

Carrie Holley-Hurt

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SPEAKERS

Sopphey Vance, Carrie Holley-Hurt

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- S** Sopphey Vance 00:03
Cool, hi. This is Sopphey Vance, interviewing Carrie Holly-Hurt for the Institute for Diversity and Civic Life here at Austin, Texas. Carrie, say hi. Welcome.
 - C** Carrie Holley-Hurt 00:25
Thanks so much.
 - S** Sopphey Vance 00:27
To start a little bit, Carrie, we start from the beginning. Tell me a little bit about you. What are some formative experiences that make you who you are? As Carrie, as parent, seminarian, wherever you want to start.
 - C** Carrie Holley-Hurt 00:44
Oh, wow. Okay. I grew up in West Texas, in Odessa, Texas, working class family. I dropped out of high school at eighteen. I moved in, took care of myself, and then quickly moved to DC to start life, and then ended up about five years afterwards going to college, for the first time thinking maybe it was possible. I applied to one school, got in one school, George Mason University. I went there and excelled academically where I never had before, because I had an undiagnosed learning disability. It wasn't diagnosed until my

master's degree. I have dyslexia. One of the things I've read is that there's three different superpowers you can have with dyslexia. One of them is empathy. That's the one I got, which is a blessing and a curse. But in college, getting outside of West Texas and the education system there - getting outside and being in college and being exposed to other people and being exposed to what actual history was and the world and conflicts in the world and stuff, that empathy was able to be funneled into activism or justice seeking.

C

Carrie Holley-Hurt 02:24

During college, I interned for an organization that helps supply resources for people who are experiencing homelessness. I remember going to a fundraiser, and it was somewhere in Virginia at this really rich house, and all these people are just donating money or whatever to help this cause - and not saying that that's wrong. There's nothing wrong with that. I understand you have to meet the immediate needs. But it was very clear to me, this is a system and a cycle that will perpetuate indefinitely, as long as systems stay the way they are. My favorite quote in undergrad was, "The poverty of the poor is not a call to charitable action, but a call a social change." During that internship, I was like, "I can't be involved in this. I can't be involved and just like, 'Poor, poor people.'" Why is this? We know that there are systems in place that keep people poor and keep people marginalized.

C

Carrie Holley-Hurt 03:34

So I went to University of Bristol, public policy, got my degree, ended up right before going meeting my husband again. We'd known each other forever. We met in seventh grade. But we just had a weird night where we just happened to reconnect. But I was like, "I'm still going to grad school, even though you're really cute." And I went to grad school, and again, poverty and social justice being my focus. Initially, I thought, "I'm going overseas, I'm never coming back. America is not my place. I'm gonna go to wherever, where I can make a direct impact." But the more more work I did there, the more I was like, "Wow, lots of well-meaning White people really fuck things up. I don't want to do that." Especially looking at NGOs and understanding them more, I was just like, "I don't know what I'm gonna do." I ended up doing all my research focused in, basically, can we draw a direct line from policy to how it impacts people? I ended up being able to find a place in Linares, Mexico to look at how US energy policy regarding ethanol had affected the price of corn, which had impacted the real day-to-day living of people in this small town in Mexico when the price of the tortilla was 400 percent more. That was that trajectory. How do we look and see? How does it affect people's lives? Then at that point, I was just like, "It does." I didn't know really where to go from there.



Carrie Holley-Hurt 05:32

But I had fallen in love with this man, so we moved. We were here, we were in Austin. I finished my dissertation, which is what they call it in England. I ended up getting pregnant with my oldest kiddo. We just decided to stay here. I got a job working for the Texas Legislature, which was horrible. I worked there for about five years. In that time, I was diagnosed with lupus. Then my husband, just kind of like, "This is horrible. It's horrible. I hate watching you suffer all the time." I had been kind of trying to deal with my own health issues. I had been getting really into the holistic world. I decided that we wanted another kid, but I couldn't imagine having another kid and working at the legislature. I hardly ever saw Harper as it was. I got pregnant, worked that cycle, ended up giving birth to Alex two days after we published our final report for the cycle, and then came back because they had me come back, and I promptly quit. I was just like, "I can't be doing this with y'all."



