

Transcript of Oral History of Nina Karetova
Interviewee: Nina Karetova
Interviewer(s): Joanna Reese and John Peyton
Date: March 9, 2021

ABSTRACT: Photographer, Nina Karetova, retells her personal experience of the pandemic, familial loss, and Black Lives Matters protest during the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021. Karetova shares personal memories about moving and living in East Atlanta to interviewer Joanna Reese as well as open up about memorable memories about her past, love ones, and career as a hip-hop photographer.

Joanna Reese 00:00
All right, great. That's good to know.

John Peyton 00:01
All right.

Joanna Reese 00:01
All right.

John Peyton 00:02
Sounds like we're good to go. I'm going off.

Joanna Reese 00:05
Okay.

John Peyton 00:08
All right. See you guys.

Joanna Reese 00:08
Alright, so what I'm going to do is I'm going to talk for the first couple of minutes.

Nina Karetova 00:14
Mhm.

Joanna Reese 00:14
Just read through all the necessary agreements or what not, you just have to verbally agree to the statements that I'm saying.

Nina Karetova 00:22
Okay. Okay.

Joanna Reese 00:22

When all of that is done, I will start asking questions.

Nina Karetova 00:25

Sounds good.

Joanna Reese 00:26

Sounds good. All right. I shouldn't need to edit it when I'm all done. If you don't necessarily like if you don't reveal someone's like health conditions against HIPAA or admit to a crime or something like that. So we shouldn't be able to keep all of whatever we say.

Nina Karetova 00:43

Okay.

Joanna Reese 00:44

Because it's-

Nina Karetova 00:45

I have not committed any crimes lately, so we're good.

Joanna Reese 00:48

This can be subpoenaed. So I mean, it's, I just don't want any incriminating things, you know?

Nina Karetova 00:54

Yeah. No, no, no.

Joanna Reese 00:55

Okay. So are we ready?

Nina Karetova 00:57

Mhm.

Joanna Reese 00:59

Great. All right, let's get started. Well, I am Joanna Reese, and I'm here with Nina Karetova and John Peyton. The date is March 9 2021. The time is 2:48. John and I are in Indianapolis, Indiana and Karetova is in Atlanta, Georgia. Karetova, I want to briefly review the informed consent and deed of gift document that you signed. This interview is for the COVID-19 Oral History Project.

Nina Karetova 01:36

Mhm.

Joanna Reese 01:37

Which is associated with The Journal of the Plague Year, a COVID-19 archive. The COVID-19 Oral History Project is a rapid response oral history focused on archiving the lived experience of the COVID-19 epidemic. We have designed this project so that professional researchers and the broader public can create and upload their oral histories to our open access and open source database. The study will help and collect will help us collect narratives and understandings about COVID-19 as well as help us better understand the impacts of the pandemic over time. The recordings, the demographic, demographic information, and the verbatim transcripts will be deposited in The Journal of the Plague Year, a COVID-19 archive and the Indiana University Library System for the use of researchers and the general public. Do you have any questions about the project that I can answer?

Nina Karetova 02:31

No.

Joanna Reese 02:33

Taking part in the study is voluntary you may choose not to take part or you may leave the study at any time leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with Indiana University, IUPUI, or the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute. Participating in this project means that your interview will be recorded and digital video and audio format may be transcribed. The recordings and possible transcriptions of my interview copies of any supplementary documents or additional photos that you wish to share and the informed consent and deed of gift may be deposited in The Journal the Plague Year, a COVID-19 archive and Indiana University Library System and will be available to both researchers and the general public. Your name and other means of identification will not be confidential. Do you have any questions?

Nina Karetova 03:32

Nope.

Joanna Reese 03:33

In addition to your signed document, would you please offer a verbal confirmation that you understand and agree to these terms. I am also asking that you verbally confirm that you've agreed that your interview will be made available under the following license Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial Sharealike 4.0 International, the COVID 19 Oral History Project, The Journal of the Plague Year, a COVID-19 archive, and the trustees of Indiana University acting through its agents employees or representatives as an unlimited right to reproduce, use, exhibit, display, perform, broadcast, create derivative works from, and distribute the oral history materials in any manner or media

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Nina Karetova 05:11

I agree.

Joanna Reese 05:13

Finally, I want to ask for verbal confirmation that you have agreed that your interview will be made public to the will be made available to the public immediately.

Nina Karetova 05:24

Oh, I agree, definitely, with everything. Yeah.

Joanna Reese 05:26

Wonderful. Okay.

Nina Karetova 05:28

We are good across the board.

Joanna Reese 05:30

Wonderful. Let's get started. So, let's talk a little bit about you first, where do you live? And what is it like to live there?

Nina Karetova 05:41

Um, I live in Atlanta, Georgia. I live in an area called Midtown, which is kind of like the downtown where all the offices all the restaurants is right in the heart of Atlanta. I love living here because it's, you know, it's it has a big city feel but a small town, you know, vibe about it. Everybody kind of knows everybody. And the area I live in, I'd like that I could walk to the grocery store, I can walk anywhere and get anything I need is within walking distance. So yeah, and when I came into Atlanta, I was homeless sleeping in my car. So living in the area that I am, which is considered like a higher scale area of Atlanta is like, you know, it's still sometimes I walk into my home, and I'm like, oh, my goodness, I am like living here. It's still mine. So...

Joanna Reese 06:32

How recent was this experience with being homeless?

Nina Karetova 06:35

2018. Yeah, I knew that Atlanta was where I needed to be for my career. I'm a photographer. And I decided, for some reason to get into the hip-hop industry. Didn't know anything about hip hop didn't know anything about the culture. So I came into Atlanta, and just not knowing anything. And it was definitely an experience, you know, I slept in a warehouse with no air conditioning, couldn't sleep with the windows open, because people would jump in through the windows at night to get to the recording studios, or just jump in to get in, you know? So, you know, it was definitely experience, you know? And then I was hitting three to five nightclubs a night by myself, just trying to get in with my camera and couldn't get in, because nobody knew who I was, you know? And, so just thinking back to those days to now I go to any nightclub, and they're like, oh, Karetova, you know, and it's like, don't wait in line. You know, I'm in any section, you know, and it's, you know, it's so to go from that, to where I am today, you know, in such a fast period of time, is just, it's remarkable to me still. I'm very humble about what I do, you know, so it's always just very like me.

Joanna Reese 06:59

What are the primary things that you do now on a day to day basis?

Nina Karetova 07:55

On a day to day basis, I'm doing photo shoots, I work with people like Killer Mike. I've worked with people. I mean, my client list is pretty endless on people that I've worked with. But I'm also going more into the community aspect of becoming involved in the community a little bit more. By this time next year, I want to have scholarships, built for kids going into, like the School of Arts, like whether it be music, dance, you know, and create scholarships for them. I was trying to do it this year, but then COVID hit, and it kind of put a damper on a lot of my plans. So so next year, I'll be moving ahead and building scholarships and all of that. So day to day is just waking up, going for a walk to grab coffee up the street. Usually business meetings on the phone, getting in a photoshoot, Atlanta's not like the rest of the world. They never quite shut down. Everybody still is doing what they do, you know, through everything. So if I'm not in the studio at night, sometimes I might be up in the nightclubs, shooting events, you know, doing different things. It's it varies day to day. So...

Joanna Reese 09:08

In between the community.

Nina Karetova 09:10

Yeah, in between time, I can't sit still. So there's times where I'll go out and I'm an Uber driver sometimes, you know, just because it's like, well, if I'm gonna sit here and do nothing, I might as well make money. So...

