you know, 1934, and you could still be alive today, the world is has changed significantly since 1934. But when you look at the psyche, and like the social stuff, we really have not shifted a whole lot when it comes to structurally policy wide around women's rights, or, you know, a lot of other stuff. It's just like, now we're like, trying to, like, roll this stuff back in 2022. So I'm like, No, we, we have a long way to, to go. And I and I welcomed the death, I welcome the death because to me, I would rather die a million times over then stay the same. And I think maybe other people need to embrace that philosophy too, is that maybe staying the same is not more worth just dying, letting it all go? Because it's like, once it's all once everything is gone, you know, like fire, I think is a you know, fire is a very powerful element that has the power, the ability to just completely obliterate and destroy and change the molecular structure and compound, you know, just turned something like built into dust. And it's like, once it's gone. It's like yeah, you know, the pretty buildings or whatever, the forest, it's gone, but then you have this whole open, you know, palette to work with. And so I think that's where we have to kind of lean on is not looking at, you know, the negatives or like, oh, you know, all this stuff is changing and you know, things are dying, but looking at it as like, yeah, all these things are changing and they're dying.

**Lukas Soto 02:34:05**

And let's lean into that, you know, let's lean into that because, you know, it's time for for new things to be birthed. So yeah, I mean, you know, overall, it's, it's unpredictable and I'm not banking on a whole lot, but I'm excited. I'm excited to see what happens and I feel like you know, it'll take a lot to take me out so um, I'll stick a stick around as long as possible and you know, continue to bark at people that need to be barked at and continue to shake hangs up and, you know, make way for for these youth to come in and do stuff and they're very chaotic generation and I love it I welcome it wholeheartedly I'm like I, you know, I was like I was I helped create you psychotic ass crazy as kids and I just I appreciate it I'm like, I can't wait to see what they do. I'm I'm excited to see what, what these kids do because they have really high emotional intelligence and they're very wise wise beyond their years because they've had to deal with, I think their mortality and a lot heavier stuff than previous generations did. And I think people could argue and say, Oh, well, when we were coming up, you know, we dealt with Vietnam, and this and that, and it was, you know, it's different, you guys are so privileged, but I don't think that in the world is a safer place to be in 2022, I think that the world that we live in now is far more dangerous place to be a youth to be



a child than it was even for me and growing up in the in the 90s. I think that I have a lot of privilege over even my son, you know, and he's, he'll be 14 this year. And I think, you know, of my life when I was 13, or 14, and I did not have to deal with the things that he has to deal with today. And so I know that I'm privileged in that regard. And I and I feel the same about the generations prior. The, what kids are dealing with today is not anything that we that youth have had to deal with before at the level that they are in, so I am protective of them. And and I just have to you know, it's like when I'm feeling bad about myself or my situation, I got to think about them and think Man, there's a whole lot of like shitty people out in the world assholes, and people that don't remember what it's like to be a kid, and don't really care. And I'm like, Man, people could say whatever about me, but I feel like I have a lot more to offer young people as far as helping them to develop themselves into healthy, grounded, you know, multi dimensional beings. And so to me that's worth sticking around for us to help see them grow and flourish. And lead. Yeah, so I look forward to the change, I think we're going to deal with a lot more craziness but but it's gonna, things are gonna, you know, in that there's, there's still a lot of hope.

**Kit Heintzman** 02:37:22

What should academics and the humanities and the social sciences be studying right now to help us understand the human social side of the pandemic?