Carrie Holley-Hurt 06:55

I went back and got my health coaching certificate, started my own business, trying to work with people with autoimmune diseases primarily, which was a whole other story. I sort of do that still, not as much. Let's fast forward a couple years, I get hired at a boutique health coaching place. It was not a great fit for me. I had to put my dad into hospice, and all of that became really a challenge. I got really sick, which ended up me not being able to bring in as many clients as my boss wanted, so I got fired, which was fine. But it did leave me in my spiritual director's office crying and saying, "I just want people to help see past all the bullshit that there is to see that they're enough and inherently loved and worthy." We did some discernment, and that's when I decided that I thought maybe it was being called. Applied to APTS [Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary] and applied to the scholarship. My prayer was, "If this is meant to be, then I will get in, and there won't be an uphill battle." I got in, and so this is where I am. I guess those are my pins in the map of my life that are most important right now.



Sopphey Vance 08:45

Right. Big story items. You mentioned the spiritual director denomination or church were you affiliated with?



Carrie Holley-Hurt 08:55

I am a Unitarian Universalist. My spiritual director is, I think, Episcopalian. She is connected to the other seminary. She really wanted me to go to Seminary of the Southwest [laughs]. I met her through - we do this thing called Wellspring. I guess it's

analogous to a Bible study, but it's on different topics. Every year, it's on different topics, and you work through it with a small group. Part of that process, they encourage you to get a spiritual director, and I was like, "Yes, please let me do that." I've continued to work with her even though I no longer do that program.

S Sopphey Vance 09:52

You talked a lot about activism and quest for justice. I think you said "seeking justice." What does activism look like in your life right now? What's going on, Carrie?

C Carrie Holley-Hurt 10:15

[laughs] That's a really good question. Right now my activism - I guess it's always been kind of scattershot. Maybe it would be working with campaigns, or there's an initiative within UUism called UU the Vote. I organized about thirty or forty people or so. We sent out thousands and thousands of postcards to people primarily in Texas who had been thrown off the voter rolls, primarily with Hispanic last names, because that happened. That was one thing. Then when the session came around, it was just seeing what was coming up. I was tracking bills, anti-LGBTQ bills and anti-trans bills primarily, but also anti-voting rights bills, and some critical race theory bills, although I know I didn't catch all of those. My goal was just to know what was going on, and when I could go up and do what I could.

C Carrie Holley-Hurt 11:34

Mostly what that led to is, I did sign up a few times to testify, but mostly, I never got to testify, because the house has new weird rules I don't understand where they can cut off testimony. Most of the time, I just would go down and submit my opposition to bills and call. Where I live in Austin, we have a super friendly state senator, and my representative is super friendly. Mostly, it was just calling and being like, "Thank you. For the record, I don't support this bill. Please don't support this bill. Thank you for what you're doing." That was how I was personally using my resource and privilege. Then on top of that, trying to drum up other people by posting about it, telling people about it, texting, annoying the hell out of a lot of people, I'm sure. But just letting people know and providing myself as a resource. Because I was a part of the legislature, I know how things work pretty well. I know that getting in part of that world is so hard. They really create a barrier to entry on purpose, so that you don't have huge rooms of people testifying. So just trying to make myself a resource whenever possible.



Sopphey Vance 13:00

You mentioned the first type of bills that you were looking for was LGBTQIA+, how does that affect your life specifically?



