

Tislarm: "Hi guys! Thank you all for being here. You all are people that've held me down through the pandemic, so I wanted to bring us all together and talk about what we went through, where we are now, and where we're going. So, let's just jump into it! How's everyone feeling today?"

Yaya: "Absolutely! Feeling good. You see I'm festive? I've got the holiday spirit!"

everyone laughs

Bones: "I'm piggybackin' the holiday spirit." *Laughs*

Yaya: "That's it, that's it! Should we introduce ourselves Tislarm?"

Tislarm: "Yes! Yes! Should I start this over? I feel like I didn't say enough."

Sheldon: "No, it's fine! It's natural."

Yaya: "No, it's good. This is a conversation, hunny. This is a conversation. Keep it casual. I'll start! My name is Yvette Yaya Williams. I am an artist of all sorts. I consider myself a storyteller and professional make-believer and also just a very huge supporter of community, children, all of that good stuff. So, a humanitarian all around. That's my role."

Sheldon: "Oh god, no pressure, huh?"

everyone laughs

Sheldon: "My name is Sheldon Henry and a fun fact is that I grew up with Tislarm in Brooklyn. So we've known each other a very long time. So yeah, and we're still in the arts. It's really cool to have friends that you've started with, and still in the arts at this point."

Bones: "Hi my name is Bones Jones and I am an artist also. And uh... I'm so happy to be here."

everyone laughs

Yaya: "Yessss!"

Tislarm: "And I'm Tislarm Bouie, your host." *laughs* "Um so you know in 2020, our lives came to a halt and whatever we used to do... whether that was performing every day or training and auditioning, working, our lives came to a stand still. Our industry specifically was shut down. We weren't able to get any gigs, we weren't able to make any money. Something that we all loved doing every single day of our lives was stripped away from us and we weren't able to do it for the longest that we haven't been able to do it in our entire lives. So, what was it like for each of you to keep going? What inspired you during that time?"

Sheldon: "Um, so I guess we should break it down a little first. So at first, for me, it was kinda like, 'oh I get a break'. Because I thought it was like... a month. Even two, you know? And especially being in a show right now on Broadway it's like, I get four days off a month. You know? So, at that point of the pandemic, especially because I was opening a new show at that point, I was a bit burnt out. So when they said, 'you got like two weeks off' I was like, 'Ah! This is a nice break.' I'll start there and let somebody else come in and we'll keep snowballing on that. But, that's the way I started."

Tislarm: "Just keep going!"

Sheldon: "Oh okay well, um... as it kept going, I realized I needed to be on some kind of schedule. So, throughout the pandemic what I did was I joined an online Zoom workout class to keep myself going. But I also made time to reset and not feel like I had to do something. Which was the first two, three months, I felt like I *had* to do something. And then I was like, 'no Sheldon, take a beat because you were literally like scraping your eyeballs out before the pandemic.' I also, you know, never really pursued a lot of television before. So, I took that time to do it! And I mean it actually like worked out, it is working out and stuff like that. So, it was like it opened up new interests for me, I should say. And also made me, um... appreciate days off, appreciate moments with friends and family, and not just make it all about the business, you know? It was like, 'oh, somebody has a birthday party, I'm gonna make sure I get to that birthday party.'" Because, who knows? I would say in a nutshell it taught me to like cherish moments more instead of just like brushing over, moving on to the next thing."

Tislarm: "Cherish life."

Sheldon: "Yeah. So, I'm gonna start there."

Yaya: "Mmm."

Bones: *sings* "Cherish the day!"

everyone laughs

Yaya: "Come on, Sade!"

everyone laughs

Yaya: "Um, I can go next. So for me, I'm kinda like, you know, like all artists I'm a busy bee. I like to go at least, you know, if I'm not involved in something artistic I still like to be involved in whatever it is— that's me. When the pandemic first started, I sort of internalized... my intuition was telling me that this was something that was gonna be here for a little while. I knew that, just internally. So, I made the decision to go back home to Ohio. My parents have a small horse farm there and I felt like if I was gonna be bunkered down, you know, I wanted to be somewhere close to my family and friends. And one thing that I definitely learned is that subconsciously, and

