

Transcript of Interview with Sonora Reyes by Kit Heintzman

Interviewee: Sonora Reyes

Interviewer: Kit Heintzman

Date: 08/04/2022

Location (Interviewee): Tempe, Arizona

Location (Interviewer):

Transcribed By: Angelica S Ramos

Some of the things we discussed include:

Being COVID high risk and early adoption of safety precautions. Grandfather passing away in February 2020 and uncertainty about safety at the funeral: elbow bumps, masking. Being on AHCCCS (Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System) insurance in Arizona at the beginning of the pandemic. Being disabled, applying for social security with employer's support for 1+ year, losing that social security after getting a book contract. Chronic fatigue and schizoaffective disorder. Fatphobia in the healthcare industry. The difficulty of finding doctors who care. Living in a transgenerational household at the beginning of the pandemic and moving out, living out of a suitcase, and moving back home. Mother working in education, schools shutting down. Paying attention to personal stories of COVID through Twitter. Finding in-person writing groups pre-pandemic and transitioning to Zoom. Spending the pandemic writing and releasing first book, *The Lesbian's Guide to Catholic School* (2022). Being the target of online rightwing trolls after book release: death threats and homophobia. Post-trolling anxiety about in-person book events in 2022. Vaccination wait times. Catching COVID post-vaccination circa Jan 2022; COVID-spreading through the household. Long COVID: exhaustion, increased dependence on a cane, snoring. Anti-Asian racism during the pandemic; police brutality. The division among people after the murder of George Floyd; police bias and their handling of the protests. Safety as a precondition for health. Hope about COVID's endemic status.

Kit Heintzman 00:02

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

Sonora Reyes 00:08

So my name is Sonora Reyes date is August 4, 2022. It is three o'clock Eastern time. And my location is Tempe, Arizona.

Kit Heintzman 00:21

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

Sonora Reyes 00:32

Yes.

Kit Heintzman 00:34

Thank you so much. Would you please start by introducing yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening? What would you want them to know about you?

Sonora Reyes 00:42

Yeah, my name is Nora, I am a YA author. I mean you know, I am a pretty new author. My book just came out in May of 22. And see, I live in Arizona. I've been writing for most of the pandemic. So yeah.

Kit Heintzman 01:10

What does the word pandemic mean to you?

Sonora Reyes 01:14

Um, I guess like, just a, like, global sickness

Kit Heintzman 01:26

Would you tell me a story about your life during the pandemic?

Sonora Reyes 01:31

Yes, so earlier in the pandemic, my family was all living together. Like in the beginning of the pandemic, it was, me, my parents, my sisters, and their spouses and their kids, and then our dogs. So there was about 10 of us living all together, in like a four bedroom house. And it was hard because everybody had different ideas of what like, safety was during the pandemic, this was like very early days, nobody really knew like what to do. And I was the one that was very much like, Okay, we have to wear masks, we have to stay home. We're not going out to restaurants or not doing this and that and I was like, bossy, like, kind of telling everyone like, what to do. But for me, it was like safety, because I'm high risk. And not everybody agreed with me. And so I eventually had to move out. Because I wanted to live where, where I was able to quarantine because you can't quarantine if the people you live with are not quarantining. So I had to move it was my first time moving, like out of my parents house since Yeah, so it was like a big deal for me. I ended up moving back a couple of like, years later. So like, later in the pandemic, and now I live there again, because everyone decided that they were going to be safer, and then the vaccines happened. And so we were all able to feel a little bit safer. Um, but yeah, I think I had like a really hard experience with like, the living situation. And all of that.

Kit Heintzman 03:41

Would you share more about the process of deciding to move out? And then like, how does one actually, like, move places? How did you find a place to live? What did that look like?

Sonora Reyes 03:52

Yeah, so um, I, it was a pretty easy decision for me, because I knew that I needed to take care of my health. And some other people in the household didn't fully understand what they needed to do in order to keep me safe. And I don't think that any of us knew how serious it was at the time, but I was very much expecting it to be very serious. And so I had a couple of friends who were also very much expecting it to be very serious. And I knew that they would be quarantining. So I decided to move out at first it was like, Oh, well move out for a couple of months until this dies down. And then it just ended up being a lot longer than that. But I ended up finding a roommate in one of my friends who just happened to have one of their roommates move out, like right when I needed to move. So they had like an open room and rent wasn't too bad. So I just decided to like pick up and move and I only moved with like one suitcase. Because I thought it wasn't going to be that long. So obviously lived out of a suitcase for like a year.