**Lukas Soto** 02:37:32

I think spending time with those whose stories are erased, people whose narratives are not, they're falsely represented, I think spending time with the people that have been pushed to the margins of society that people that are deemed as not being worthy of human life. You know, I spent a lot of time when I was in school, studying Judith Butler's work, and she writes a lot about social death, and the breathability of life, and the grieve ability of death, and whose life is grievable. And, and she focuses a lot on Holocaust survivors, but then touches in into other populations of people. And as a person of trans experience, I was particularly interested in those two topics, because trans people experience social death on many levels, and our lives are not grievable. And what I've found, in my own, you know, life and what the activism work that I do is that the people that are the least likely, in my mind to like, be somebody that has something to teach me or something to offer me or the people that I would be least likely to interact with, have often been the most profound experiences that I could have. And so I think, historically, the way that we've built knowledge and we built systems of knowledge, it has favored certain types of learning certain types of, you know, when we look at academia as a whole and how that's developed, you know, from going back to like Greek and Roman times, and how philosophy as a discipline built and you know, like Cartesian thought and all this, you know, all you know, and then like how, you know, the school systems were built and how the American school system was built. We, you know, our knowledge is really limited because we've only we've only recorded You know, certain narratives from certain viewpoints and deem certain knowledge as you know, the correct or proper knowledge. And I think we have to move outside of that box out of the rigidity of, of, you know, what's viewed as like, right and, and allow people that are very far removed from those structures to be the ones to lead the teaching, because I think they have a lot to teach and been around. I've been around a lot of traditional elders, elders that, you know, were impacted by the reservation, the boarding school system, and, you know, grew up with their grand parents who were first language speakers, and some of them still speak their language. And, you know, most of American society would look at those people as bankrupt, ignorant, you know, poverty stricken, just, you know, just like kind of pitiful people and think, Oh, you don't even have a GED, you must be really incompetent. And it's been, you know, people that I've met, that have second grade education, they're illiterate, they, you know, don't have a GED that have some of the most wisdom and the most knowledge of anybody I've ever met more than, and I've have known a lot of people with PhDs, very

unimpressive people with PhDs that, you know, can't really say much to even what they've studied, but they have the title. So I don't think that the things that we often, you know, decide like, oh, you know, for me, for example, I'm articulate, I'm, you know, I've always been told, Oh, you're so articulate, and you're very good at, like, explaining stuff. And so people could say, oh, you know, that I'm smarter than someone else that because I'm able to articulate my thoughts and ideas. And I don't think that that's true, I've met a lot of people that are like, very socially awkward, and like, you know, on the spectrum, or like, are not good at writing or have dyslexia. And they have so much to teach others. And so I think we have to, like move outside of how we are, allow ourselves to be taught. And I think embracing creativity, that's why I love the arts. And I love being around artistic and creative people because they really work outside of the frameworks of like, what we're taught, like, oh, you need to, like read a book or like, take a standardized test. And other people were like, well, what, you know, like, what if we did you know, what if we did this, that's like, completely counterintuitive? I think there's a lot of power in that. And I think that's, you know,

### **Lukas Soto 02:42:21**

I think having interdisciplinary approaches, and, you know, because like what I see about, like, the different discipline that you choose, you choose, you know, if you like, for me, I went towards sociology, because I liked the way that they were problem solving, how are you asking the question? How are you seeking, you know, truth? How are you building, you know, a study or gathering data? And how are you asking questions? I think that, you know, if you just stay with one thing that really limits your ability to problem solve, and so I think for us to be able to come up and innovate creative solutions, we have to approach things in a creative way. And I think academia needs to move away from the way things have historically been done. You know, the peer Review, peer reviewed journals and like doing, you know, doing different things, I have found that when I was in academia, that professors that did more community based learning, stuff that that was, you know, that getting out and having lived experience of like going out into the field and working with folks that that often is far more profound than, you know, reading a book. And, yeah, and then I think the other thing for academics is like realizing that, you know, being all knowing or having a lot of knowledge, if you're just reserving it to the ivory tower, that you're in that it doesn't really serve much to the general population that most people have no clue what academics do. Most people do not give a fuck about the research that academics do, because they can't read it. It's not accessible. And that's the thing like I love academic writing. I'm good with like, big words. And I like you know, I like reading I have a lot of different theorists that I enjoy reading that are very heavy, and kind of irritating in the way that they write because it's very, like jargon laden. And there's a time and a place for that. And I think there's certain people that can really engage in fun with that, but to me is like, what good is my education and my ability to like write a really intricate title about the complexities of this in that if you know, the people that are the most impact acted by the research have no, you know, they have no access point to it no entry point, and it doesn't do anything to profoundly change you know, to give somebody like a psychic shift or like a, you know, an opening. And so I think kind of moving away from the rigidity and being able to provide stuff that's more accessible to the masses, or more people can engage with our passion of being learners, because I feel like a lot of academics, we go into it, because we're nerds we enjoy learning, we enjoy exploration, we enjoy discovery. And it's like, but it's closed off to only the people that were like, in the same, you know, group with. And I think if we were able to kind of disrupt that notion, and make it more open to the masses, that that would really shift the way that we were asking questions, and you know, like putting really looking at things. So yeah, I say go against the grain go against what the system says is the right thing to do, do the opposite. A lot of the times because you just never know, you never know what you might find of like doing things like completely opposite. Even that exercise of doing stuff that feels very foreign, and very, like, this is not how I was taught. Even that, like experience can lead to profound