I know I'm not alone, that I carry a lot of anxious energy. Because, you know, it's kinda like the fuel for that butterfly effect that keeps me going, that keeps me active. But when you go from having a routine which is being able to get dressed and warm up and go on the train and have, you know, that walk or whatever you have to do to get in your mindset and get in the zone, to just having an email that says the self-tape is due at this time. That anxiety starts to kick in. I mean, personally for me. Because essentially you go from living in the moment and feeling like, okay, I'm preparing for this thing. I'm in the room— Boom! I did that twice, if I messed up, if they didn't like it, it's fine, I'll leave it in the room. To being able to go at it six, seven, ten, as many times you want. And also, having that thought in the back of your head of like, 'okay I know this is due Friday. Imma do it.' And then Tuesday comes. And then it's Wednesday, and then it's Thursday night at midnight and I'm like, 'I gotta do this! It's due on Friday!' So I really had to, you know, we talk about routines and what changed— that energy doesn't go away. I love that energy and I had to learn to accept it and learn that it is what makes me who I am. But, I also had to learn to, you know, cultivate it in a different way. Being in Ohio where things are slower, gave me that sort of, you know... shift that I needed. You know? And also giving myself time to, okay if you're not going to be walking to the train to go to this audition, go for a run every day. Take some time to walk up and down the driveway. Do what you have to do. Because your circumstance and your space don't have to be, you know, reliant on each other. You know what I mean? So you get to create however you wanna feel or however you're going to choose to react to the space that you're in. So, being in a quieter space, more open space, I was more open to exploring those parts of myself and also paying attention to them. And learning how to deal with them in a different way."

Tislarm: "And your family too. You wanted to spend time with them"

Yaya: "Oh yeah, absolutely! Being around my family... I mean, for me, I've always been a big family person. I go home every second I get. This is the first time though that I actually understood, and I love ya'll and god bless ya'll names, but I understood why people sometimes say, 'okay, I'm just gonna give my family four days and then go back to what I got to do.' Because it is a lot! Trying to balance, you know, as an artist we have to get into this mindset that you can't allow people to confuse your free time for availability. Just because it doesn't look like I'm doing something... in my head I'm working. You know, I'm planning."

Sheldon: "Strategy!"

Yaya: "In my head I got a lot going on. And so you know, being back home, you know, obviously I was collecting unemployment, I was doing that whole gig with the rest of us. But there was this concept that I had free time. I was available to go babysit my little cousins, or go do this with my mom, or go to Walmart, go to Sam's Club. And I had to get in the habit of saying no. But also, like you said Sheldon, like saying yes when it's necessary. And turning my yes' into yes' and my no's into no's. You know? And knowing the difference between both and not having that guilt or that anxiety. But also, learning that love and community and family, those are not nouns. Those are action words. And so you have to... just because I'm not taking the time to see you doesn't mean I can't call you. Doesn't mean I can't send a text. Doesn't mean I can't, you know... I don't

wanna reply to this five page message right now but I can say, 'I hear you, I see you and I love you. And I'll talk to you soon.' You know? So, having my family around definitely taught me that. Because your family, you know, when you're surrounded by so much love, you kind of learn how to really handle that love in a different way. You can set boundaries and still be kind. You can show up, but also still make time for yourself."

Tislarm: "Bones, this next question is for you."

Bones: "Wonderful. Because I feel like the last question was taken up by all my thoughts."

everyone laughs

Tislarm: How are you different now than you were in 2020? Whatever that means to you. What choices do you make that are different? Any new hobbies that you've picked up? Anything you've been through that has changed...

Bones: "Um, I would say... Not me tucking my hair behind my ears"

everyone laughs

Bones: "I would say that... you know, I don't know I feel like there was a lot of work for me happening like... I was kinda in transition from... well, my transition from Europe to LA and then to New York was like a big time period in my life. So I felt like I was in quarantine, post-quarantine... I was still figuring out a lot of stuff in my life, like what I wanted to do, how I wanted my career to push forward, how I wanted my personal traits to push forward, what things I needed to work on, etc. So, when moving to New York and kinda being back in this fast-paced life that is very different from Europe and LA where you're like, you can go have a coffee for three hours and it's okay, go hiking for three hours and it's okay. In New York if you're doing something for three hours that's not work then you feel like it's not okay. So getting back into that space was kinda interesting. But also I knew how I wanted to enter back into New York, as far as like, carrying those same sort of mentalities with me. The same practices that I was using with me, here. So, going into 2020 I had started a new dance job that I really didn't wanna start but, you know, we do these things for the money. So I had sorta made myself stick to fashion at the moment and just say like, 'okay I am going to New York and I'm only doing fashion'. Because it's really easy to step outside of what you're gonna say and then start doing all these other things and feeling disconnected. And feeling so plugged into other people's projects and visions that you lose connection of your own... that whole nine yards. So I said yes to this job because I needed some money to like, make some things push forward. And, it wasn't that much of a long-term commitment, so I felt like I could make it work and then be out. But as soon as that was over, like two or three days after that finished... then you know— COVID. Quarantine and all these things start. Just like Yaya said, I did feel like this was gonna be something that stuck around for a second. And that's only because, not like things that were happening outside in the world but things that I was feeling. And also like if you are any sort of connected or any type of in tune with the world and also being able to read the world, read