Carrie Holley-Hurt 13:18

I'm married to a man, but I'm bi, so it doesn't really affect me. I'm a totally passing person, right? I'm a mom, people just assume. It doesn't really affect me. My oldest kid is non-binary, and there have been discussions about maybe taking hormones or doing hormone suppression therapy, or binding, or whatever. But those have all happened since legislation has happened. It didn't technically affect me or my family at all. But it affects a whole lot of other mamas and papas and parents. I don't know. The two bills that I think really affected me or pissed me off the most that caused me to [take] action was, one, there's a statute that basically says - What do they call it? I can't remember what bullshit term they use. Basically saying that any health provider doesn't have to provide any abortion service if it morally affronts them. Okay. They were trying to add on to that, that basically said no health care provider has to provide any service to anyone if it violates your conscience. Primarily that's an LGBTQ issue, right? How many times [do] we write about trans women being stepped over in a crash, so that EMT workers can go fit the person that fits their idea of what person -



Carrie Holley-Hurt 15:17

On all fronts, on race, on sexuality, on gender identity, on all of it, it just pissed me off right? It's so immoral, it's so wrong. I wanted to speak up against that, because I just can't imagine living in a world where we codify that in law. Even though we know that shit happens in the real world, to codify that in law just seems like a deeper degree of evil. The other one was they were trying to take away providers' license who provided gender affirming care to kids. I do know kids who need gender affirming care, and I know adults who get access to gender affirming care. I know that it can be really hard as an adult to access that care. Then you throw in the complications of parents having to try to access that care from their kids, and now the state saying, "And we might take your children away." Or if that shitty bill doesn't get passed then you won't even be able to find a provider to provide the [care]. So now the mental health of your child is really at stake. And let's not forget, it's just a way for the state to completely marginalize kids who don't fit the bill. So yeah, those are the two that got my mama bear hackles - like, "I want to rip your head off, but that's not socially appropriate, so let me just figure out how to translate that into action."



Sopphey Vance 17:00

You started speaking of empathy as your superpower. Has this empathy always been there? The norms that you grew up [with] in terms of gender and activism, were those around you when you grew up in West Texas?



Carrie Holley-Hurt 17:29

Yes, I was always an empathetic kid. My mom is a very compassionate person. But I was raised in a fundamentalist Christian household that was extremely conservative. One of my sister's first memories was pulling her little red wagon around campaigning for Reagan. My mom runs a crisis pregnancy center. My sister was the president of the National Right to Life Committee. I worked for the National Right to Life Committee in my early twenties when I was floundering. When I was a teenager, and I was pretty rebellious, and I was like, "I'm a feminist. Also I'm gay, kinda." All this shit that I had been sold is a bill of goods. It's weird, right? I think that the underpinning of where I was like, "I'm a feminist. I'm an ally and also part of the community, hybrid," that was three parts: empathy, because I was like, "No, humans are humans are humans are humans." Any kind of primacy creation is just dehumanization. Obviously I wouldn't have had the words at that time, but I think that that's what it was. Then one third just a kind of fuck you to these systems that I didn't fit into and that didn't feel right to me, but were telling me I was wrong.



Sopphey Vance 19:23

Powerful, powerful statement of overturning and overlooking these ideals that were placed upon you. Here's a more difficult question. What is it like living in an intersection of the LGBTQIA+ world and the current societal world we live in? Not just for yourself as a part of the community, but for your child as well?



Carrie Holley-Hurt 19:51

Yeah. It's funny because we just vacationed, and it's very much geographical. When I'm here in Austin, my kiddo, all they wanted for their birthday was D&D stuff and they/them stuff. So we had big gay, awesome family birthday party. They got their they/them hoodie that they're wearing, and it's a hundred degrees outside. And here, totally cool. I'm like, "Yeah, this is my kid." They're really trying to figure out - they're thirteen. They have a lesbian pin that they [laughs] put Sharpie, "80%" on. Which is so fucking adorable. I can't stand it. Here it's just like, that's it. My kids, I love them so much. They surprise me, and they fill me with joy. Luckily, I got the parenting advice of don't try to sculpt your kid. It's a

treasure hunt. And this is my kids. They're a treasure hunt. It's awesome.



