

**Texas After Violence Project  
Interview with Tandra Louie**

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INTERVIEWER 2: Murphy Anne Carter

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AMY KAMP: My name is Amy Kamp and I'm with the Texas After Violence Project and it is June 26, 2021. I am here with Tandra Louie and Murphy Anne Carter who is also with Texas After Violence. Tandra? Do you want to introduce yourself a little bit?

LOUIE: Yeah, my name is Tandra Louie and I'm an Austin native, born on the East Side, St. John's neighborhood.

I got into organizing four or five years ago with Austin Democratic Socialists of America. They were working with a coalition of different groups, Grassroots Leadership, Austin Justice Coalition and I think a couple others working on the 250 million dollar housing bond. My partner was going to canvasses and I just got curious about what's happening. Being someone who's native to Austin, I've seen the housing market just plummet completely for us. So, that's a project that really spoke to me. Ever since then I have been doing organizing around criminal justice and housing and the homeless crisis that we have here in Austin.

KAMP: Recently, we've been dealing with proposition B, which recriminalized camping and you're pretty involved with that, right?

LOUIE: Yes. In 2018, we were canvassing too. For people who may not know, canvassing is where you're door-knocking. We were door knocking to get signatures to repeal these ordinances. Originally, the ordinances were sitting and lying in public, aggressive panhandling up to discretion, police officer; and, if you know anything about police officers, their discretion cannot be trusted. And camping in public, but camping doesn't mean having actual infrastructure. It means if you just like have a bag on you, you can be called a camper in public and get a ticket for it. But, it's up to the discretion of the cops. And if you look like me, if I'm wearing certain clothes and maybe aren't up to par to someone's standards that I could be considered camping if I had two backpacks with me. If you're a tourist here for South By and you're just chilling on the curb and looking like whatever, then you're just here to make money for the city and you're definitely not going to get a ticket for being out in public. These ordinances were put in place, I believe, in 1997, and the police chief at the time told the city council that it was a bad idea. He said that this is just going to cycle people in and out of jail and not do anything to actually get them off the street. He was right. The city council still decided to vote to put these ordinances in place. You fast forward from 1997 to 2018 and we were able to repeal the ordinances and it was great. Then Save Austin Now happened -- real estate developers, the Travis County Republican Chair, a lot of big money people from Dallas area. [00:03:39] So, Save Austin Now. Another group, what are they called, Safe Horns?

KAMP: Oh yeah, Safe Horns.

LOUIE: Yes, a UT Affiliated parent group. Their job was just fear-mongering like, What about my daughter? She's walking down Guadalupe and a big scary homeless man is going to stab her. Every sort of trope that you've heard about homeless people for the last two decades in America, these people have been spouting it off. As we know they've been successful, because the ordinances have been put back into the books here as of May. Their fear mongering worked. Unfortunately, looking at the numbers are after the election, it wasn't just wealthy people in West Side, Austin, who voted yes on Proposition B. It was Democrats across the county who voted to reinstate this proposition. I think it was fear mongering and people not fully understanding what they were voting for. Even with all the phone-banking and the door knocking, May elections on off years are awful. May elections just aren't high turnout. That was working against us. We couldn't get enough of our people out to the polls.

KAMP: You mentioned that, growing up in Austin, you've seen the housing market change and get a lot worse. I honestly don't remember what Austin was like before 1997, but I would assume that the amount of people who don't have homes now is much greater than it was before the campaign ban was passed.

When the camping ban was lifted, we were able to see how many people didn't have homes and it was to me, shocking. I didn't realize that so many people didn't have homes in Austin. I don't know if y'all were prepared for that, since you're obviously the ones doing the work, or if it was surprising to you and how you think that affected everything?

LOUIE: I wasn't prepared for the visual of seeing so many people having to sleep under the highways. It was a little shocking. It's easy to look at paper, see a number like so and so percentage of people are having secure housing for homeless in Austin. To see it was a shock even for someone who has been trying to do organizing around the issue.

It is so unfortunate, because I was hoping humanity will win and be like, Okay you see these people living under a highway and no way think they want to live this way. There is so many people in this city, and it's a national problem, where they're convinced that these people are actively choosing to live this way. And before the ordinances were repealed the first time around two are the first time, 2018.