Kit Heintzman 05:28

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

Sonora Reyes 05:32

Yes, um, I don't remember the specific incident. Like my the first time that I heard the word but I know that the first time it was relevant to me was when so my grandpa passed away, like very early in the pandemic, like in like February, like before, it was before lockdown happened, like February 2020. But we were all still pretty, like aware of COVID just not knowing how serious it was. And so the funeral happened. And it was nobody knew like how to act on each other because everyone wanted to hug because it's a funeral, but nobody wanted to, like touch each other. Because of COVID. So it was a really like, weird experience. Um, and I think that was like, the first time that like, I remember COVID being like a big deal in my life.

Kit Heintzman 06:43

Were there certain things that you did differently at the funeral than you may have otherwise, because of that sort of awareness that there was this thing happening?

Sonora Reyes 06:51

Yeah, instead of hugging, we like touched elbows. So you would just like go and like, touch everyone's elbows to your elbow. And that was like our way of like, I don't know, supposedly, like being safe. Some of us were wearing masks. But at the time, it wasn't like masks weren't like a thing yet. Like, unless you were sick. Um, so. Yeah, um, it was mostly the elbows, that I remember being different.

Kit Heintzman 07:33

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

Sonora Reyes 07:40

Pre pandemic, um, my health has kind of been like, in a gradual decline for the past few years, like pre pandemic included. Um, and yeah, I guess the pandemic just exacerbated that. Um, but pre pandemic, I was still pretty, like, you know, I've been disabled for a while pre pandemic. And I'm, I'm sorry, the question was, was my experience with like, health and health care pre pandemic?

Kit Heintzman 08:26

Yeah.

Sonora Reyes 08:27

Okay. Yeah. So I guess I, I wasn't going to like doctors all the time or anything like that. And a lot of my experience pre pandemic was with a specific doctor who I ended up leaving before the pandemic started. Um, and it was an interesting experience. I took a long time to find a doctor that I really felt cared about me because a lot of doctors will just kind of dismiss you or like I'm overweight. So they'll say like, any health problem I have, oh, it's because your unique diet and exercise when like, they don't know if I'm getting diet and exercise, they just know that I'm fat. So like, that I finally found this doctor who seemed to actually care and like ask questions. But she kind of cared a little too much. Like she would lecture me about things and like, um, it was it was a it. It kind

of crossed the line at one point. And I had to leave but I it sucks because I haven't been able to find somebody that like cared to that level or to any level close to that. Since then

Kit Heintzman 10:04

Could you say something about the importance of feeling like your health care providers care about you?

Sonora Reyes 10:11

Yeah, it's so important because especially right now, when everything is so like, everyone is getting sick, and it's really hard to feel like your health care providers don't care about you. When you go in, and you feel like they, like you're just another person that they have to deal with, instead of like someone that they're trying to help. And that's how it feels a lot of the time, it just feels like you're an inconvenience to them, because you have like health problems that they have to try to figure out what to do with, and they don't, it's not an easy solution. So sometimes it kind of just feels like, they don't care. And it can be so frustrating. Because you're, you know, you don't get better without that help, you know, so it can be really hard to not have a primary doctor who like, really cares, because then you just have to keep looking, and you have to keep trying, and a lot of the time when you're sick. Or if you're chronically ill, or in chronic pain or anything that that lasts longer than just like a week, you're gonna need to find somebody who's like always there and who can really take care of you and help you. And when you're dealing with that chronic lake level of sickness, you're not often able to put in the energy to find someone. So it's really unfortunate that it's not the norm for like doctors to really take the time to, like, get to know what each individual needs and like really care for them. At least in my experience.

Kit Heintzman 12:24

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

Sonora Reyes 12:28

Pre pandemic?

Kit Heintzman 12:30

Yep.