Carrie Holley-Hurt 21:11

When we are out of this little pocket, I am terrified. I did something that was really shitty, and I had to apologize for it. We were in a small town somewhere. I don't know if we were in the panhandle or somewhere, I don't know. It was either New Mexico or the panhandle. It was a small town. There were people who were making me nervous. And I'm like, "Harper, please just take off your pin, just please take off your pin." I did it as we're walking to the gas station bathroom. That did not go over well. I'm like, "I'm sorry. I get scared." After that, I was like, "I'm not going to do that, because that's bullshit." Harper should be who they are, but also I'm going to have to kill someone. I find myself posturing. I noticed I was walking in front of them, like, "What? Fuck you. What?" Just ready. I'm sure most people are just like, "Calm down, lady." But I'm so terrified for them.



Carrie Holley-Hurt 22:18

They finally came out to both sides of the family, and by that, I mean both my husband and I have had conversations with our moms, so that's not really coming out. But now that there's going to be family interaction, I'm already just full of dread. "Don't say shit." I don't want them to say shit to Harper about anything, because it will not go over well for anyone. So that's harder, as a mom. Then that gets extrapolated out to the whole LGBTQ community. I delight in people who are free. Those are the people for me, those are the people who are like, "Yes to myself," even when it's fucking hard. Those are the people I want to be around because they're full of life, and interesting things. But at the same time, this world is hostile, and I just want to rip everyone's heads off that might hurt them. So it's this really weird intersection. I mean, it's the same way whenever I would go with one of my girlfriends, we would go camping a lot in West Virginia. The whole time just being so afraid to show any affection. But then you get into your little bubble and it's just pure joy. But any time outside is just pure fear. That juxtaposition is one of the markers of how insanely wrong transphobia and homophobia are. That any human being cannot feel safe walking around in this world without the threat of harm. If there was no other moral argument, just the fact that some human beings can walk around without harm and some can't. That's messed up. So it's hard. Very long-winded way of saying it's real hard to live at all these intersections.



Sopphey Vance 24:37

That's an absolutely fine answer. We're coming close to the end of all my little questions, but is there anything else that you want to talk about? Your life, this is your story. This is

what makes you.

C Carrie Holley-Hurt 25:09

I think with all of my activist work, it's interesting as it's such a part of my identity. It's so instrumental to my early identity formation in my early-mid twenties. Then now as a mom, where you have to reconstruct and reform who you are, and having to leave parts of you behind that just don't mesh. I've become more radical after that merger of the two, just because I think, for me, becoming a mom was like, "Oh my God, I love these humans this much. I feel this strongly about protecting them. That means every other mom does, too." So that means every human being is loved to the same degree my human beings are loved. Okay, so now we got to fight for all the peoples [laughs]. It was good because it expanded my feminism, it expanded all the ways that I thought about human beings, which is, of course, an extrapolation of how God is, right? If God loves me this much, God loves them this much. So even though they're sneering at me, and not wearing their mask, and saying horrible things, and holding really racist signs - wow - God loves them this much. How do I do it?

C Carrie Holley-Hurt 26:56

I say all that to say, I also feel completely inept. I get burned down pretty quick, just because it feels like, especially living in Texas, that no matter how much I shout, no matter how much I carry, no matter how much my passion is, or the passion of the people that are there day after day, it doesn't seem to matter. It's interesting to me that I continue to do this, and I continue to have this passion for it, even when I don't really see the results. I guess my prayer and my hope right now is that God will turn it for good. Maybe it doesn't affect the laws or maybe it doesn't affect that legislature or whatever, but maybe it affects somebody who wasn't told how freaking remarkable they were, or feels isolated or lonely. So I think I'm going to try to keep holding that to keep me from being so burnt out and stop trying to keep a score. Because I feel like for whatever reason, I am living in this state, and I am on the wrong side of politics if I want to win, whatever that means.

S Sopphey Vance 28:26

Thank you, Carrie. Thank you for sharing your story.

C Carrie Holley-Hurt 28:29

Yeah, thank you.



Sopphey Vance 28:31

I'll stop recording now.