I was very worried about people hiding in the Greenbelt. I used to hike in the Greenbelt too. You never really were interacting with folks living out there. They were pretty hidden, Mind our business, keep to ourselves and trying to hide away from cops or people who might call the cops on them. But it was definitely shocking and I don't think any of the organizers on the ground were prepared for the immediacy of what needs to happen.

KAMP: What do you think the Austin city government, Travis County government could have done differently if anything to try to get people into housing faster?

LOUIE: It's so much bureaucratic nonsense where there are so many City Council meetings where they're like, "Oh should we build something here? Should we do it there?" And just, "Build both of them, actually." We don't have time to be picking and choosing where we're putting homes. There was no input from the people they were trying to house. People who have secure housing and good jobs are making decisions for people and that's another thing that's been lost in this whole narrative. No one's asking people on the street, "Hey, where do you actually want to live? What would actually be convenient for you? Do you want to live way out in Northwest Austin, or would you like for the city to buy a hotel in more centralized locations off of public transportation?"

I think our city government and Travis County have dropped the ball completely with fiddling their thumbs and having these big brain meetings for nothing conclusive was happening. It's funny; I was just looking at KUT and they had a quiz, "Do you know policing and crime in Austin?" It was really basic questions. But the hundred fifty million that we did defund from APD last year, only 20 million has been used so far too reallocate to services and to housing. And it's like, "Come on y'all what is the holdup?" There's so many apartment complexes and hotels in the city.

I don't know anything about zoning. It goes over my head, I don't care. Just get it done. It's so many things, like barriers that humans had created, and then we act like they're entities that we can't just rip apart and just start over. It feels ridiculous it. We have created all these problems, and we act like some other outside force has created it and there's no way for us to take it apart and change it. \*\*\* [10:33]

KAMP: I agree with you about zoning. Those are made up rules that are often stupid. Sometimes you need enough shade or something like that. There are environmental rules that make sense, but a lot of them are made up. For people who are witnessing this right now, they're witnessing the re-criminalization of homelessness; and, the cops are starting to make arrests. What would you say is the practical thing that the average person can do to get involved to try to help people in this situation?

LOUIE: At the individual level, people need to be more willing to have conversations with their neighbors, and intervene, especially on Nextdoor. I don't know if you guys use Nextdoor in your neighborhoods, but I keep track just to see where the conversation is going. There are so many regular people who want to cosplay as police officers and think it is their job to tell homeless people where they can and cannot be. So on the

individual level, I think it's our responsibility to talk to our friends and be like, "Hey, this is actually what is going to happen legally. This is what it looks like to get arrested or get a ticket from APD when you're homeless." On an organizing level, more people have to get involved in general.

Even me being a member of DSA. The first time around, in a membership org of 2,000-some people, we could only get maybe 50 people to come canvas. I don't think people really got the urgency of the issue. When we were door knocking the thing that I always explain to people is what it actually looks like when cops come clean a camp. First of all that language. What does it mean to clean these people out of their homes? You're throwing their property away. And so they'll come in and say, hey, three-minute warning, get whatever you can. Wherever you can't grab is going into the trash.

That's a ridiculous way to operate in any circumstance. I'm a preschool teacher. If I say to my kids, "Hey, you have three minutes to clean this up, and whatever you can't clean up, I'm throwing in the trash." I would get fired. These people they're rushing getting their belongings and when the cops are trashing their stuff, you're losing your ID, you're losing your birth certificates, social security, bus card. Maybe only have two pairs of shoes. You just lost a pair. Then, to rebuild your life, if you go panhandling, you're too aggressive.

You're going to get another ticket, but you have to get on the bus to go from the Social Security Office to the birth control, or -- I was also doing abortion funds earlier [laughs] -- to the birth certificate office, to the DPS office, get your ID. Those are three stops. They're not near each other and you have to give money to ride the bus to get there. People are definitely going to be assholes to you every step of the way.

It's so frustrating, it's so frustrating. We had to be able to take back the narrative about what's happening. These people aren't lazy. These problems were created by our system. Our society has created poverty. Poverty didn't just create itself. These addictions that these people have didn't come out of thin air. People usually get addictions because they're trying to escape from this reality that's been created by capitalism. Having more honest conversations, joining our organization, Austin Justice Coalition, Grassroots Leadership, Austin DSA, Workers Defense Project -- Just knowing that all these groups need people. Once you join you actually gotta show up and do things. You can't just say, "I'm a member" and then not do anything. You gotta put in the work.