Joanna Reese 09:22

You mentioned your community, and you started to work in the community. And Darius your friend when I called him he said that you are working on it's called Karetova Kids.

Nina Karetova 09:32

Uh huh. Yeah.

Joanna Reese 09:33

And can you tell me more about that?

Nina Karetova 09:34

Yeah. Yeah. And what that is, is I just want to build he and I together want to build a nonprofit, where we help our kids in the community with like, getting items for school, making sure they're fed, like I said, building scholarships. And being mentors in the school system. I was actually asked to be a mentor to the school system and COVID hit now the school shutdown. So when schools open back up, I'll be in the school system doing mentoring. And it's just providing we want to provide services to kids who are going through traumatic losses, because here in Atlanta, you know, it's, you know, right now, it's, I compare to the wild, wild west a little bit lately, because there's been so many shootings and so many things happening in Atlanta, you know, and so it's just kind of, you know, am I going to be okay, you know? It's kind of all of us, sometimes you feel like, are you going to be okay even going to the mall anymore, you know? And when you go to the mall, here that, it's like, you have to go through metal detectors, and there's like, security everywhere, police everywhere in our malls now, just because there's been so many incidences. The other night, I was leaving a nightclub, and we had just crossed the street, and there was a drive by shooting and we had to run into the hotel parking lot. You know, I've, I've, you know, seen people being shot, you know, I've witnessed, you know, different things, you know, so it's just, it's just definitely a different world, sometimes over here. So...but so it's so it's just providing kids with services that have gone through losses of losing a parent, providing services for kids whose parents are in the jail system, and all of that. So because of, because our kids are future, and we have to start working with the kids to plant the seeds, you know, to bring change, especially in the Black community. And we're not going to see the change we want in our lifetime, but we have to be in those community centers watering the seeds, so those little trees of knowledge grow, you know? And they're going to be the ones that bring the change.

Joanna Reese 11:49

Awesome. How would you say that COVID-19 outbreak has affected the community beyond school closings, and some of them were on unemployment?

Nina Karetova 12:00

Definitely, definitely, in my, you know, with people I know, you know, there's been a lot of my friends who have lost their businesses. You know, it's, [Someone comes into background, a voice is heard but

the words are unintelligible.] it's kind of like I need it, because I'm doing this, can you just close that door for us? Hey, sorry about that. Yeah, for me, it's like, I've seen two sides of it, where people have lost businesses, you know? I have met people who are on the verge of losing homes, but then I've seen sides where people have, you know, really been winning, or, you know, they found ways to make money during COVID, you know? So I've seen kind of both sides of, of it affecting people. We were shut down here in Atlanta, for maybe a month, but when the rest of the world was shut down, we started opening back up, you know? So it's like, our, I feel like when I see everything going on, around the United States, and around the world, I feel like we're in a completely different universe, sometimes, like, we're our own planet over here. Because you walk into the nightclubs here, and they're jam packed, where you can't even walk through and nobody's wearing masks, you know, to but you go anywhere else and it's like, people are masks step still on quarantine, you know, still, but, you know, we're just over here living our best lives, you know, so...

Joanna Reese 13:21

And that's what we're experiencing. You can't go anywhere without a mask here.

Joanna Reese 13:24

Yeah. And it's like, even outside, and my father died in December. And I couldn't even go to his funeral because of COVID. And there was like, something like six to ten people contracted COVID at his funeral. You know, and so it's just, I didn't get to see my father before he passed away. I was supposed to surprise him in March for his birthday. But then that's when all the restrictions started, you know? And so it's just like I, you know, hadn't seen my dad in two years, you know? And I got to FaceTime him once before he passed away. So that was definitely a difficult thing. You know, not being able to be at his side, you know, through, you know, his last days.

Joanna Reese 14:02

Where was he living? And where was the funeral?

Nina Karetova 14:05

In California, in the Fresno area of California. So, you know, and so that was hard, you know, for, like, on in my personal world, that was probably the hardest thing was watching my dad's health deteriorate, and feeling so helpless, that I couldn't just be there. You know, and all of my friends were like, yeah, we're, if you come out to California, you can't see any of this, you know, one of my friends didn't see her son in like six months, like that he would stand on one side of the street, and they would stand on their porch and just wave to each other. You know, and they just recently, you know, came back together, you know, so it's just, when I was watching what everybody else in the world was going through, like we were still, you know, coming going back and forth to each other's houses over here. You know, we were still you know, our social life became the grocery store. Everybody would just meet up like, oh, we're gonna go to groceries, oh I meet you there will shop to get you know, so we found ways here to be

social. And then all of a sudden it was like before you knew it, everybody was like, back in the clubs while the rest of the world was quarantined.

Joanna Reese 15:12

Yeah, that is a different experience.

Joanna Reese 15:14

Yeah, people are...

Joanna Reese 15:15

Have you seen anyone change their opinions, or the day-to-day activities at all in response to the pandemic?

Nina Karetova 15:22

Um, I've seen some people not change their opinions. I've seen some people it taking them getting sick to change their opinions. I mean, it's just like, across the board, some people are just like, still in their own world of COVID doesn't exist to, you know? Just almost a couple of people in my circle almost dying from it, you know, and it took them almost dying for them to realize, wow, this is serious. So...

Joanna Reese 15:50

Has COVID-19 changed your relationship to your community?

Nina Karetova 15:56

I definitely would say it was a time that kind of let you see who was on your side. And who wasn't like, you know, there were some people who just kind of went off into their own thing like, oh, you know, we're gonna do it on our own. But there was definitely a lot of us, because we didn't have the finances or the resources to stock up. And we didn't know how long it was going to happen. So there was like a little network of us that pulled all of our resources and money together to make sure we were all surviving through it. So I would say for me, it was definitely really seeing who had your back and who had your best interest at heart. And it kind of made my circle of people closer.

Nina Karetova 16:41

You mentioned your father's funeral. You have that geographic distance with your family. Would you say there's other types of distance with your family? Are you close with them?

Nina Karetova 16:50

Oh, there's definitely difference. My family and my community don't really, I'm more of the shame of the family, because I'm so active with the Black community. And I was raised to point out people in the Black community and say, it's your fault that of societies that doesn't matter who you are, and what you do. You know, it's, you know, it's like growing up, I can have my Hispanic friends over my Asian

friends over, you know, but I couldn't have my best friend Keisha [REDACTED LAST NAME] over because she was Black, you know? And we we're Russian, so we have a very small, tight, we're Russian Molokon. So it's like you're born into that religion and culture, you marry in it, you die in it, and I have friends that have been disowned by their families for marrying white men. But just because they weren't Russian. So there's definitely, you know, a more narrow way of thinking so. But yeah, Black people in my family, you know, in my immediate family, you know, was never anything accepted. So when my dad was dying, you know, it was like, Well, if you come don't bring any of your friends, you know, my brothers would tell me, oh, you know, you're dating somebody, but he's not allowed to come to the funeral. You know, because he's Black. So, there's definitely a lot of that tension. A lot of people see my social media and think, you know, in my culture, there's a lot of gossip. I've heard I'm a stripper, that I'm a prostitute that I've that I'm a drug addict, do you notice, like, you know, my family thinks more so that I'm just like, in a car, doing drive-bys, what they see on TV, you know, you know, the stereotypical stuff, but my friends are Grammy nominated musicians, producers, you know, actors, actresses, you know, people that they listen to on the radio, you know, and so it's just crazy their perception of my life, but they never have stepped into my life to see it. And that was one thing that I'm, you know, that I took kind of from my father's death is like, I'm thankful, in a sense, that, that burden of I feel like I could not live my life without having to worry, like, oh, what's my dad gonna think, Oh, if I post something on social media, what are people gonna say to my dad, and now that my dad, you know, is, you know, in heaven watching down, he could see that I'm not the disappointment he thought I was, you know? That I'm not doing anything bad. That I'm that I'm actually an upstanding, decent, you know, person. I make mistakes. We all make mistakes, you know, but I'm just thankful that my dad can look down now and realize, well, you know, she was never a disappointment. She's always, you know, been on a good track, you know? And, unfortunately, you know, my brothers, my oldest brother I haven't talked to since 2019. He wants nothing to do with me and my other brother. I told him I was going to be coming to California to do a job with a client he was and I said, so I'm going to come your way to pay respects to my parents grave and I said, Do you want to get together for lunch or dinner? He goes, Oh, I'll probably be working. You know, and it's like you don't even know the day you're gonna be working. So. But yeah, I'm kind of a more of the shame of the family the embarrassment, you know, that type of stuff for being so active within the Black community.