situations and read circumstances and read body language and read how people are speaking on camera through television. You know, how like all these things... you're not really privy to the possibilities of the things that may be, the things that may... the reality switches that may happen. And so I kind of felt, in my body, I could feel that, you know, the world was changing. It wasn't just like a, 'here comes a new flu'. It was like, 'No!' Here is a stamp on history. And with this stamp comes like, all the approval. And so with that approval, means us as the people, and us as the people before anything that the government does or... now we getting real conspiracies. *laughs* Anything that happens before... no, but, for real though. Anything that happens in the government realm or in like, higher power realm, we have to approve it as the people because we are the ones who carry out those plans or those messages or whatever it is. It's just like social media. If someone says, 'hey, here's Facebook'. We have to go and say, 'okay, Facebook is poppin'.' If they say, 'now here's Instagram'. We have to go and say, 'now, Instagram is poppin'.' You know? Like those are our jobs, and we give those things power. And so I can feel that, you know, repetition is power, repetition is key and will always win. And so these things are said over and over again. And so it's just waiting for the stamp of approval from us. So I was like, 'we're in here for the long run'. So I did start to set some things up in my mind, just as far as like how I wanted to see... I didn't want to move back because I just got here and I knew that there was a plan that I wanted to carry out. Um... and thank you UniGod, things just started to, you know, you vocalize it and it just starts to fall into place. Things start to show up in your life in the way you need them to. And so things started to show up for me. I'm very thankful because I put... we've put time into our crafts and things like that. And so to see any sort of benefit is amazing, especially during a time like this period where nothing is moving in the world. Um..."

Tislarm: "What's something that you've been working towards? That's kind of happening now?"

Bones: "Fashion. Fashion is happening. You know, I am building a brand and it's going well."

Tislarm: "What's the name of it?"

Bones: "The brand is called House of Bones. I'm getting there, Tislarm! Let me get it out! *laughs* The brand is called House of Bones and what you're trying to get me to say is that, this year I made it a thing that, you know like I said, I wanted to push forward. And I've made very conscious decisions to only have one thing in mind and so, Project Runway introduced itself in my life. I entertained the idea and then said, you know, yes to the idea and now like it's become this thing that's been very beneficial for me. I'm very grateful because, again, like a lot of stuff wasn't moving throughout these times so, that's one big thing that's really different for me. That was a long answer, but... um, really different for me. And... but also in the same head space of, 'there's a bunch of shit to do— a bunch of *things* to do, sorry, I know this is being transcribed— my bad."

Yaya: "No! Because you changed because the word changed, is what you were saying."

Bones: "Yeah! Yeah! We have to."

Yaya: "We all changed! It's a wave, you know what I mean?"

Bones: "We have to!"

Yaya: "To try and say how you changed in specific ways is so hard because I don't even feel like I am the same person. My whole life— this is a new person here."

Bones: "Yeah same. What's the saying? Move with the times or get left behind, and it was like, I'm not about to be left behind. You know, we saw our parents get left behind with internet and technology and like that can't be—"

Yaya: "Ooh! I got left behind with internet and technology, chile. I'm still trying to catch up."

Bones: "Yeah."

Sheldon: "What other questions you got?"