KAMP: For some people, the idea of knocking on a stranger's door is really scary. Is that something that you've had to overcome? How did you get to a point where you felt a level of comfort having those conversations with strangers?

LOUIE: At the beginning of every campaign, I have a mini, little anxiety attack. Just going to be completely honest. It's not comforting to go knock on a stranger's door and talk about politics.

Especially when it's not for a candidate. It is easy to go talk to about a candidate. People are used to that. But if you go talk to someone, go to someone's door and you're talking about propositions and politics and how the system operates, people get very defensive. It's a lot of, "Oh well I really know how that works." But, okay, well let's have this conversation. Be more open about it, but people put up a guard or people just don't trust you.

For me it depends on what neighborhood we're in. If we're in Windsor Hills, or off of Manor Road or St. John's area -- I live in the Rundberg area, in District 4. If we're in that area, people are pretty cool. It's usually working class communities, middle class, lower class, retired communities. These people are very friendly, even if they don't agree with what I'm saying. Sometimes they'll still open the door and smile like they're open to the conversation.

A few times I canvassed Far West Austin, and it was terrifying. I walked up to one door, we have our little mobile app, it gives us the address, and so it tells me the person's name and their age. I see a name that is a white male, 43 years old, and it's like, "Okay, here we go." One time I was canvassing off of Far West. I walk up this driveway and they had a Blue Lives Matter sign. It was like, "Oh I don't even know how you ended up in my app. I'm not --" There's sometimes I won't knock on the door because it's not worth it. One guy in DSA a few years ago had a gun pulled on him. That's Texas. That's the reality.

In my heart, I know I had to do something. I just kind of had to get over myself. It is what it is. I'm not going to phone bank. I hate phone banking because people pick up the phone, they hear my voice, "Oh that's a black woman." They can tell, for whatever reason, they can tell. When I'm at the door it is harder for people to dismiss my humanity, because I'm right there and they see me and it's less intimidating. They see me and realize I'm not some bogeyman.

It's hard. I'm not ever going to sell it as something easy to do because it's not easy. You just got to make it happen.

KAMP: Have there been conversations you've had where people have been hostile to the idea starting out, and then there's been something that clicks for them.

LOUIE: Yeah, there's been several different campaigns. Sometimes people have to talk it out and they don't really even know what their opinion is. That's the skill set that we're building -- being able to be patient with people and you're not rushing at the door. I'm not just there to get you signed this clip board and walk away. We do deep canvassing where

I'm going to knock on the door with intentions of trying to talk for 20 minutes. Those longer conversations change people's minds.

There was a time I was canvassing for Bernie Sanders in South Austin, and this guy opened the door. My canvassing partner is the older man. Older white man, probably in his 70s. And so the young guy opens his door and he tells us he's in the military and he voted for Trump, but then he got married to a Mexican woman and she didn't have citizenship here before they got married. So, he was really aggressive at first. When we were talking about different policies, in his head, were too left-leaning. But then we were talking about his wife and immigration and just had personal connection. Unfortunately, a lot of people need a personal connection for them to care. I take what I can get out there. So just being able for him to see the struggle that she was going through, and knowing that if she hadn't married him, she could have been deported, or she could have been one of the ice camps at some point. \*\*\* [20:07]

We've changed minds at doors. Sometimes, people got to talk it out, and they have never been given the opportunity to talk about these things out outside of Facebook or outside of their family bubbles. Neither of those are healthy mediums for talking about politics for the most part.

KAMP: You mentioned people need to have a personal connection, you talked about on social media, your own personal connection to some of these issues like your family's dealing with homelessness. I don't know if you felt comfortable talking about that.