Nina Karetova 20:10

And you said your mother's passed as well?

Nina Karetova 20:15

Yeah, she passed in 2014 from cancer. And she's the reason why I'm actually part of the reason why I'm where I'm at today is my whole life, I had to live up to my family standards. And when I was 18 years old, I was dating, I started dating someone Black, and my family kicked me out of the house for it. And it took a long time after we broke up for me to get back in with my family. So once I finally made it back in with my family, I lived to what their standards were and the way they thought I should live, I married who they thought I should marry, I have the jobs they thought I should have, you know? So, I

went through a lot of my life just being completely unhappy, you know, and it's like, I always felt like I was living my life. But I was up here watching it. Like, it just wasn't really me living my life day to day. And so my last conversation with my mom, before she stopped talking, it was just her and I in a room. And she said that, because my family are very strong Christians, you know, and stuff, which to me doesn't make sense with them also being racist. But, you know, so one of those things my mom had said, God showed her my whole life and gave her a vision. And she said, I saw the way that you were raised, and she doesn't, I apologize for all the pain and heartache you went through she was I just didn't know what to do with you. Because you were so out of the box and such a free spirit. And I had to live to the family standards and our culture's, our culture's standards, you know, so she apologized for the way she raised me and trying to shove me in a box I never belonged in. And then she said, but God also showed me where you're going, and she goes, what I need you to do is, I need you to, to stop living for what the family thinks, and she goes, quit your job, because I was working at Indiana University. She said, quit your job, quit everything you're doing and put your camera in your hand. Because God showed me where you're going. And you're gonna go to places and depth in places you never dreamed of. And you're going to be around people you never dreamed of, and the family's not going to approve, our culture is not going to approve, but she goes, you need to do it. And you need to live your dream, not only for yourself, but for me, because I could never live my dream. So every picture I take as part of my mom's legacy. And my mom had so many failures in her life that I refuse to be one. So it's like my work and my dedication to just making the world a better place as part of my mom's legacy.

Joanna Reese 22:37

That's wonderful.

Nina Karetova 22:39

So..you know, and it's like, all I want to do is make a positive impact. I'm around celebrities all the time. And people are like, it's crazy how these, you know how everybody just let's see when and I'm like, because I'm not there for clout. I'm there to make connections so we can work together. They're the people that are going to have the resources to make the kind of change I want to make.

Joanna Reese 22:58

Speaking of working together, you are able to take part in some of the protests in the last six to eight, almost a year now. Darius mentioned that you were part of protests for Black Lives Matter, Blue Lives Matter, voting suppression, um, protests after Rashad's death, Breonna's death, George Floyd's death.... can you speak to that?

Nina Karetova 23:29

Yeah, that definitely was, it was a crazy way to come out of COVID. The lockdowns And the crazy thing for me was I had done a podcast with this guy, Grady. And I, on the podcast, I was like, we were talking about the Black community and the changes that I want to see and being an advocate within the community and being an ally in the Black community. And I said, you know, what needs to happen is

there needs to be a revolution, it's time for there to be a revolution within the Black community. You know, it's like, it's like people need to, you know, put down their guns put down their resentments against each other and come together because there needs to be a fight and there needs to be, you know, there needs to be movement within within the Black community. And two weeks after that interview, the protests started. And it was just like, wait a minute, can I just say this was supposed to happen two weeks ago, you know? So I, I was out there with the intention of being out on the frontlines because I felt that media wouldn't portray the story correctly. It to me I felt media was just gonna say, oh, look at all those Black people destroying everything. Look at look at what they're doing, look at how, you know, and so I wanted my camera and my eyes and my, you know, I just wanted my presence because I knew that my camera would tell the truth. And it would tell the would tell the story, the realistic story of what was happening out there. And my voice would tell the reality, at least the reality I witnessed out there, and I knew media would never do that. And so I went out there the first day completely on my own. And I mean, the streets were blocked off, there were 1000s upon 1000s of people out there. Right away, I noticed on the first day, like, I started noticing within an hour of being there, like kind of the little different groups of people, like there were the people that were there, protesting, you know, and letting their voices be heard. Then there were the more extreme protesters that were being a little bit more, I mean, they weren't doing anything violent, but they were just more aggressive about their protesting. Then there were the people out there that were just with their cameras. Look at me, I'm at a protest, look how cute I look today at the protests, you know, who just wanted to show they were there not doing anything, you know? And then there was the kids that didn't know what was going on, they were just out there, because their friends were pretty much going out there. Then there was the sector of white people that were supporting the Black community, you know, and they were there along with their voices, but then there was the sector of white youth that was there that grew up how I did that were more the punk rocker anarchist, you know, style kind of kids, I'm not saying they were punk rockers, but they were more of the anarchy, you know, just out there with more of the destruction mentality, you know, and stuff. And so um we kind of saw the different sectors of people, you know, and it was just kind of maneuvering through the crowd. And the first day, there was even even though there were all these little sectors of people, there was a unity with everybody, you know, because everybody was there for a Cause at the end of the day, you know? And before I knew it, see it, one of the first things that they happened out there that was significant was destroying the CNN building, you know, like, the kids were vandalizing, you know, the CNN sign. But the funny thing is, when I went there, you know, it's like, the pictures I have, you see a lot of white kids vandalizing the sign, you know, and then later on, you know, the Black kids came in, you know, and stuff. But, you know, a lot of this a lot of the spray painting, a lot of the Black Lives Matter, graffiti that was being sprayed, I witnessed a lot of white kids doing it, you know, and I'm just not saying that, because, you know, that's what I saw, you know, the burning of the flag was done by white people, you know, but of course, media portrayed it a different way, you know, and one of the kids that was charged in the destruction defacing of the sign of CNN was Black, but it's like, he wasn't the first one there doing it. He was just the kid that's, you know, climbed on the sign at the end of it wave and his Black Lives Matter, you know, flag.