Tislarm: "I know for— I'm just gonna share mine. I know for me, one of the biggest things, that I got from 2020, that I'm taking with me now is not living in fear. I remember one time I had a friend and she's like, "Come on Tizzy, let's book a vacation and let's go here!" And I was like, "no! I'm not taking a vacation until I'm 30, I don't deserve it." You know, and all that. And now I look back on that and I'm like how dare I say that, I didn't deserve to take a vacation because I feel like I didn't do what I needed to do or was scared of missing out on something. You know? And if I've learned anything through COVID it's that I'm taken care of. And I have been taken care of my whole life. But it took me to sit down, when nothing else was happening, and just to kind of see like all these people, all these connections I've made, prior to me being locked down, for people to reach out and want to work with me. When everything's at a stand-still. And I feel like I've been blessed in that way and I just have no reason to live in fear. And, that's a big thing for me. So now I'm leaving New York for a bit. I'm not going there let's say... for a reason. Well I am! It's nothing written in concrete. I'm just kinda following my heart and my intuition and leading with that which is something that the old Tislarm in 2019, in the beginning of 2020, would have never done."

Yaya: "Bravo!"

Tislarm: "So yeah. That's something... So one of the other questions I have, I don't know if there's any hobbies that anyone's picked up? I know Bones specifically, he was inspiring for me because he was always doing something. Every time I would go to his house. *laughs* And I remember for me, it was uh... I've always loved to choreograph but I feel like I never really had time to dive into that side of my art. And through COVID, I didn't have anything else to do. So I was just like okay, let me get started on this piece that I've wanted to do forever. And it turned out. It turned out amazing. And now, I'm realizing that I wanna dive into that now... sooner than expected. Just to piggyback off of— Bones has always been someone that like, everytime I go

to his house he's sewing or making something. And I remember this one time I didn't want to do one of my videos and it was like four in the morning and he's like sewing something and I'm like, 'boy— do the damn video! You're saying no for no reason just because you're being lazy and you're scared of Lord knows what!' You know, just to have the first step or to have the first rehearsal."

Sheldon: "You know it's like you also have to realize that going into a pandemic... as people who could not work at all. Right? Really. There's something called depression. *laughs* And, there were moments of that that we've never really experienced before. You're like, "I don't want to be bothered, but I wanna be bothered." So we have to realize that, we have to acknowledge that. We're dealing with like, people who were living their everyday lives! They were literally going on vacations, working from home, getting a check from doing what they went to school for, what they in *debt* for. And we're sitting at home we're like... uh... what?"

Tislarm: "Yeah, and they're watching TV. The arts which isn't supported enough sadly.

Sheldon: "Right! We have to also, you know, allow ourselves to step back and be like, 'I don't want to do anything this month.'

Yaya: "Absolutely! You deserve that. That's what you work for. And you have to re-charge. Because you have to be able to, as an artist, take in what is happening in the world and let that speak through your art. You know? And sometimes that takes stepping aside, you know, and being alone with your feelings, alone with your thoughts, being alone with—

Bones: "Being an artist is not being reactionary. It's really thought out. Like, it's not reactionary at all. And so I feel like that's the thing that I carried from, you know... moving from New York to going overseas and then to LA and then back it's like, yo there's a lot of things we just react to as people. Like constantly. And then that turns over into our art forms like... and yeah it's just a whole spiral from there. But yeah, it's not reactionary. We need that time to sit, recupe, recover and think about like... what is actually happening to my life?"

Sheldon: "Yeah!"

Yaya: "And also I think I can say like, going back to Ohio, from a very small town, we talk about things like representation matters. But that representation of that mental part of your health also matters. It's not about, you know, these children being able to see you do what you love or seeing you living what you call your 'purpose'. It's about being able to have them see you do it joyfully. And to be able to see you do it productively. And to be able to see you managing it. You understand? You know, because when I go home I have a whole gang of cousins who want to be— who want to do what I do. They wanna— and so taking the time to make up dances with them and show them like, I actually have fun! I do this because I love it. Not because, because I'm not getting paid. Nobody's giving me... you know, we're not posting this. They got, you know, three followers on tik tok so nobody's seeing it. So, you know, I'm doing it because I love it. And because I love them. And I think that that's a part that we really have to promote especially, you

know, like all of us being Black artists is that it's not enough to just wanna be able to reach that high and be able to have that freedom that wealth gives you. It's the freedom of the knowledge. And like, the actual self-care. And being able to do what you do, and find the joy in it and be happy in it. You know? Because there's a lot of people who look good doing what we do, but they're not happy."

Bones: "Mhmm."

Sheldon: "Well, we don't show that side right?"