LOUIE: In my teens, my parents got a divorce. Actually, we we can go all the way back. My grandmother had a drug addiction and she had my mom when she was 14 and then had three other daughters. My mom became a caregiver at a young age -- Not necessarily homelessness, but very housing insecure, hopping from place to place. Fast forward to my parents getting divorced when me and my brother were teenagers. My dad also had a drug addiction that he had developed. My mom, single mother and she worked -- She had a pretty good job through AISD (**Austin Independent School District**), but the money on paper was not paying the bills. On paper, it looked like she was getting paid a lot, but she had to file for bankruptcy, because she lost a house because of my dad. So, hopping from apartment to apartment and always having someone sleeping on the couch like a cousin, an aunt,

My mom, she showed us how to respect people even when we were struggling. We will have nothing in our living room. If we had a living room was still open for people to sleep there. Several of my cousins were in foster care when they were teenagers and just watching from afar them hopping from house to house with these strangers and not having the capacity to do anything to help. Even if my mom had room and/or the money, like I said earlier, a lot of bureaucratic bullshit. Hoops you gotta jump through to even get custody of your own family members. Most recently, my mom got really sick, and she is forced into retirement early by

AISD. They were not giving her any sort of wiggle room after 18 years of her giving her life to the district. She was renting a house in North Austin. The landlord – there was a water leak and he never fixed it. Her water bill was crazy high and she couldn't pay for it. Her water was off for a month before she told me, and she moved into our house. My brother was staying there at the time; and so, now he sleeps in our living room and has been for a couple of years. Him and his partner were saving money to buy a place but with covid her family situation changed where she's had to step up to take care of her mom. They're in this limbo of, “Should we get a place knowing that you're at your mom's house? ninety percent of the time?” Should my brother continue to stay with us until they can comfortably get a place and save more money, because you're always going to need more money?

It's been a lot of consistent housing insecurity in my life. I got lucky because between the apartments in high school. At one point we were sleeping at my uncle and aunts house. They had pretty nice house in the suburbs. My uncle was able to get a good job in the 90s. It was just a draw of the luck, his age and the job market back then. If it weren't for them, I don't know where we would have been. I had plenty aunts and uncles whose couches have been my beds for months at a time, depending on whatever was going on in my life.

KAMP: I think so many people experience that and they don't connect it to being homeless and having to sleep outside. I probably don't know enough wealthy people, but who hasn't?

LOUIE: Right, right.

[laughter]

KAMP: Another question I had, looking back through that time. How has the attitude toward public safety, toward law enforcement changed in Austin like, both for the good and the bad, since you have been observing it?

LOUIE: I think lesser with the George Floyd protests. We were really able to capitalize in that moment. So many people are ready for something different and they didn't know that was possible. When we were doing -- Jose Garza winning DA and being in DSA, and then the defunding campaign happening at the same time as the protests. Since Ferguson, all these videos being publicized and we're watching what they (police) do. That is their job, their job is to brutalize, oppress, keep people under their thumb and control. People are finally waking up to see that. On the other hand, the stream is also happening. Where people are like, “No these are our heroes. They need to respect them, they need more money, and we will like them to use more force on black people and brown people, and poor people, and sex workers and women all of us.” Oh, union workers.



I think the conversation has gotten better on one side and has gotten much, much worse on the other side with Next Door and Facebook and Fox News. These people are just getting fed all this misinformation and crazy propaganda. Since I started doing this work, it's impossible for me to not see propaganda. I'm watching TV I'm like, "Oh a cop show or oh the cop is --" It's just ridiculous because I watch these shows and they paint these cops as being super competent and empathetic, getting their job done and protecting the community. When we know that's not what's happening in reality.

I read an article this morning. This man in Colorado -- this guy shot a police officer. Another man walked up, picked up his gun to shoot the guy to protect the police officer and make sure no one else was going to get hurt. A separate police officer showed up and shot "the good guy," because he thought he was the one who did the initial murder. What is happening in our country? That is insane, that's insane. They're so ready to use force. There's no critical thinking skills. They've been given so much room to be these national bullies against all of us. It feels like so many Americans are so used to it that they don't know any better. They don't realize they're being oppressed. I love to tell people, "Listen, nobody likes to see a cop at their door." Nobody wants to see a cop turn their lights on behind them. We've seen videos of affluent white people pop off at police officers in public. They love to give us his double tuned where it's like, hey, you need respect officers but also that officer cannot tell me what to do. That's not his job. His job is to police you and leave me the hell alone. \*\*\* [28:27]

KAMP: I feel like a lot of things are converging when it comes to public safety in Austin. We have homeless decriminalization but also prop B. There's immigration, like you're talking about. There's horrific discoveries -- I don't know if discoveries the word. People speaking out about what's happening with sexual assault, how people are being treated by that. Does it feel to you, that there's a possibility to really change things right now?