Sonora Reyes 12:31

Um, I started, so I went on disability in 2019. So I started staying home and working from home, like as a writer, and just writing all day at home. So I didn't really do much like the year leading up to the pandemic, like I just kind of like was recovering and trying to like, get better. And I would like try to write at coffee shops and stuff like that. Or write with friends if I could. But for the most part, I was just writing all the time. I wasn't working or anything like that.

Kit Heintzman 13:25

What was the process of getting on disability like?

Sonora Reyes 13:30

Oh, that was a struggle. So I was lucky that I had a job that really supported me in getting on disability. So like, my job allowed me to go on a short term disability automatically, like, no questions asked for six months. And the first six months, they paid me my full amount. And then after six months, they continued to pay me 60% While

they got me like a lawyer and people to try to help me get on social security disability. So they were helping me Well, I was getting trying to get on the other disability. So I had like a unique situation where I was getting paid either way, and it was really nice. Like my job really helped me out there. And I'm so sorry if you hear the guy yelling in the background. But yeah, so my job was really, really helpful in that. Sorry. I'm so sorry. I don't know if you can hear this or not.

Kit Heintzman 14:50

I can barely hear it. And I love this cat already.

Sonora Reyes 14:55

Yeah, she's very vocal and sweet. Um, but yeah, so I'm so sorry, I lost track of the question.

Kit Heintzman 15:06

You were talking about the support that you were receiving from work in applying to switch from their disability to Social Security Disability.

Sonora Reyes 15:14

Yeah. Okay, so I got denied for social security disability and my job, got me a lawyer to like, appeal it. I think that's the term. And so we went again, to try to get it again. And they denied me again, I think it took us like three or four times, like going back and saying, like, no, like, we actually need this, for them to finally approve it. Which is ridiculous, because so I have like a plethora of disabilities. It's not just the one. But the one that I ended up, that ended up like sending me out of work. I'm just full disclosure. So I have schizoaffective disorder. I didn't know this at the time. schizoaffective disorder is schizophrenia and a mood disorder. So depression or bipolar. And I didn't know it at the time, but that was what was going on with me that like, made me like have to take time off of work. And I had to go to an inpatient hospital at one point. And so we had like, records of me like in an inpatient hospital, where like, there are doctors saying, like, I cannot work. And there are people saying like, that I need, like, all this care, and they still denied me like three or four times. So and I had like the lawyer from my job. So I can't even imagine how hard it would be to get disability. When you don't have all those resources that I had.

Kit Heintzman 17:05

What did it feel like when you were finally accepted onto the Social Security Disability?

Sonora Reyes 17:11

I honestly was just so tired by that point. And I got accepted shortly before I got my book deal. So I only ended up getting like a couple months of payment out of it. Because I got my book deal. And since I got paid for my book deal, I was no longer eligible for disability. So it was, it just felt like a lot, a long fight for it to just go away. But it was also a good a good thing that like I got the book deal. And that was really exciting. So I guess it just kind of overshadowed that.

Kit Heintzman 17:53

I'd love to hear more about the writing you were doing pre pandemic and then into the pandemic, and if anything changed with that.

Sonora Reyes 18:02

Yeah, um, so pre pandemic, I started out writing fanfiction. And I was working my old job, like I worked mornings. So I would get off, I would get off of work at like 8:30 - 9:00 in the morning. And then I would come home and write, like, until I was ready to go to bed, which was like 6pm It was pretty early, because I had to work so early. But I would just write all day. And it was really nice, honestly. And then I guess, after I left that job, I you know, I my health kind of started declining and I stopped having as much energy to write all day. So I would schedule writing times with friends, like every Monday I would write at this time with this friend every Wednesday, I would write at this time with this friend and like so I started like having scheduled writing meetings with people. Because they know a lot of other writers in my area because of national novel writing month where I met a lot of other writers. Um, and I guess after the pandemic, it got a lot harder to write because I was so used to writing with people like I have a really hard time writing alone. So I started as zooming with my friends instead of meeting them in person and we would just like, mute ourselves while we're writing and then like unmute to, like brainstorm stuff, and I kind of got used to that for a long time. And, you know, I had to get used to it. At first it wasn't as productive as meeting an actual person like, face to face. but it did help a lot to be able to like zoom with anyone, like any time. And I, and it had to be like new people because everyone's schedules changed and everything so and I got to meet with people who are not local. So that was kind of nice to

Kit Heintzman 20:24

In the sort of short period, like sort of couple of months after the pandemic started, what was your day to day looking? Like, beyond the writing?