Yaya: "Right."

Sheldon: "We don't show the struggle, per se, or the times where you're screaming at the wall in your house and no one's here."

Yaya: "Right."

Sheldon: "We're all acting!"

Yaya: "Right, and that's the thing though! That's a humanistic thing. Like we as artists get paid to explore the one thing that connects us all as humans. Because we're not gonna all speak the same language, we don't even have the same currency, we don't have the same background, a lot of us don't even have the same taste in music. But what we do share as humans is emotions. So to be an actor or a dancer or a singer or a visual artist or a painter, you're able to express human emotion in what you do and I think that that's like the God given gift that all of us share. You know? It's not so much as about— everybody feels pain, everybody feels depressed. But it's about being able to find that balance and discovering it in a way that you can convey it and share it with other people. You know?"

Bones: "And honestly like, I like a little bit of depression in my coffee. Like, I like a little bit because it's like you have to like... not that I wanna wallow or anything but like, you need— I want my body and my experience here to feel everything that it can in every way possible. And like, an experience, because otherwise then it's not—then I don't feel like I'm speaking my truth. You know like I can say how I feel when I'm happy but then there's a different— you know when somebody closes their eyes and is like, 'I'm trying!' Like that type of happiness I wanna be able to feel but like you don't feel those things unless you go through like all these other little bumps. Not sayin' I'm trying to be down and depressed forever like... but there's moments of like, yo you need to be like... I need to think about this."

Sheldon: "Well that's what drive the creation, right?"

Bones: "Yeah! I gotta think about this like everything can't be peachy, you know? Every five seconds."

Yaya: "Oh, I know a hobby though. Outside of my neighborhood in Brooklyn— because I was in between, I had my apartment the whole time I was living in Ohio. I didn't give any— I still had my apartment. So I would go back and forth. But they would go outside, and I know we've seen on the TV and everything the, you know, smashing the pans together and all that, at 6:00 every day—

Bones: "Right."

Yaya: "And I started doing it, and I would be, I kid you not, I would be tearin'— I would be cryin'— I would be like, in tears, doing it. I had so much joy! Because everybody was doing it. My mom's a nurse, my uncle is a nurse. You know, there's so many people in my life that are on that front line that it was like, finding a new expression of joy. Finding a new expression of sadness, of emotions, of whatever it is. And doing it. So that's why I mean community is an action word. Because you can walk past people but being out there all together, every day at the same time, smashing those damn pans... like, some days that was what I needed to get me through the day! And nobody can know that. You know what I mean? And that wasn't something I was going around and telling people, but it's just knowing, like you said, you've always been good. You're gonna be good! But just participate in life. Don't let your life live you— you've got to live your life. You know?"

Bones: "That's interesting— I totally forgot about that pot bangin' thing."

Sheldon: "I used to do it all the time!"

Yaya: "That was the best part of the pandemic!"

Bones: "You know— I was really— Can I bring up a point about that really fast? I was really excited about that at first, and I really enjoyed it at first, and then it started to piss me off. I'm gonna be honest."

Sheldon: "Oh my god, really?"

Bones: "Yes! It started to piss me off."

Yaya: "Spill the tea."

Bones: "It started to piss me off because, I'm like... we're all doing our jobs."

Yaya: "Right."

Bones: "To the best of our ability. And there's been things that us, as— and we're all Black here— there's been things that us, as Black people, and the Black people that came before us, have been slaving away, doing away, making away, producing away... you know like— and it just felt very... at a certain point it started to feel kinda off. Because at the same time we're going

through this, Black people are still being shot down and killed and we're out here participating in these frontline things. And while I'm very thankful... like, I started screaming "Black Lives"-- at 6:00, I started screaming, "Black Lives Matter".

Yaya: "Right."

Bones: "Because I was also in a very charged mode because I was, you know, at the protests and all those things."

Tislarm: "Because it was happening at the same time."

Bones: "Yes! It was at the same time. Because I'd be at the protest and you're, you know, walking down the protest and you're hearing the pans at 6:00 and you're like no, we're out here screaming for Black lives and you're still trying to shadow me with this white-infiltrated, gatekept job as an essential worker and as a doctor and as a-- that's a very white kept position."

Yaya: "Right."