LOUIE: Yeah, I think there is. Margaret Moore was the star of the Democratic Party for a minute in Austin. People had that woman up on a pedestal and all she did was protect cops and hide sexual assault cases. Those are the only things she did when she was in office, and Jose won by a landslide in that runoff election. A lot of people are getting smarter and a lot of people are looking at the world for what it really is, for better for worse. I think there is possible change, there are a lot of young people in Austin who have not been as entrenched in the decades-long copaganda and who know better. These people are talking to their parents about it. I think there's a lot of hope in Austin right now even though on the daily it does not feel like it. It feels very daunting; but, I do feel like a change is happening very slowly right now.

KAMP: Do you consider yourself a police and prison abolitionist?

LOUIE: Yeah.

KAMP: How do you define justice? What would a just Austin or a just world look like to you?

LOUIE: Oh, Amy. [laughter] Equitable schools, schools as main community centers. Kids actually want to go to schools. Definitely not having officers anywhere near a school campus. Homes where people are choosing where they want to live, not people are forced to live in certain areas. Actual communities and public spaces where we're not having to spend money to exist outside, because that's what a lot of it is. If you're somewhere and someone doesn't want you there because you're not paying for anything. If someone called a cop saying, "Hey this person is loitering, I need you to solve that problem." That's the first step. Get cops out of schools, have more public spaces.

Drugs -- How are we in the year 2021 and people are still going to jail in this country for drug usage, for having drugs on them, and for selling drugs? People don't sell drugs because they want to. People aren't selling drugs because it's easy. People who sell drugs know it's very dangerous and they consider all of that. They have no other choice, because we know how much you are paid working at a regular job. A lot of people who are selling drugs are already a hundred steps behind where they can't just graduate from high school, get a regular job and they can make it. No, they're already so deep in the hole that they need to get ridiculous amounts of money as fast as possible. To punish those people for trying to survive in this capitalist system is crazy.

A just world is no prisons. I was talking to my friend the other day. She's like, "Well, what do we do about mass murderers?" So, what do we do about Mass murderers? That's a good question, but that's not something we actually have to worry about right now because prisons are not going to be abolished in our lifetime. I am very realistic, I realize that. Right now our prison abolition outlook needs to be -- How do we get the people who are in jail for drugs, mental health issues, immigration, protecting themselves and sex workers? How do we get those people out of the system? And how many mass murderers are actually in prison? Not many. As far as I can tell, a lot of mass murderers either take their own lives, right then and there. Or they're never caught.

KAMP: Or they're caught decades later.

LOUIE: Right, he's a 70 year old man now. That's the cops being bad at their so-called jobs.

A just world is where we're all able to exist. How we want to be as long as we're not harming others and we're living in a world that's not constantly trying to punish all of us for just existing.

KAMP: I think that there's been some discussion with George Floyd's murder. Derek Chauvin, him going to prison is not really accountability. He's not being held accountable to George Floyd's family or loved ones. What do you think accountability would look like?

LOUIE: Disarming the police, first off. Limiting the contact we have with police officers in general. Cops didn't need to show up for a counterfeit bill. That's crazy. Real accountability is taking away their power. Just because Derek is in prison doesn't mean those other three officers who were also accomplices in Floyd's murder aren't still on the force. Accountability is not allowing Derek Chauvin's mother to take the stand and give a dumbass crocodile tears speech that she gave yesterday. Did you guys see it?

KAMP: I read about it.

LOUIE: I couldn't physically watch it because I know it would make my blood pressure boil. Accountability is not giving that person a platform. Accountability is holding these police departments to whatever their fake words are like. You say, you're going to do this thing. Let's see it happening. Give you a month to get it together. Why are we giving police departments years to work on these reforms? They've had decades. They've been doing this for decades. My abolition mind is accountability is just solving the police department completely. They're not protecting anyone. They're protecting capital and that's it. Accountability is going to our communities and showing them the ways that police officers are actually making them less safe.

Accountability too is giving up money. Take money out of their pensions and give that to the family, don't take it from taxpayers. Why are we paying for their murder? Take that shit directly out of the police budget, take it out of their pensions and give that money to the family members.