kind of aha moments where you're like, oh, wow, if I wouldn't have taken that chance, or taking that risk, we might have not led to, you know, this other, you know, this other question, or this other set of research, or this other opening? So, yeah, I think that's when, you know, I think things the education system needs to become more accessible to people, I think the work that we do internally needs to be more readily available for people to engage in discourse around to be able to engage with it and to give, you know, we need that like, critique. And I think being around people that aren't college educated, when we're like, dealing with our stuff kind of is a humbling thing, because they're like the like, I do not, I literally do not give a fuck about this like this. You know, I think we need to hear that sometimes.

**Lukas Soto** 02:47:51

And, you know, and just being open to like, maybe the way that we've done stuff isn't the right way. And really questioning those power structures. Because what I found with like, the academy and why I was like, I don't think I could do this is because a lot of the times, it's like the people that run I went to Lewis and Clark, it's a small liberal arts school. And like, the people that are the closest to the student body is the professors, but the professors have little to no say, and how anything gets done, and they are not willing to voice things because they don't want to lose tenure, or not be offered it and being able, like most people are adjuncts, so you have shitty benefits, you know, you know, all the stuff, I'm sure. And so I feel like the people that are the closest to the problem are not able to offer solutions. And then it's these people that are behind closed doors, that the reason why they get to make decision is because they're funding stuff. They're the ones with the trust, and so they get to pull the strings, and that is my big bond with academia is because it doesn't value knowledge, a lot of the times it doesn't value Critical Thinking it values, the status quo, and values, you know, certain things that are very counterintuitive to learning. And as long as you know, the higher education is for profit, and not for the pursuit of critical thought and for the betterment of society. I think we're, you know, in in a really dangerous place. And that, yeah, that's kind of my take with with academia, especially in the US is that it's so deeply entrenched in white supremacy, culture and the inequities of getting into schools and who gets to have, you know, access to Ivy League schools, you know, the fact that you can look at a, you know, I could look at a high school seniors, grandparents, W nine, and that would give me a better indicator of whether or not they'd be accepted into brown or Harvard than their academic transcript. That's an issue. And that's something that I think academics need to push back on of like, why is this if we're saying that, you know, if we're being taught that, you know, this is our role as academics in our respective disciplines, then why is this kind of the prevailing theme of who gets to be a winner or loser in our society and whose knowledge is deemed as the right knowledge or the knowledge that we look to? Yeah, I think that needs to shift and being booksmart is not, you know, it ain't innate it oftentimes, I think. Yeah, I think there's there's a lot more to it, but Uh, you know, I think just being open and really being around people outside of our comfort space to challenge us and to help us see things that well, you know, we all have blind spots, we all have blind spots. And we have to, you know, I think in order to be like real, like good researchers, we have to interrogate those blind spots and constantly be seeking ways to improve our biases as researchers, especially because we have, you know, it's like, I have biases, whether I want to or not, and so yeah, looking at that.