Sonora Reyes 20:35

Um, like, right at the beginning of lockdown?

Kit Heintzman 20:41

Yeah.

Sonora Reyes 20:44

Honestly, I didn't really do anything it was. So like I said, I was living with a ton of people. And we would pretty much we would order our food, or my mom would cook or my brother in law would cook. And we would eat together. So like, I kind of had like, a situation where I wasn't super isolated. In the beginning of the pandemic, it was actually almost the opposite. Like, we were all stuck in the house together. I'm, like, there. It's like a two bathroom house live with, like, 10 people. And we were all like, just together all the time. And so like, some of us were, you know, it definitely tested our like, like, our ability to, to, you know, our patients and all of that. So, but I think it was a good experience for me. And it was a lot better, I think, than being alone. I think once I moved out, I got really depressed because I was like, mostly alone, even though I had roommates. They were like, just in their rooms the whole time. So it was I ended up really missing that like chaotic. Everyone's around all the time. Moment.

Kit Heintzman 22:20

I'd love it if you shared something about sort of what those conversations about needs and boundaries looked like in the home with your family, and then later with the roommates.

Sonora Reyes 22:32

Yeah. So with my family, it ended up just being so I expressed what I wanted, which was full lockdown. I wanted everyone to be fully like quarantined, and I think that was too much for everybody else, because I was the only one who's like really high risk. So like to them. It it felt like constricting, I think. So I ended up ultimately being that I wasn't willing to enforce it. Like I didn't want to be that person who was like, basically the the cop being like, Okay, well you can't go out and you can't do this. And that when they wanted to even though like I felt like it was for my safety. I didn't want to have to be in that position. So I ended up leaving and then the conversations with my new roommate. We just had a conversation before I moved in like okay, what are your safety like COVID safety things? What are you like, are you quarantined? Are you masking? Are you doing this and that, and we were on the same exact page, we were both like wanting to quarantine and fully, like, they were like, oh, yeah, Nobody's allowed in the house. Like, it's just us. And so it we were just like on the same page about it. So we didn't really need to have the boundary talk because we were like, pretty much like already an understanding of what we both needed.

Kit Heintzman 24:15

What were some of the ways that you were getting information about what would be the sort of best possible steps to take to protect yourself?

24:22

Um, I'm trying to remember, I know I was looking at like, the news. I was looking at the CDC and I was looking at a lot of Twitter and like what people on Twitter were saying about like, because on Twitter, you can see like real people who are saying like, I got sick and here's what happened. And instead of like on the news, it just seems like so like intangible, you know what I mean? So I was just reading like real people's stories and like, I just wanted to, for me it was, it wasn't so much of like, here's what this person is telling me I need to do to stay safe. But it was like, I want to do everything that I can to make sure that this doesn't happen to me. Because like for me, it's better safe than sorry. Um, and unfortunately, I did end up getting COVID like when I moved back home. This was like after we were all vaccinated, so it wasn't quite as bad as it could have been. But I do think I have long COVID I not sure like how bad it would have been if I wasn't vaccinated, though. So

Kit Heintzman 25:52

Would you share more about catching COVID and the experience of having it sort of like while it was still active?

Sonora Reyes 26:02

Yeah, um, I didn't have it for too long. Thankfully, my whole family got it. Everyone who lived in the house. And jeez, I'm trying to remember, I just know that I was pretty much bedridden for a couple of days, I already don't have a lot of energy because of chronic fatigue syndrome. So I just had, like, even less energy than I already had, I was getting out of breath, by like, just standing up would make me out of breath. Um, I had a really bad headache. Um, I didn't get it as bad as some of the other people in my family, which was really surprising, because I'm the one in the family who was like, highest risk and like, has the most like, comorbidities and everything. But I think just the vaccine really helped. For me, and, yeah, I think I didn't get it as bad as like some of the other people in the household.