Money is never going to bring back someone. Money will definitely help you grieve because with money you don't have to work for a little bit. Can you imagine your son is killed on TV and you have to go back to work because you got to make sure you keep a roof over your head? I couldn't even imagine. I would lose my mind. Being able to protect these families financially so they can protect themselves, spiritually, is accountability.

KAMP: Austin has a reputation for being very liberal. Shockingly, maybe not shockingly, a lot of people come to us and they're like, "Wow it is incredibly segregated compared to other big cities." What do you think accountability looks like for people who live in Austin and have benefited from this segregation?

LOUIE: How do we even know? It is so complicated, because if you're a white person and you live on the East Side doesn't necessarily make you a gentrifier. You're probably just renting a shithole house. It's so nuanced. I always try to be very precise on talking to people, because with the internet people are like, "We got get rid of all these colonizers." Those people aren't actually the ones who created this problem. There are people in Tarrytown who are still pushing to live their little segregated lives, and I don't know what is to be done about those people. Do we seize their property and give it to a black family and then where do they go? I don't know what it looks like at this point, because everything is so set in stone. (Interstate) 35 was built to separate the town.

People need to have a come-to-Jesus moment with themselves and realize that Austin is so segregated. The first time I left Austin, or even left Texas, I went to Chicago and my mind was blown. Chicago's pretty segregated, but I saw all sorts of people everywhere I went, and it was amazing. Austin, so many places I go to, I'm the only black person and it is crazy to me. People look at me like I shouldn't be there, I don't belong, even though I was born here.

I don't know how to solve this problem or to even approach it. It's so bad.

KAMP: I can understand that. One thing that seems especially painful to me with gentrification is how many people lose their homes because they can't pay property taxes. That's their only source of generational wealth, their only way that they were going to keep their family housed. Is there anything else you want to say about the housing issue, the housing bond?

LOUIE: It's a made-up crisis. Why not just put people in homes? Like, I don't give a fuck about real estate developers. I don't give a fuck about their profits. They have enough money. I'm sick of -- Everything we're doing has a come back down to the money.  
\*\*\* 39:50

I know it seems childish, but it's all made up. There's so many nice apartment complexes in Austin that are empty. They're empty. That's what it is across the country and it's stupid. No one's living at that property, so what profits are even being made right now? Just put people in the house and stop being so selfish.

I don't understand people who are frothing at the mouth, and they're so upset about people being homeless. Are you jealous? Do you want to move out of your house and live under the highway? Were you planning on staying there and they took your spot? What are you upset about right now? Yes, I just want people in Austin to stop being so damn selfish.

I really think that's what it boils down to. People are very individualized and selfish. They think because they're wearing their Birkenstocks that they're cool and liberals. No, you're just as bad with those pieces of shit in West Lake Austin too. That's all I got to say.

KAMP: You mentioned, briefly, being a preschool teacher. How was being somebody who had to show up to work every day, didn't have the privilege of working from home during the pandemic -- How has that affected your perspective?

LOUIE: I already knew what the game was, the essential worker thing. I saw it a mile away. It's just bullshit. We closed, March 13th last year, and it was the week before our spring break. So we're going to have that spring break off anyway. The guy who owns the schools -- no one really knew what was going on so he's like I'm going to apply for the PPP laws and we can figure it out. We were going week by week basis. He's like, "Okay, everyone just stay at home. Just stay at home." But then we had some families where they were nurses and they worked at hospitals, or single moms who were still working the restaurant industry for places that are open. They needed childcare. Out of the three schools, we had one school that was open in April with a class of four kids. At the time too the younger teachers are like, "We can do it, we will by ourselves, and we won't be risking by getting anyone sick. Like I said, I have a house full of people. I cannot leave my house right now, that doesn't feel safe, and we had to -- Me and my co-teachers, we had to organize and were like, "How are we going to make sure that we're going to keep getting paid and how long can we do that?"

So we managed to get pay full-time with our health care benefits still intact from March 13th until mid-June. Which I thought was pretty incredible, because at the time, 72% of child care facilities had shut down completely and most of them had not bounced back. We got very lucky in that regard, but when school started back it felt -- there's this understanding between us and parents where they were extremely grateful. I'm never going to say the parents did not appreciate -- extremely grateful and understood the risks we were taking. Understanding the mental toll was having on us. Last year was awful for all of us and we still haven't had a moment where we sit back and have processed it together.