Nina Karetova 27:55

You know, and so just watching that destruction, and then, you know, being where the doors were, and going up to the frontlines of that, you know, filling rocks and bricks flypast my head, you know, as you know, and hitting the cops and water bottles, you know. And then, as the night went down, it started to get even more aggressive, you know, there's footage of me, then all of a sudden, my phone starts ringing. Because unbeknownst to me, I'm all over CNN, I have people, my people in Japan, were texting me like, we see you on the news. You know, people over here, people in California, people in New York, you're on the news right now at CNN, get out of there, what are you doing, but I caught all the footage of them, like throwing smoke bombs into the CNN building at the cops and, you know, in all the back and forth, you know, of everything, you know, I was right there, what I was dodging glasses, the windows were being busted down. You know, so that's, you know, and then everything moved into downtown, and then there was a lot of destruction of property throughout downtown, they were starting fires on the corner, you know, busting windows to businesses. You know, so it was just like, wow, we're definitely, you know, in a different world. And then the next day, you come and then all of a sudden, you see the National Guard, and, you know, and all their trucks coming in and tanks and all, you know, and it's just like, wow, you know, it's a crazy world. So, uh, you know, and it just kind of went from being a sense of unity to them there just being kind of because there was no true leader of the movement here. Then everybody wanted to be the leader, everybody wanted to take a claim and what they're doing so then there was just a lot of arguing between the protesters, you know, it kind of led to that within the weeks, you know, so went from unity to kind of everybody fighting with each other over who was the leader, you're coming with this? No, come with that, you know, so it was just a it was just a really interesting transgression of events. You know, that had happened.

Joanna Reese 29:58

Have you been involved with an groups before this?

Nina Karetova 30:02

No, no, this was the first time that I was ever that I had ever been in any protests and anything like this. I mean, I've done, I should say, I've done small things for like, you know, protesting small little local things were that were there, but nothing on a on such a scale of what, what this movement was, you know? And you know, and I, I felt the need to be out there because with me being part of the hip-hop community, the hip hop community has embraced me so tightly. And with so much love, that I felt if I wasn't out there supporting the people that support me, than what am I even doing? You know, working in community centers, I didn't want a kid to come up to me be like, "where were you during the protest?" Oh, I was sitting on the couch watching it on TV. No, I was on the frontlines. I saw everything. I fought for you. I fought for your rights, I fought for your freedom. You know, I was there for you. You know,

Joanna Reese 31:03

Have you seen anything in results, in legislation, or in acts by the police or changes?

Nina Karetova 31:10

Yeah, there was? Yeah, I know, like, some of the communities around here actually put together a councils like review boards, and different things. For the police. You know, I know that, you know, I honestly have been so busy. I haven't been following politics as closely as I normally do. But I know, like, you know, I know, there's been some changes, but not not enough. And I always say the thing that is going to bring about the most significant changes, there's not going to be the change and impact that's needed, until white America takes accountability for their actions in the Black community. You know, and a lot of the problems in the Black community are because of white society, because of white government, you know, systematic oppression, poverty, lack of education, you know, it's like, when when education gets cut, where the schools that get cut? Is it the, you know, good neighborhoods that get cut? No, it's the inner city schools that are being cut. You know, and so a lot of the problems within the Black community are because of our government, placing those problems in our government is majority white. And, and in my opinion, I, I believe, you know, the reason why that is, is because there needs to be a scapegoat, there needs to be a finger pointing, oh, they're the problem. You know, and until white America takes accountability, for the problems in the Black community there, there can't be a true change, we need to stop using the Black community as a scapegoat. And we need to, because in the Black community are our governors, our lawyers, our police officers, our teachers, our presidents, but we're going to keep but, but our government tries to keep them in the system, to where it's almost kids from a young age are stripped of hope, and are stripped of, you know, any hope of being successful, because they get caught up in the system, and they learn the system. And that's all they know. And that's all there, you know, for a lot of kids, that's all they're going to become, you know, and what we need to do is we need to step into the Black community and restore that hope and that faith, and we need to teach the kids in the community centers, it doesn't matter what your mom and dad, do, you know, who you are, what neighborhood you come from, you can be the president, you can be a CEO of a company, you know, and it's gonna be a lot harder for you, but you could do it, you know, and we need to restore that hope in the kids in the community. And that's why it's so important for me to be an advocate in, in the Black community with the kids, because it's like, We need to restore that hope. We need to restore the hope and parents, you know, and, and provide, you know, better opportunities for jobs, better opportunities for, for better housing, you know, and all of that within the community. You know, there just needs to be a restraint. I believe that's one of the biggest things that we need to restore in the community is hope. You know, and unfortunately, there's not a lot of faith in our government, in my opinion, because it's like, it's like the government has held down the Black community so long, that it's like, how can you have faith in a system that continuously oppresses you?

Joanna Reese 34:34

You mentioned different groups at the protest. What would you say the average age was?

Nina Karetova 34:40

I am anywhere from people bringing their little kids out to senior citizens. I mean, it was like, across the board, every age out there. So...

Joanna Reese 34:54

That's wonderful.

Nina Karetova 34:55

Yeah, parents had their kids out there because they wanted their kids to be part Live, you know this because this, this was like, historical, this is the thing that's going to define our Gen, you know, their generation. So they wanted their kids to witness it firsthand. And you know, and it was great seeing, you know, kids out there, learning how to take a stand. So...

Joanna Reese 35:19

Awesome.

Nina Karetova 35:21

You know, and for me, it's not my, it's not my job to, you know, and I just want to say, you know, when it comes to the Black community, it's not my job to be a voice for the Black community, because the Black community has their own voice. It's my job, to be a voice that's going to help that that's going to educate, you know, white America and help open doors that the Black community can open, you know, it's like, "Hey, let me knock on this door for you," "Hey, I want to talk to you for a minute," you know, the door opens, by the way, "It's not me that wants to talk. It's this group of people, let's go come on," you know? So you know, and so it's, it's just I it, you know, I'm being educated. You know, I came in with my opinions already, you know, and that's one thing that helped me move along in the protest was, I already had these opinions set before, you know, and I already had my mind set, you know, establish before I entered in the protest, this isn't something that I ever that I didn't learn in the protest, this is something that, you know, somebody was feeding me, this is something that I watched over time working in corporations. Watching people get passed up for jobs and education, in our system based on you know, because they met "quota," or, "Oh, we're gonna hire this guy, because he's not a good representative of our company, just because of the color of his skin." So I witnessed a lot of that. I have family that will hire people, based on the fact that they're Black. You know, so, you know, so I've witnessed so my, my voice is, from my own experience, and what I've witnessed.

Joanna Reese 36:51

So what you would say then is based on the way you were raised, your experience has changed you. And you...

Nina Karetova 37:01

Oh definitely. Definitely, because I remember when I first got a driver's license, you know, my parents would tell me don't go to these neighborhoods, or those neighborhoods when you're driving. And it's just like, you know, I'm being a camera. Why, because I'm the kids, you tell them not to do something on my go figure out why I can't do it, you know? And I would drive through, and I'd just be like, these people

are doing the same exact thing we're doing except they're just Black, you know, it's like, they're just having, you know, hanging out with their family, you know, playing, you know, park, you know, and so it was just, just overtime and through experience, because I didn't, I wasn't really around the Black culture until I was in high school. And more so in college, you know, was my first experience, so it was something I never grew up in. So there was, of course, it was easy to have that fear of like, "ooh, ooh, there are those people," you know, because I didn't know otherwise. But then when I, when I was able to experience and have friends that were Black, it was just like, Oh, they're just like us. Why are we why are like, you know, why can't we all be friends? You know.

Joanna Reese 38:05

And that has opened you up to living in Atlanta?

Nina Karetova 38:08

Mhm.

Joanna Reese 38:10

And being in the business that you're in with the people that you work with.