Kit Heintzman 27:09

What were some of the things that you were witnessing with the other people you were living with?

Sonora Reyes 27:15

So, um, it kind of came really slowly. So like, I think my mom got it first. And we were all trying to quarantine her from the rest of the house for a while. So it took a few days for anyone else to get sick, because she was masking in the house and like all that, but you know, she sleeps in the same bed as my dad. And so he eventually got sick, and then he takes care of the kids and then they got sick, and then the kids touch everything, so we all got sick. So it kind of like happened slowly and I was the last one to get sick because I'm like, the most careful out of everybody. of like trying not to get sick. Everyone else had kind of accepted. We're all gonna get sick at that point. But I was very stubborn. I was like, I'm not gonna get this. I'm not going to catch this. And I did. Um, but yeah, everyone, pretty much I know my brother in law got a really bad he was like bedridden for like a week, I think. And I'm sorry, I have a really bad memory. So I'm trying to remember specifics, but it's kind of like it's somewhere in my brain, but I can't reach it. So yeah, I just I know like it was a lot of people in bed. There was a lot of coughing I know the kids were very coughy and it was that would freak freak us out

Kit Heintzman 28:57

What are you what are some of the things you're experiencing now as a part of long COVID?

Sonora Reyes 29:03

So, like I said, I have chronic fatigue syndrome, which just means I get tired all the time. And since I got COVID It's gotten so much worse. I've been needing to sleep a lot more than I used to. So now I sleep like 12 to 14 hours a night and still feel tired like all day. Like any amount of physical activity is really difficult. I walked with a cane which I did before but now I needed a lot more than I did because before COVID I only needed it sometimes. And now I pretty much need it anytime I leave the house just to like save energy. And I've heard I can't witness this myself, but I've heard that my snoring has gotten really bad. Um Since I got COVID, so

Kit Heintzman 30:04

And how long ago was it that your caught COVID?

Sonora Reyes 30:07

Um, geez, when was that it wasn't 2021? Or maybe it was early 22. It was after the vaccine. I think it was after we had all gotten our second dose. So maybe it was early this year, like in January, I think.

Kit Heintzman 30:32

How did you come to the decision to get vaccinated?

Sonora Reyes 30:37

I knew from the very beginning that that's what I was going to do. I just, if there was any way that I could reduce the risk of catching it or spreading it, I was going to do that. And almost everyone in my family was in agreement on the vaccination, like everyone pretty much wanted to get vaccinated. Um, yeah, I, it wasn't too much of a like, it wasn't a hard decision for us, we just wanted to make sure that we were doing what we could to stay safe.

Kit Heintzman 31:14

Once you decided to get vaccinated, how easy was access?

Sonora Reyes 31:19

I'm trying to remember, it was pretty easy. It took a little bit like you had to look, a couple places to like find somewhere that if you wanted to get a certain time, and if you didn't send an appointment, it was a very long wait time. So you pretty much had to set an appointment. Um, I know my mom was able to get vaccinated before the rest of us because she works in education, which is like essential worker. So she was able to get vaccinated and she was able to get I think her and my dad both were able to get vaccinated because it's like, you and your spouse, I think. And they didn't have to schedule it, they just went and the lines were like, so long, it was ridiculous. Like, I went with her. And we were like, in the parking lot line for like, two hours. Um, but then once it opened up to everyone, I ended up getting one of the first slots when it opened up to everyone. Um, because I was just like, refreshing the page, like, constantly trying to find like a slot. So I ended up getting a pretty good, like, time that was pretty early on. It wasn't too difficult to to get it.

Kit Heintzman 32:55

How did your body respond to the vaccine?

Sonora Reyes 32:59

My arm was a little sore. Um, I was a little tired the next day, like I was really tired the next day. Um, but other than that, I was fine.

Kit Heintzman 33:17

What was it like having your mother as an essential worker while all this was happening?

Sonora Reyes 33:24

Um, it ah, I guess it didn't really even put together that she was like, she was able to work from home for a while. Before going back to work. Um, like cause the, all the schools shut down. She works at the community college. And they like had shut down. So like, it wasn't until they went back that she was like, really considered an essential worker, I think. Um, or I think it was just, I'm sorry, my memory is so bad. I think it was just like, teachers were considered. I don't know when they went back. But most of the pandemic, or at least the part where I lived there. Um, she was working from home, so it wasn't too different from everyone else.