Preschool workers across the country are treated like shit. A lot of times, they don't consider us as real teachers. We get treated like babysitters. Most preschool teachers in the country don't make more than \$9 an hour. I'm really lucky. I make \$17 an hour. That's big baller money in the preschool world and it's nothing. It's nothing, it's pennies for a grown adult in America.

I'm hoping that more workers are having organizing conversations in their workplaces. Seeing it for what it is. We have to be able to organize together against our bosses or else they're going to keep pulling this shit because it's not going to be the last pandemic, unfortunately. With climate

change, another virus is going to happen. We have to make sure that we have the power to make sure that we can take care of ourselves and each other.

KAMP: You mentioned briefly the psychological toll all of this has taken. Are there things, are there techniques that you've discovered that help you deal with all those things? What are some things that bring you joy, bring you comfort?

LOUIE: Me and my partner, Seneca, we watch so much TV. Lot of dating shows and the most surface level, mind-numbing stuff and just laugh about it and my job. I'm at an outdoor school, and we're near Bull Creek on and natural Preserve. We're the only people out there. When we came back, we were at the central location. But once we got more kids, last August, we're ready to go back into the woods. We were going hiking every day. Me and my three teachers and these 20 adorable, little five year olds, hiking in the woods. Checking out of everything, being very present in the moments, looking at mushrooms, looking at butterflies, identifying plants, trying to catch lizards. Taking on their childlike -- What's the word I'm looking for? Their childlike perspective.

My job really did save me mentally. I got lucky because I work at a beautiful campus. I wasn't stuck in a fluorescent light classroom, trying to do Zoom on a computer and teach three kids at the same time. I came out of this way better than a lot of other people. I mentioned earlier that my mom was with us. We were playing a lot of dominoes, and we were playing space. Playing games together. I bought a coloring book and Nintendo switch. Anything that's not me scrolling on my phone.

I was buying a lot of records too. Listening to a lot of music. Trying to keep my humanity, because I hate it when I see organizers who don't allow themselves to have joy and who think that you have to be very serious all the time or else you're not serious and committed to the work. That's crazy to me. I'm a human being before anything else and I want to feel joy and happiness as often as possible. I'm never going to put that on the back burner for the good of the cause. No, I have a finite amount of time on this planet. I need to make sure that I'm having a good time on this planet, because the horrors are going to keep happening. I can pick and choose what I fight against, but it's not my job to save the world. I'm not trying to. That brings me a lot of joy -- the comfort of knowing it is impossible for me to change the world by myself. There're enough people on the planet where we could tag in and tag out when we're feeling like we need to.

KAMP: Thank you so much for doing this interview. Was there anything that I didn't ask you that you wanted to discuss?

LOUIE: No, I don't think so. This was great. It was so nice actually talking to you. I really appreciate you doing it. It was so great to hear your perspective. I don't know if Murphy has any questions. Sometimes Murphy will have a really great question.

[laughs]

MURPHY ANNE CARTER: If I can figure out how to unmute myself maybe. [laughter] Oh, like "A year and a half of Zoom, you still don't know how to hit the little microphone icon?" I wanted to reflect back something that I really appreciate and maybe that can turn into a question, but I'm thinking so much about the clarity with which you identify, what is make believe. Not only in the ways in which we've made being a human transactional, but also the structures that we've created. In particular, when you're talking about housing. I'm so curious -- when you're having this kind of clarity and also I can hear the that same kind of clarity when you're describing, at the same time, this is my humanity and I need to have fun. I wanted to bridge those two moments together because they felt so in conversation with one another. You are taking back and narrative as you've described. I'm curious, when you want to take back the narrative or change the narrative of what these structures have told us -- like this is the narrative, right? What does taking back the narrative look like or sound like or mean to you is my question. It's a very long-winded way to get there, but I'm very caught up in everything you're saying and I was listening so closely. If you saw me scribbling, I was taking notes.