Nina Karetova 38:13

Being- Yeah, and I just feel like, you know, God in the universe placed me here, you know, and it was just because, you know, and I have several artists that tell me about the positive impact I'm making in the community. And because, you know, they said, there's not a lot of people like you that genuinely care about us, you know, and, you know, and to, you know, and especially, you know, like I said it, I was never in the protest for people to be like, "Look at me, look at me," you know, but, you know, a part of that was now the people that I work with, when when people question will be, "Who's this white girl over here?" And I'm like, first of all, I'm Russian, there's a difference. But, um, but it's just like, you know, I hear a lot of people say, "Nah, man, she was with us. She was on the frontlines of everything." you know? Ao I've heard people talk to people that were unsure about me because of the color of my skin. You know, like, if she had cop, who is she? What is she doing over here? It's like, "Nah, man, she's one of us," you know? So...

Joanna Reese 39:09

That's awesome. And I've seen your been your business. Has COVID affected your ability to work?

Nina Karetova 39:19

Oh, definitely. I do a lot of music festivals and a lot of events, and I probably lost got at least \$20,000 worth of work through COVID. So it definitely affected my business and how I move and and all of that stuff.

Joanna Reese 39:39

Do you see it picking up now?

Nina Karetova 39:41

Yeah, it's definitely picking up now, you know? And it was I and part of it too was I like I said here in Atlanta people were still kind of doing shooting music videos still doing their stuff, you know, but I was a little bit more afraid because I was just like, well, I don't know. You know how this you know, I don't want to get somebody sick. I I don't want to get sick. You know. So I was a little bit more cautious about it. And so but ya know, it's definitely I feel like I'm on the upswing of everything right now.

Joanna Reese 40:13

Will you speak a little bit more about the friends that you discuss that have lost their businesses? What kinds of businesses?

Nina Karetova 40:21

Yeah, like, I have family friends at home that lost their like, like one had a flower shop. Hair salons, here in Atlanta, that shut down. Restaurants have been shut down here in Atlanta, just because people couldn't maintain the business through COVID. So yeah, so there's been, you know, and then a lot of people are because they have to homeschool their kids had to shut down businesses, or stop their business, you know, to take care of their kids, because they didn't have, you know, any other resources, you know, you know, to care for their kids. So, yeah, so it's just been like, hair salons, restaurants, I mean, across the board company shutting down, and my friends have lost their job. You know, and, you know, so it was a scary situation, you know, for a lot of people, at least I look at it as I was in it alone, but I can, watching some of my friends who have two or three kids, you know, are single parents that even just have one kids go through it, it was just like, oh my god, I'm so thankful I never had kids through all of this, because I don't know how I would have done it. You know, and, and a lot of my friends out of the country are so surprised at how our government handled everything here. You know, as far as like taking care of the citizens, because they're like, we've gotten a monthly stipend, since everything has shut down. You know, we were taken care of the whole time. And they're like, they can't believe how much of a struggle Americans have had, you know, and how kids are going hungry, you know, and it's just crazy. Like, we're waiting over here to see what's going to happen with people that couldn't pay their rent through this. You know, because in one county alone, this was like, in the middle of the pandemic, when county alone, they said there were 900 pending evictions. And that's not in a county like Atlanta, where they were, you know, a large city like Atlanta. So it's like, what are these families going to? What's going to happen to these families that are facing evictions that haven't been able to pay their rent, you know, when, when all the rental assistance ends, you know, and it's like, you can't get an apartment, especially in Atlanta with an eviction, it's hard enough to get apartments here, you know, like, what's going to happen to all these people's evictions on their record. You know, on top of that, one of my friends was facing eviction, but then her landlords came back and said, Look, you know, here's what we can do, can you at least we'll cut half of your bill down, if you can just start

making monthly payments, you know, we'll take the \$10,000 You owe us and we'll make it 5,000 to help you. So I mean, there's been some things, some people that have tried to help like that, but not many. It's, you know, so it's going to be a scary thing to see, you know, when all of this ends, you know, or how high up is the homeless rate gonna go there. I know, Department of Labor here in Georgia, I don't know how it's been in other states. But it's just like crazy here in Atlanta. You know, like, in in Georgia, there's people that got approved back in March, who have yet to see a payment, my friend got approved in September, and she's yet to see a payment. And it's like, people are emailing and calling and there's no return phone calls, no, email back, no, nothing. So it's just like people are left hanging of like, When do when do we get this money? You know, when girl if, and it's funny, because they don't tell you, they won't return your call, they'll just tell you go on to Facebook, you know, and read our updates there. And you just see 1000s of people commenting, you know, when girl was saying she had to move into her car. You know, other people are saying how they don't have food for their kids. You know, and so it's just like, you know, it's just scary, you know, and it's just, you know, unemployment is going to about to run out for like the PUA. And stuff is about to run out for a lot of people this week who got their extensions, and it's like, how much longer until Biden signs this paperwork so they can continue, you know, those payments, you know, and it's just kind of it's just that right now. I just see it being a little bit more for a lot of people a little bit more unstable, you know, and because we don't know what's going to happen next.

Joanna Reese 44:38

Right. It's been a whole year.

Nina Karetova 44:41

Yeah.

Joanna Reese 44:41

Since the nation went on lockdown. Would you say from the beginning? March of last year to this year, March. What's changed in your thoughts?

Nina Karetova 44:57

Um, like as far as the CO- the COVID goes, it's definitely my thoughts is like the importance of just staying healthy. And you can know when just like, I've changed my whole diet, my whole eating way of eating, you know, and stuff, just because it's just like, I want to make sure my body you know, is, you know, optimizing every nutrient, like I'm not eating junk food anymore, you know, just, I'm just doing like juice and vegetables and fruits, you know, and just eating more organic, clean living, you know, and stuff to build up my immunity, because I don't know if you hear me coughing, but I have a form of asthma that makes me cough. So through COVID, it's just like, I swear, I don't have COVID. But, uh, you know, and just, and just the sense of like, I really, like I said, I really know, who has my back now, you know, in the community, and, you know, and it's just the importance of, I've always been a person that's watched out for the people that are around me, but now I'm even more so watchful, like, are you

okay? Are you good is there you know, and making sure my friends rents are paid, you know, and they're making sure my rent is paid, you know, so I just, I just say, like, for me, it's just been a stronger sense of community and stronger bonds. You know, and just, you know, you know, sometimes walking into a club and being one of the only, like, handful of people wearing a mask, and you know, it just being like, you all are kind of crazy, right? You know, and I'm not saying that I'm, like, perfect all the time. Because there's times you know, that I'm not, you know, being as safe as I should, but it's like, I'm definitely a little bit more cautious.

Nina Karetova 46:43

So would you say the medical issue concerns you the most through this pandemic? Or financial outweighs that?

Joanna Reese 46:49

Yeah, definitely finances, because it's like, right now, I'm in a situation where I'm, you know, where I got to a point where I was living, you know, a good life, you know, and then COVID hit, and I lost so much money, and I don't have medical insurance. So if I get sick, it's like, I can't go to the doctor, I can't go to the hospital. You know, I kind of you know, so it's just like, if so, for me, it's more, I, I've lived in my car before I could do that again, you know, I know how to survive without a roof over my head, you know, and without money in my bank account, I've done it, you know, but for me, it's like, if I get sick, can I survive that? You know, because I, it's like, I need eyeglasses, I can't even go get eyeglasses, you know, it's like, half the time, if I have to read a label, I have to take a picture with my phone, and zoom in on my phone just to read what I'm reading, you know, because like, I can't even get eyeglasses, you know? And especially through the pandemic, you know, it's like, I'm making rent, you know, paying my utilities and putting, you know, a little bit of food on the table, you know, I don't have the means anymore, just to go, "I'm gonna go get a manicure today", "Oh, I'm gonna go, you know, take a weekend off of work," you know? I don't have that luxury, you know, anymore.