Kit Heintzman 34:21

This is another like, tricky potential memory question. So if we all feel free to be like, I don't know, like, it's been a really long two years. But 2020 was sort of like notoriously a big year beyond the pandemic. And then 2021 had the same kind of level of like, Oh, it's 2021 still being 2021 about everything. And now we're in 2022, which continues to have its own heaviness beyond the pandemic. I'm wondering other than COVID-19 What have been some of the other social and political issues on your mind?

Sonora Reyes 35:01

So, a lot of, I guess, the stuff that's always on my mind is like, um, you know, I know there was like, a lot of stuff going on with, like police brutality and a lot of hate towards like Asian Americans, which I guess is related to the pandemic. Um, I think I think I've been very, like, focused, not focused, but like, I feel like racism has been like a big thing on my mind. The past couple of years, like, regardless of COVID, like, it's just been a constant. Like, it seems like that's been a big problem

Kit Heintzman 35:56

Would you share more about what you've been noticing in the last couple of years related to racism?

Sonora Reyes 36:09

I think it's just like, everywhere on like, a lot of the time, I'll see stuff on the news. And part of it is like, also the shootings and everything that's been happening, like a lot of like, Asian workplaces have been, like, attacked, and like, people have, like, there's just been a lot of that going on. And then of course, in 2020, that was like, you know, the big thing was like police brutality, and it just, it's been really like, constant. I feel like since then, and there's been a lot of other things going on, were like, after George Floyd was killed. There were people that were kind of like, divided about it, and like, you know, like, people protesting and like, the protests being handled a certain way, like, where police would come and treat protesters a certain way, versus how some other protesters get treated. It's just very clear to me that there's just some bias there. I don't know.

Kit Heintzman 37:33

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

Sonora Reyes 37:40

Health?

Kit Heintzman 37:42

Yes.

Sonora Reyes 37:44

Um, I guess like, it's a very holistic thing, like, your physical, mental well being.

Kit Heintzman 37:58

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

Sonora Reyes 38:06

I think for me, safety is a big thing that makes me because my mental health at least to feel like safe and healthy. And I feel like I can really heal when I feel safe. And I would just love for like everyone to be able to feel that.

Kit Heintzman 38:31

Could you tell me what safety means to you?

Sonora Reyes 38:34

Yeah, so like, for me, I felt very unsafe, early in the pandemic, when the people that I lived with weren't quarantining, and we all had different ideas of that. And I'm not blaming them, it's not anyone's fault, because we didn't know how serious it was at the time. But I didn't feel safe because we all had different ideas of what safety was. And I needed more than what I was able to have at that place. So I think safety is feeling like your health is not at risk. Feeling like you, your you know, well being is not at risk that you're taken care of and cared for. And all of that.

Kit Heintzman 39:39

May I ask what prompted you to decide to move back home?

Sonora Reyes 39:44

Um, it was the vaccine. I felt a lot safer once the vaccine came out, knowing that it was going to make things a lot easier and Also, my family got a lot better about their social distancing. And they had promised me to take certain precautions if I came back because they wanted me to come back to. And we agreed on it. And I ended up coming back with the caveat that we would all get vaccinated and that we would be as safe as possible and make sure everyone's wearing masks when we go out and stuff like that.

Kit Heintzman 40:36

You'd mentioned receiving a diagnosis during the pandemic, what's access to more routine non COVID related health care been like for you?

Sonora Reyes 40:50

So I used to be on access insurance, which is the free Arizona insurance. And that was great. And I feel like I was able to pretty much have, like, all my needs taken care of this was like earlier in the pandemic, like, way earlier in the pandemic, the first like six months of 2020 ish, the first eight months maybe. And I'm sorry, I lost my train of thought. Um, what was the question? I'm so sorry.