LOUIE: People, like all of us, get really sucked into having a perspective of the world that someone else has given to us and not questioning it. For me, taking back the narrative is deconstructing what people are saying to me, deconstructing what has been towed at me. "What does that actually mean?" When we talk about crime, I had this conversation with my aunt and uncle last week, on Father's Day, because he -- I'm very anti Joe Biden. My uncle, he's very much liberal Democrat. He doesn't understand why I don't like Joe Biden. We were talking about crime, and you guys probably know the news. They have been spouting out propaganda about how crime is on the rise everywhere and they're bad guys doing crimes constantly. I was talking to my uncle about what what really is crime? Who's defining what the crime is? Who's making the law? It's the people in power so they're able to say, "This is now a crime, because we're going somehow profit off of it."

I told him, one of the biggest crimes committed in this country is wage theft. For wage-theft, it's usually only civil cases. They're not criminal cases, unless it's a very large amount for a lot of workers. These workers, their wages have been stolen for so many years. They don't have the money or the time to fight these cases. They usually disappear. That is an actual crime, that's stealing from people's labor. Loitering is not a crime. Having an outdated inspection tag on your car is not a crime, but these are the crimes that people are getting committed for. Smoking a joint

on your front porch is not a crime. You're not hurting anyone. You're not bothering, your minding your business. But if APD officer rolls by, you're getting a ticket. Or if you look like me, you're getting arrested. Taking back narrative is being able to step back and critically think about what it is that people are saying to us and being able to find the words to say, "Actually, I disagree with that because of x y, z reasons. People in power do not like that. They're like, "No, this is what actually is going on and I know because I have the authority because I have so much money. No, you're wrong. It's my job to tell you all the ways in which you're wrong and what the reality of the world actually is."

CARTER: I have one more question.

LOUIE: Sure.

CATER: That was an amazing answer. Thank you. One thing that you said that I thought was phenomenal was when you're describing canvassing. That the skill set your building is to be patient with people. The expectation of when you arrive on their doorstep you're going to have a longer conversation. I was wondering if you could speak more to that skill set and the value of that skill set. Hearing that makes so much sense to me, but I don't feel like that's something that I engage with often in the external world.

LOUIE: Collectively, people are bad listeners. Someone's talking to us and you're already thinking about the next words you're going to say in response. You got to turn that off when you're at a door because you already have your talking points. There's no reason for you to be in your head to try to combat whatever that person just said. We have a script for a reason and people are usually predictable. People are really predictable and they would hate to be called that. You don't need to be in your head thinking about what you're going to say to this person. You really need to be present and listening to what people are saying to you. People can tell when you're listening and people can tell when you're checked out and ready to just move on to the next door. I learned this skill being a preschool teacher. I've been in child care for 13 years. If I were not a patient person, I wouldn't last this long. You got to listen to people and not be ready for an argument. There's some people, when they do their first canvases, they think that is your job, to argue with people at their door.

It is not your job to argue with people. It's your job to have a conversation. It's your job to give them a different perspective. It's your job to listen. It's your job to give them the space to talk about whatever it is they're talking to you about. I had talked to people whose politics are incoherent, the politics are all over the place, they have no idea what they believe. They don't even know if they're talking about, but it's not my job to try to give them some sort of philosophical or political science lesson at their front door. You got to listen, let people rant, and once they get done ranting. You go to your action.



I was talking to one guy, he's in the Army and despised Donald Trump. We were talking about Medicare for All. We were talking about health care and the VA. He said he was pretty happy with it, but he still doesn't trust the government. How will the government be able to handle Medicare-for-All or universal healthcare. I was like, "Your VA, we want that, but for everybody." It took us 40 minutes to get to that. I would not recommend staying 40 minutes at someone's door, but on this particular day, I felt determined. It is rare to speak to some older man in the Army who isn't going to be immediately dismissive to me. He didn't agree with majority of things I was saying, but he still was respecting what I had to say. So I gave him that same space and respected what he had to say. He ended up signing -- Because we were trying to pressure Lloyd Doggett to sign off for Medicare for All and this man ended up donating to the campaign and signing the petition. If I had walked away after 10 minutes, he would have been like, "Screw Medicare for All, it's never going to happen, and I don't even know who Lloyd Doggett is. It wouldn't have gone anywhere if I was ready to give up because he was a little rough around the edges.

CARTER: Thank you.

LOUIE: Thank you.

CARTER: Is there anything else?