Joanna Reese 48:03

What would it take, for you to sense a kind of a return to a daily existence, that's not concerned all the time?

Nina Karetova 48:16

I'm definitely just getting, you know, events opening back up. Like I said, I do a lot of concert photography, there's a lot of artists that I'm going to be that I was supposed to go on tour with. So just that sense of, you know, events opening back up and large events opening back up, because that's part of my security, you know, that's part of how I pay my bills. You know, and for me, it's just that it's just that find out because if I have the money, I can go to the doctor, I can get sick, you know, I can afford it. But right now, it's just that it's that instability of work and events, and you know, and coming up with new ways to do photo shoots, like I have some guy that once we just start shooting his breed of dogs, and I'm like, Alright, so I'm gonna get into dog photography, because that's like, you know, \$9 million, you

know, market right there. You know, so it's just, like, definitely trying to find new things to do and new things to try, you know, getting into different markets. So, it's just, it's just scary. And, you know, like I said, it's worse for my friends in California that are in the entertainment industry, because they have kids and families, you know, and I have some people that have had to move back in with their families with their parents, you know, and all of that stuff through this because they just couldn't do it anymore. There was nothing, you know, happening, you know, and there still is not really anything happening in the entertainment industry for them. You know, and are people in foodservice you know, in the foodservice industry, my friends that are caterers, all that stuff, you know, have shut down their businesses because, you know, it's like, well, there was no events to cater, you know, photographers losing their wedding businesses because there were no weddings to shoot. So they've been struggling, you know, so it's just getting those events back up. And, you know, and just the world opening backup is going to, you know, change a lot.

Joanna Reese 50:15

Now, there's been a rise in a recognition and mental illness. What would you say that you have experienced increase...

Nina Karetova 50:23

100%. Because I, I, I, or I already suffer from depression and anxiety. And so it's oh, and I remember when I went to a therapist, she says, "You always see the worst and everything before you could see the good." It's like, it's like, oh, you know, I might cut my finger with a knife. And it's like, oh, no, I'm gonna chop off my whole arm if I use that, but you know, I see the extreme before I scale it down to what reality is half the time, you know, so I definitely, the pandemic has increased my anxiety, and you know, and then it was just that sense of being in such a public world, you know, and then just being by yourself, and it's just like, oh, this is kinda depressing. You know, you know, and so and then, of course, with the loss of my dad, December was particularly rough, because I lost my mom in December of 2014, we buried her on my birthday, in 2014. So it's like, I already deal with the loss of my mom. Then I had a client that was shot and killed in a shooting in December. And then a week and a half later, my dad died. And then I had a cousin that had an aneurysm and was in a coma, then, you know, and then with I had a, I broke, my relationship broke up, you know, during that, so there was definitely, you know, a lot on top of the COVID that I was dealing with, you know, so definitely a lot of depression, definitely a lot of anxiety, because it was just like, "When is my unemployment check gonna come?" "When is work going to happen?" "Am I going to be able to eat this month?" "How am I going to pay rent?" You know, so...

Joanna Reese 52:03

I can see that.

Nina Karetova 52:05

Yeah, so it's definitely been...is....and I'm actually had stopped posting on social media for over a month, just because I got into such a state of depression, where I didn't even want to leave the house. You know,

it's like, I would go Uber late at night and middle of the night, just because it's like, I just didn't want to be around people, you know, and that was my only way to make money was going out in the middle of the night, you know, and Ubering a little bit here and there, you know, but, but definitely anxiety and depression. Definitely. Depression did take effect during, you know, during the whole thing.

Joanna Reese 52:43

You said your community was very tight and that it got tighter. Did they rally around you at that point?

Nina Karetova 52:51

No, because usually, when I, my depression hits, I retreat, and people just half the time people think I'm just busy, like, I'm just, like, caught up with work. And I have a tendency to retreat. My friends that I grew closer with now know that when I retreat, it's because I'm not working half the time, you know, so they've learned to kind of see the signs a little bit of like, oh, Karetova is, you know, retreating a little bit. Are you okay with it? You know, but definitely for me, you know, because, like, a lot of people even in the industry don't know that I was suffering from such severe depression, you know, and so I'm going to be doing a social media post talking about it, because it's like, who do you talk to, when all you're surrounded by are your clients, you know, and people you work with, you know, who do you turn to, so it's going to be a call of action to build the network to build some kind of system within the industry, to help address depression and anxiety, you know, and mental health awareness that we all need to be accountable and speak about publicly and breaks the stigma of mental health.

Joanna Reese 53:59

The relationship that you said, and did you believe that the closures the pandemic accelerated this, or was this something that was coming?

Nina Karetova 54:13

You know, I think it was just kind of, like a combination of everything, just kind of, you know, my dad dying, you know, facing all of that, you know, and, you know, and just life getting trying to get life back to normal, you know, I think it was just a combination of everything. Part of me thinks I'm not really good relationships. I'm very much a free spirit. And sometimes I think I'm a little too independent, you know, and so, but yeah, I just, I think it was just a combination of everything.

Joanna Reese 54:48

There is one when I talked to him, he said, you mentioned that you moved as well, during the pandemic and this last year.

Nina Karetova 54:56

Yeah, I went from living in a living in a little town outside of Atlanta into...once I got my unemployment check, because it was at the point where my lease was up at my old place. And the person I was living with, had moved out. And unbeknownst to me and her brother that were still in the

house, she moved in a whole family. And it just turned into this chaotic like, Oh, my God, there's this family now living here, you know, and the lady had a surgery. So her room was the dining room, you know, so there was no privacy, there was no quiet anywhere in the house after. So it was just like that mad dash of what is my deployment going to come so I can get out. And so yeah, so I did move during the pandemic. And I actually am friends with an AI now became friends with the, with the manager downstairs. And he was telling me that it was good timing of moving because restrictions, because there's so many scams going on in Atlanta naturally, on a regular basis that now with the pandemic, there's even more scams, people are pulling to move into apartments, so they're going to be tightening up their regulations. And people moving in, and people are already telling you, they're trying to get into apartments, and it's like, three times as difficult before the pandemic to get into a place. You know, and even here, it was, like, you know, trying to prove that I could pay my rent, because I didn't have bank statements for the time that my that my, that I wasn't working during the pandemic, you know, it's like, how do you show them that you had income? You know, when you didn't have any, you know, so so it was a little tricky getting in, but I was able to get in and stuff. So, goodness, yeah. And it's just going to be you know, so yeah, all the restrictions are like my friend is trying to get an apartment right now. And she's like, Karetova, I don't even like understand what they're wanting. She goes, I'm practically giving them my blood type. And I go, that's how it was when I moved into my place. She goes, No, she goes, I remember going through it with you. She goes, it's even worse now. So yeah, so, so I got into this place at the right time. And I also had, and it worked out really well, like timing was perfect for everything. Because I also in 2018 had an accident where I went down a flight of stairs, and I ended up having to have metal plates put in my ankle. So I was living you know, a little bit more south of where I am paying rent with no income, and my family wouldn't help me, you know, so I so I ended up getting evicted from my apartment. But for some reason, out of all the years that eviction never showed up on my record, until a month after I got into this place. So yeah, because I just couldn't pay rent anymore where I was and then I just kind of was bouncing around, you know, with friends for a while until I got back up on my feet. So-

Joanna Reese 58:07

What's uh, let's take a quick turn to COVID as a sickness, do you know someone who is experience this?