Kit Heintzman 41:35

No, no, you're doing perfect. Um, I had asked about what routine health care was like during the pandemic. And you're

Sonora Reyes 41:43

Right, right. Okay, I'm so sorry. I completely like blanked. Yeah, so, I was seeing a doctor regularly a therapist and a psychiatrist. But once I got my book deal, I had to go off of that insurance. So now I'm still kind of without a regular health care provider, or a psychiatrist or anything like that. So I was given like a three month supply of like, my medication from my last psychiatrist, who I recently left. So, um, and he was great. Um, so now I'm just waiting to, to find something else. And we'll see how that goes. But I did really like my old psychiatrist, we like met virtually, um, because of the pandemic. So

Kit Heintzman 42:54

How are you feeling about the immediate future?

Sonora Reyes 42:58

I actually feel pretty hopeful about the future. I feel like even though COVID doesn't really seem to be going away, it does seem like it's less severe. Now, that like a lot of the people who are getting sick or not, you know, it's not as high of a death rate. And like, people, it's like, I've heard that it's heading towards becoming like a common cold. That is very, like, treatable, and we'll go away soon. So

Kit Heintzman 43:43

What are some of your hopes for an even longer term future?

Sonora Reyes 43:48

For a longer term future?

Kit Heintzman 43:50

Yeah.

Sonora Reyes 43:57

Like hopes for myself or for like, the world?

Kit Heintzman 44:04

Yes, both and all of them.

Sonora Reyes 44:08

Okay, um, so, of course, I hope that COVID goes away forever. And that nobody ever gets sick ever again. That would be wonderful. I would love for everyone to be healthy forever. And I know that's not realistic, but that's my hope. And then for myself, I guess I just hope that I can continue doing what I'm doing and writing and continue to make a living doing that.

Kit Heintzman 44:51

I know you'd mentioned that this is your first book, so you might not so you don't have like pre pandemic comparison points. But what's it been like having a new book come out during the pandemic?

Sonora Reyes 45:04

Yeah, it's been wild. So I got my book deal literally on like, April 3 of 2020. So it was really the beginning of the pandemic. And so it kind of got, like this huge news that I was going to become a published author, um, was like, in the midst of this huge like, the world was changing. And so I kind of felt like it was a fever dream, like, it didn't feel real. Um, and then it took a couple of years for the book to actually come out, once it came out. I was actually able to do a few in person events, you know, like, with precautions and stuff. So that's been really nice. I know that I, I actually am grateful that my book came out when it did, because it was late enough in the pandemic that I was able to do some in person events. Whereas they know like, if had come out earlier, I would have done all virtual

Kit Heintzman 46:21

What did it feel like doing the in person events?

Sonora Reyes 46:25

It was a little scary. Um, I actually got a lot of hate about my book coming out online. The day that it came out, it like went viral on like, right wing Catholic Twitter. My book is called the lesbians guide to Catholic school. So you can imagine how that might make some people a little angry. So a lot of people were upset, to say the least I got a lot of death threats, a lot of threats, other threats, and I'm just people saying awful, awful things about like me and queer people. And so I was afraid to do the in person events. Because I didn't know if anyone was going to show up and cause problems. Luckily, that did not happen. All the in person events went super smoothly, and everything was amazing. Yeah, luckily, my fears were false. But it was pretty scary.

Kit Heintzman 47:49

I'm really sorry. You went through that.

Sonora Reyes 47:51

Thank you.

Kit Heintzman 47:54

Is there anything else you'd like to share about making this queer work and then having this conservative right wing backlash against you?

Sonora Reyes 48:14

Yeah, it was really frustrating. I guess they kind of knew that I would get some kind of backlash. But I wasn't expecting it to be anywhere near the amount that it was. It went completely viral. And um like in the wrong space, like not my space. And so it was like all the comments on my post about my book coming out today. Were like people calling me like a pedophile and a groomer. And like, for like writing a queer book for teens. And that was really hard to like, make this post where I'm like, trying to celebrate. And then all the comments like hundreds of comments or just people like saying those things. That was hard, but then it did blow up on the other side, again, where people's started finding that and then defending me. So I did get a lot of support and love on the other side afterwards, so that was actually really nice.

Kit Heintzman 49:36

Who else has been sort of emotionally supportive of you during the pandemic?

Sonora Reyes 49:43

Oh, so many people. Definitely. I feel like my mom has been very supportive. My agent has been super supportive and awesome. Like my whole family, my partner. I've, I've been really lucky to have like, a lot of people around me that that support me.