**Kit Heintzman** 02:50:18

I want to thank you so much for the generosity of your time and the wisdom and kindness of your answers. Those are all of the questions I know how to ask right now. But if there's anything you'd like to say, that I haven't made room for, please take some space and say, so.

**Lukas Soto** 02:50:37

Yeah, I think projects like this are really revolutionary, because it does go really counter to a lot of times, you know, for indigenous people, we were an oral history. People, you know, that's how things were passed on was through stories was through doing exactly what we're doing right now is sitting down and taking time to get to know one another, I think that is profound. And something that we need to lean more into, is taking the time to know one another's stories. Many years ago, there was this guy used to do 1212 step for many years. And he said in a meeting, the ones who said, you know, either I like you, I love you, or I just don't know you. And he said, You know, I can't think if I sat down with a single person, and you sat down and told me your story from start to finish, that at the end of it, I wouldn't like your love you. And so if I don't like you, or love you, it's because I just don't know you. And and I think there's a lot of truth in that. And so I think, you know, making space to go back to these Indigenous ways of knowing of sharing through song, through dance, through storytelling, through touch, through things that are very, of the left brain, yeah, the left brain is the feminine and the more creative part. And then the right is like language and linguistics and, you know, writing and documentation, I think we gotta move more back into the left and be, you know, connecting to that. The spirituality, you know, that spirituality and the interconnectedness of, of, you know, what makes us us and, you know, for native peoples, we do believe that we're, you know, connected to everything that anything that has life I'm connected to, and so I have a responsibility and a duty, to uphold, and to regard and to protect life and to, you know, get, you know, to do the things that give to life and not take away from it. And, and I think sitting and documenting and having conversations, where people can just be more hold a lot more weight than, you know, maybe a statistic or a percentage or, you know, other data points, I think, stories, you know, it's like the Maya Angelou saying she goes, you know, people aren't going to really remember what you did, they're going to remember how you made them feel. And so it's like, you know, we get into our feelings through stories and I, yeah, I've, you know, storytelling is a big piece of the work that I do, how I do anti racism work, how I do transformational organization, transformational organizational change, work, the is through, you know, the power of stories, and, and, you know, seeing that, at the end of the day, we have a lot more in common than than not now, and that's, I think, that is definitely what is needed now is for us to be able to see our, our commonality, you know, see that were unique and and give respect and reverence and, you know, space to people to be uniquely who they are and be different, but to see that we're actually a lot more likely than not so, yeah, I think I think this is is good, you know, this is noble work to be doing and, you know, there needs to the stories need to be out there. Yeah, because they're, you know, who knows what's going to happen? So it's like, well, maybe Maybe this is something that will exist, maybe if all the books are burned, somehow this will like stay on the cloud. And then, you know, our future relatives, you know, 100 years from now are going to be able to have access to this. And those stories might ignite a fire within them and their purpose and the work that they're supposed to do. So I'm excited that I got to be a part of this and I appreciate you reaching out. I am always when people are like, oh, so I'm like, people are talking about me. This is so weird, but I appreciate you know, and the opportunity to run my mouth because it's something I've always been good at. I always tell people I was late to to speak. I didn't start talking until I was almost two but once I started talking, I never shut the fuck up. So

**Lukas Soto** 02:55:26

I yeah, I always appreciate any time where that space is given. And I hope you know, whatever I say I always say, you know, if it impacts one person, then I guess I did my work. So yeah, hopefully somebody hears it down the road and, you know, maybe connects to it or completely hates it, but it drives them in a direction that they're able to do good things with it. So whatever the outcome, I think it was worthwhile in endeavor.

**Kit Heintzman** 02:56:02

Thank you so much.