Nina Karetova 58:17

Yeah. I know, a handful of people. And I believe I had it. I never- and that was before the outbreak of COVID happened. I was at a nightclub when I with one of my clients and I started feeling a little off. And then we went next door to another place. And by the time we left, I barely made it to my car, I was so weak. And by time I got home, I was just burning up with a fever. And it took me over a month to get rid of the congestion and get rid of but I didn't know like I just was just like, This is the craziest lung infection I ever had. But now looking back, I had all the symptoms of COVID. And that was like, you know, that was in like January, February and then all the you know, then all the shutdowns happened in March. So So I believe that was a form of COVID that I believe I was positive during that sickness. Because I'm looking back at how long it took me to get well. But yeah, my friend was in ICU for several

weeks. with it. He was a club promoter here and he came out of it. My mom and dad's friend who was like a mom to me growing up spent five weeks in the hospital. My friend in New Orleans, their whole family including their one year old baby tested positive for it. So they're the worst case of it was their mom, you know, she had almost lost her life. I have friends who lost their parents because of COVID. So yeah, so I've definitely seen people die from it and be sick from it. I've had clients that have had it, you know, so it's definitely have been around?

Joanna Reese 1:00:02

Have you seen this, the common phrases, Self isolation, flattening the curve? Have you seen these in your community? Or in your families? Or in your friends?

Nina Karetova 1:00:11

Oh, yeah, I definitely have a lot of friends that are glad we're just like I have friends that are still isolating themselves and just stepping out minimally. Just because they're still worried about it. So yeah, there's, there was definitely a lot of self isolation, and stuff, and I have friends that still won't go to restaurants or nightclubs, or they'll go to the grocery store, they'll do what they have to do business wise, and then they go back home. And a lot of them Fortunately, their businesses allow them to work from home. So I still see people that are like not doing anything outside of what they have to do from their home.

Joanna Reese 1:00:49

Yeah. Let's talk about news for a minute. What have been your primary news sources during the pandemic,

Nina Karetova 1:00:58

I'm usually like CNN, and then a little bit of local news. And honestly, I didn't really watch a whole lot of news through the pandemic, just because it, it just got to be so much doom and gloom. For me that I just a lot of it, I didn't even really watch a whole lot of news during it. So I would just go online, read a little bit about it, just to kind of keep somewhat up with it. But I wasn't just absorbed into watching the news all the time about it.

Joanna Reese 1:01:32

So since when watching from last March to this March, how would you say that the cover has changed of the pandemic?

Nina Karetova 1:01:41

I'm hated, because I didn't really watch a whole lot of it. In the beginning, I would say, it's become a lot more hopeful, you know, people are now getting vaccinated. And you know, and there's it be, I believe the news became lighter, you know, about it not such a, you're gonna die if you go out of the house, you know, type of feel, you know, so it's become more light, you know, it's just kind of like, oh, you know,

and it's like, we're focusing on other issues. Finally, in the world, it's like COVID, still a main source of, you know, the news. But it's also there, I think we're more on to the solution stage of it, rather than just the fear of it, because we were being fed so much fear for the past year. And now we're being fed more of the solution. Now we have a vaccine now we're, you know, going to have another stimulus check now, you know, so there's definitely I would say it has transferred over to more of the solution.

Joanna Reese 1:02:37

Where do you feel that they were deficient in covering?

Nina Karetova 1:02:40

I, across the board, I honestly don't believe we were ever told the whole truth about, you know, about what was really going on, you know, like anything else, they just told us what they wanted us to hear. They wanted to instill that fear in us. They wanted, you know, they wanted us to be terrified, you know, to even hug our loved ones, you know, so.... Yeah, so I definitely, there was definitely like, way too much fear. It's like, yeah, I understand. It's like, there was, you know, you understood the severity of it. But then it was like, they played on that fear of everybody. You know, and it became more of like, glamorized stories of like, you know, kind of kind of vibe to it, in my opinion.

Joanna Reese 1:03:32

When it comes to the local government, that you were discussing with just not really closing things down very often do you think they could have done things differently or responded?

Nina Karetova 1:03:41

Oh, yeah. The mayor, here in Atlanta, Keisha Bottoms was Keisha Lance Bottoms, was trying to fight for more closures, but Camp, our governor wasn't, wasn't following, you know, what we should have been doing. You know, so she had wanted to shut down a lot more. And she wanted a lot more restrictions in place, but, you know, it was the, the governors and senators of Georgia that were like, oh, no, no, you don't have to do all of that. So they were taking it, you know, more on that light note, you know, so I feel like had she been the governor of of Georgia would have been a lot more of a lockdown. And there would have been a lot more safety precautions put into place.

Joanna Reese 1:04:30

You told me that you were able to travel to Mississippi and Louisiana. What was your experience there compared to where you are?

Nina Karetova 1:04:41

Um, it definitely was like a whole other world, you know, just people everywhere masks restaurants being shut down. You know, and, you know, not really being able to see your friends, to where over here it's just like, oh, yeah, let's go meet at the restaurant. Let's go have a drink, you know, so it was definitely like, ooh, this is like what locked down as like. This is what you know, the pandemic is like

outside of our area, you know, so people were just taking a lot more serious than I feel the people here were.

Joanna Reese 1:05:10

Do you feel like you've communicated with your friends and family more with lockdowns or with the pandemic or less?

Nina Karetova 1:05:17

Or, you know, it, it was kind of a mixed bag. I feel like a lot of more, a lot more people were involved on social media, but not necessarily. Like, it wasn't. Like, there wasn't a whole lot of talk to my friends in California, you know, or elsewhere, it was all through social media, you know, and then a couple of my closest friends and I seem to talk more, but, uh, but it didn't, it wasn't like, you know, reunion time with friends, or any of that kind of stuff. You know, I feel like everything happened through Facebook or Instagram, you know, what people were communicating? I, you know, and that's the part of our world that's changed as people aren't calling to check-in on you anymore, or they just go paste, you know, post on Facebook, and it's like, oh, you know, that's what's going on? We'll just comment here, we won't actually call them, you know? So...you know?

Nina Karetova 1:06:14

Excuse me, do you believe that this experience and after reflecting on that response, do you think this has transformed how you think about those friends and that family?

Nina Karetova 1:06:28

Um, you know, I just kind of felt like friends and family, I just kind of felt like it put me more on the outside of the loop. You know, like, because I felt like, at least my family would have been checking in on me a little bit more like my aunts and uncles may have called or, you know, and I just kind of it just, you know, reemphasize to me that I am on the outside, you know, now of, of like, my culture, my family, you know, and all of that stuff. So because not a lot of people, I thought a lot more people, especially knowing I was out here by myself, fending for myself, it to me, it just seemed like people would be checking in more, and that didn't happen.

Joanna Reese 1:07:11

That is disappointing, isn't it?

Nina Karetova 1:07:13

Yeah, you know, and it was just the typical, like, the typical people that call me all the time to check on me, my best friend Chris Brown, you know, and her husband, Tony, you know, it's like they always call, you know, it's like, she doesn't see me on social media in a day. What are you doing? How can you not and so you know, and a couple other of my close friends, but other than that, like, I never got calls from my aunts and uncles. Are you okay? Is there anything you need? You know, like, none of my cousins.

And I mean, like, I come from a large, the last time my parents had Thanksgiving at their house. Before they moved off their farm, there were ninety-eight people. That was just my dad's side of the family, and not the whole family showed up. You know, so that's how big my family is. You know, and just to go through that, and you know, not, you know, any of them calling, just say, "Are you okay," you know, but at the same time, it didn't really surprise me.