Kit Heintzman 50:15

What's partnership meant to you?

Sonora Reyes 50:23

I'm not really sure how to answer you're

Kit Heintzman 50:36

Not specific to your partner, then. Um, could you give an example of a moment where you needed support and received it from someone?

Sonora Reyes 50:46

Oh, okay. Sorry. I think I misinterpreted. Last question. I think I misheard you. Um, yeah, so I think Did you say an example?

Kit Heintzman 50:59

Yes.

Sonora Reyes 51:00

Okay. Um, let's see. I I feel like there's so many examples, that it's hard to pick something but, um, like, on the day that my book came out, my mom had, like, some of our friends come over. And she made like, a special dinner with like, my favorite foods that like I had any in so long. And it was really sweet. And like, I feel like that was like a big show of support, and especially like to share that with like, my friends and family.

Kit Heintzman 51:53

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

Sonora Reyes 51:59

I have been trying to forgive myself for needing as much rest as I need. And I've been trying to listen to my body and allow myself what I need. So if I'm tired and need to rest, I need to lay down or if I'm hungry, I need to do like, I think whenever I feel a negative emotion, I just have to ask myself like, Okay, have you slept? Have you eaten? Have you had water? And a lot of the time, the answer is no to one of those things. So I just need to, like, make sure my needs are taken care of.

Kit Heintzman 52:46

Coming to the end of my questions, and the first of the last is do you think of COVID-19 as a historic moment, a historic event?

Sonora Reyes 52:57

Oh, yes, definitely.

Kit Heintzman 53:00

What about it feels historic?

Sonora Reyes 53:03

Um, I feel like just the fact that you know, so many people have been affected. So many people have died and so many people like, it's definitely, like, a huge thing. I don't think, you know, since like, the Spanish flu, there's been like anything quite like this.

Kit Heintzman 53:34

What do you think scholars in the social sciences humanities, so departments in fields like English or film or sociology or political sciences, what should we be doing right now to help us understand the human side of the pandemic?

Sonora Reyes 53:55

I think honestly, like, talking to people and like, like, what you're doing now, I think is great, and like, hearing people's experiences, and especially like, marginalized people, I think, um, to see like, because obviously, they're, you know, and I am, I've been very privileged, in my experience, you know, like with my old job and like, with my family, being able to like, have somewhere to go, and all of that and like with my book deal. So, I think I've been very privileged in that way, but not everybody is and especially people who are more marginalized than me. Might have like, very different experiences. So I think it's like really nice to hear those experiences. And yeah, I'm not really sure like what goes in into all of that, um, but I think you know, you're doing great.

Kit Heintzman 55:07

Thank you. I'll take it. I'd like you to imagine speaking to a historian in the future, someone far enough away that they have no lived experience of this moment. What would you tell them they cannot forget about this moment?

Sonora Reyes 55:32

I'm trying to think of how to say it concisely.

Kit Heintzman 55:34

It doesn't need to be concise.

Sonora Reyes 55:37

Okay. Um, I would say, don't forget how I think how quickly it went bad in the beginning. So, for example, I know there was like that crucial two weeks or three weeks in the beginning where it was like, if everyone quarantined those three weeks, we wouldn't be here right now. Like it wouldn't have gotten to be a pandemic. And I think just knowing that and knowing that, like something, if you catch it early, you can like save so many lives. So I think that would be really important to like, catch it early and to take action like it's possible I would I, and maybe this is an unpopular opinion, but I'm like, make everyone stay home, pay them to stay home for three weeks, you know? And then hopefully, you can avoid two years of, of this.

Kit Heintzman 56:51

I want to thank you so, so much for the generosity of your time and grace and vulnerability of your answers. Those are all of the questions I know how to ask at the moment, but if there's anything you'd like to share that my questions haven't made room for, please take some space and share it.

Sonora Reyes 57:10

Thank you. I can't think of anything right now. I think you asked a lot of really good questions, and I've pretty much said everything that I can. That's on my mind.

Kit Heintzman 57:24

Thank you so much.

Sonora Reyes 57:26

Thank you