Joanna Reese 1:08:10

I see. And you say you love Atlanta, but after that [Audio breaks up], it's like Atlanta responded.

Nina Karetova 1:08:16

Yeah. It's like, if I didn't call my family, you know, and, and I didn't reach out, it's like, they wouldn't even I felt like they wouldn't even remember I exist.

Joanna Reese 1:08:27

Yeah. Well, after your response about how Atlanta responded to the pandemic, and not really shutting down, do you still love it just as much?

Nina Karetova 1:08:39

Oh, of course, like, Atlanta is home for me. Like, this is like, I feel like Atlanta is where I would... because I spent so much of my life searching for a place I belong. And I finally found I feel like I found it here in Atlanta. You know, I found my voice. I became confident. I'm no longer an introvert. You know, it's like, I love you know, there's so much to do here in the city, you know, but still has that small hometown feel, you know? So Atlanta's home. This is this is where, where I'm going to be the rest of my life, you know, as of now.

Joanna Reese 1:09:17

Awesome. How would you say this experience in the last year compares to other big events that have happened in your lifetime?

Nina Karetova 1:09:26

Just this past year with COVID and through...um...through the protests and everything, like, I can't think of anything that anything, you know, that can compare to, to that. I mean, you know, it's like, the death of my mom changed me a lot. You know, and stuff, but it's just, you know, I've never thought in my lifetime, I would, I would see anything like I've seen this past year. You know, and the funny thing is, I just think of all the times my mom would talk about out how stuff like this would happen, how they're gonna make you have a chip, and they're gonna make you and we'd be like, "Oh, um, you're crazy," you know, and you would hear her, like, they're going to do something to make everybody sick, you know, and, you know, we would think my mom was crazy. And then it's just like, you're sitting there going through it. And my mom was right about all of this.

Joanna Reese 1:10:20

Knowing what do you know now. What do you think that the community or the, I should probably say, government, what do you think the government should do to keep in mind, as learning from this experience?

Nina Karetova 1:10:34

Definitely take better care of the people that paid them...that pay into the system, you know, have, you know, have, you know, a system set up, you know, where we don't have to go months without having money, where people are still waiting for unemployment, you know? I think the government needs to go through and do a really clean sweep across the board of everything and get out the people, you know, that are, you know, not properly doing their jobs, you know, and, and it's just like we shouldn't be, we shouldn't be in the strongest nation, you know, in and how the world perceives the United States, we shouldn't be the strongest nation, only to have the people suffer the way they had to through all of this. We shouldn't have to be so uncertain of how we're going to, you know, survive the next three months. I mean, we still don't know how we're going to survive, or what we're going to do or how we're going to make it happen and we live in the United States, we shouldn't have to worry about that our government should be taking better care of us. We should have gotten monthly stipends, we shouldn't have to be like, oh, we got \$600, it's like, Thank you for the \$600. But how is that going to save us? Now you're gonna give us \$1,400. But how's that going to save us? When, when so many of us are so far in debt already, because, you know, our jobs stopped, our world stopped, but our bills didn't stop. You know? We still have, you know, we still have utility bills that haven't been paid in months. You know, there's phone service providers that didn't charge people through the pandemic. But now, it's like, we have \$5,000 utility bills, we have to pay on top of all the backend on top of everything else and, and in the country we're in we shouldn't have to be worrying about those things. We should have been taken care of threw out everything we should have gotten monthly stipends, we should have had the help.

Joanna Reese 1:12:30

Great.

Nina Karetova 1:12:31

We shouldn't be out here begging our government to do something for us when we pay so much money into our system. Because why didn't our governors and our senators and our presidents take a cut in their pay to make sure their people were okay? Why didn't their paychecks stop? Why did they bail out so many corporations, but not bail out, you know, the middle class families properly?

Joanna Reese 1:12:55

Right. When you and I first talked, I asked you to describe your experience during COVID. And you said that you've experienced a lot of personal growth. Will you speak more to that?

Nina Karetova 1:13:09

Um, yeah, definitely on the personal growth, it was more of you know, when you're stuck in a house all by yourself. You really, it just gave me a lot of time to really reflect on, on like, my business on things that I've done on mistakes that I've made, you know, what were the learning experiences from those mistakes, you know, just to not dwelling on my family no longer really accepting me or may not, or me feeling like my family is just completely gone, you know? Learning how it gave me strength, because it taught me that I can stand alone, and I'm going to be fine at the end of it. So...you know. And just through social media, I was able to connect with a lot of people I normally wouldn't have been able to connect to, you know, when I was on live feeds with like, Killer Mike and with Yung Joc, and all these other prominent people of Atlanta talking about issues and you know, not only with COVID, but in just across the board, you know, we were talking so, definitely gave me a stronger voice. It gave me time to educate myself more on how to be a better business person. What if this happens again, if we go into another shutdown? What am I going to do different? How am I going to stand out, you know, how can I do things differently for myself? That definitely gave me more strength and endurance. Let me realize, you know, what, you're not that bad of a person, you know, you're really kind of, okay, you know, if you can handle yourself this long all by yourself, you're kind of okay.

Joanna Reese 1:14:47

Well, my final comments to you and you can obviously feel free to add afterwards is that you recommended me to speak Darius Edmonds. And I did and he said, a lot of wonderful things. I'd like to share some of that with you, if that's okay?

Joanna Reese 1:15:00

Oh my god cause that would make me cry.

Joanna Reese 1:15:04

He said that you are an advocate for the underdog. That you are always giving back. That you are simple and selfless. And that everyone you meet is your family. And he appreciates that very much about you that you are always thinking of others. And I know that he truly enjoys having you as a friend and considers him...you his family as well.

Nina Karetova 1:15:34

Yeah, he definitely has brought me into like that was the hardest thing was have not having a sense of family. And being around him and his wife and his kids and his mom, I'm like teary eyed that that was like, it's hard for me to hear compliments. And so it's just like, oh, you know, especially from him, because he's so special to me to hear him say that, you know, it's just how welcoming he's been to me and allowing me to have a sense of family again.

Joanna Reese 1:16:05

It's amazing. After hearing him talk, I definitely couldn't wait to meet you in person, currently...

Nina Karetova 1:16:10

And I ramble a lot. So I'm sorry if I rambled on anything. But I get on the little soapbox about certain things, and you can't shut me up. So...

Joanna Reese 1:16:17

No, it's wonderful. Is there anything you'd like to add? Now that we're at the end?

Nina Karetova 1:16:22

No, it's just, like I said, I'm out here, I just want to make a positive change a positive impact in the hip-hop community and the world as a whole. Like, I'm going to be known as a photographer, but I'm going to be known for someone who made a positive change. You know, I just want to see people succeed. I want to see people do their best, you know, I want to see people win, even if that means me having to not reach the finish line to help someone else in it's like, that's, you know, that's what I'm gonna do. I just want to see people win and do good. And I want I want there to be more champions in the world.

Joanna Reese 1:16:55

That's awesome. Thank you so much for meeting with me.

Nina Karetova 1:16:58

No problem. Thank you, again, for letting me be part of this. I you know, it's an honor. You know, and hopefully, you know, my story in my opinion, you know, we'll help with what you guys are doing and you know? And it's, it's just an honor and, like, you have my number now reach out anytime for anything, even if it's just to say, "Hey, how are you doing today?" You know? That's the way I am. Once I once I meet people, you know, it's like we automatically you know, I just don't forget about people.

Joanna Reese 1:17:28

Absolutely. All right, and stopping this.