Bones: "And so it's like, again, I felt like, here I am just giving all the praise to the white man. While I'm thankful! And I agree with you with the community part and the comradery-- that felt amazing. But it's like, can we all come together on that type of energy for everything? So it started to like, it started to like make my brain feel a little weird at a certain point."

Yaya: "And I get that, I get that heavy. Especially being in Ohio which is in a rural area. Because like I said we grew up on a farm, so it's mostly white people. But I think that you-- and I think that we connect on this because we do believe in energy and spirits... if the energy is there, the direction it needs to go, the wind is gonna blow it. It's like if you're running in a marathon. You know? I can be at the New York marathon and I can be protesting for Black-- when you walk past the marathon and you hear people cheering, and you join in on that, it does something to you. It's the same you can be in church and people are standing up and cheering and you like... I mean we over here cheering but the pastor drives a cadillac and motherfuckers out here-- you know, whatever it is. Excuse my French. That being said, it's the-- you have to just show up. Let your energy be present and however it manifests-- that's you!"

Bones: "Which is why I said I just started shouting, 'Black Lives Matter'."

Yaya: "Absolutely! You know, every opportunity I get out there, and you know I'm out there, you know, smashing my pans, you know, every person that walks by I'm like, 'My mom is a nurse! My uncle is a nurse! We need more Black nurses! We need more Black doctors!' So that's my-- you know, that's my opportunity to step up and say how I feel about what's going on. But also show my support. So, however it manifests for you, I think it's important. But I think you also have to understand that that energy that you bring that... there's gonna be somebody out there, if it's just one person who hears you, you know, protesting or screaming "Black Lives Matter" that's gonna wanna share in that with you. And that's cool. But if it wasn't for them smashing

pans you wouldn't be out there screaming. So you have to follow the energy wherever it goes and allow it to manifest and if your intentions are pure, then I think that that's the part behind it, you know, it's the intention behind the action. You know? That's my— that's my— scoop because I, you know, being during being home during the protests and all of that and coming back and forth to new from New York, my brother's the deputy sheriff in my town, and I asked him, I said, 'Well, how do you feel?' and he told me, 'there needs to be more Black cops, Vette.' And I know that sounds, you know, all of us being Black. And I know that it sounds how it sounds. But I played when my mom was slaving every night, you know, as a doctor working the night shift every night. I play for Michael every night, every single day, I play men in black for my brother. And if he knew every single line, every single Will Smith line. That's why he wanted to be a cop because representation matters, but also because he wanted to do the right thing. And also that is what he's doing when I walk through, you know, when I drive to my town and I see his face on poster boards or like you know, big ass signs and stuff. It's like, you know, it's another opportunity for me to show up for us. It's another opportunity for me to stand for us. So however you stand, stand. But stand your ground and do it for you and know that it's because you're a part of a bigger collective. It doesn't matter, you know? Let the energy transpire is how I feel. So I get what you're saying. But you have to also find those opportunities to like— I guess the best way to say it is, you know... always choose the, you know, the miracle— I relinquish all grievances, and I choose the miracle instead. And that's my, that's my, the way I go about life."

Tislarm: "Yes. So, next question— Sheldon, um, was there anything that you gained in 2020 that you took with you back into the world once you open again? I know for me, it was deciding that I wasn't gonna live in fear anymore. Was there anything like that for you? Because as we know, right now, the world has shut down again. Well, to us, it feels that way."

Sheldon: "Right."

Tislarm: "It's not shut down. But it can feel like it. I know some of ya'll are also having PTSD, of being stripped away of gigs during the holiday season in our industry again, and not being able to make money and thinking about the future. And it's like, okay, are we about to go through this? Again? It's a very scary time. So was there anything that you took with you? Um, I guess that was a double loaded question."

Sheldon: "Well it's something I said before, it's like, when I— When the world "opened" back up, I like literally when everyone who invited me to a wedding who took the time to invite me to the wedding, like I went to the wedding. I just did not miss moments like that anymore. Like, I used to be like, "Oh, I got to work!" And I'm like, no, now I'm like, "No, actually, I need this day off for this person's wedding to stay." Because one, weddings aren't cheap, but also people invite you, they think that you should be there to help them celebrate. And yeah, so I tried not to miss any major events, you know, AKA your kind of, little holiday party."

Yaya: "Ooh! I was there in spirit, child!"

Tislarm: "Because you said you were trying to prioritize like... moments."

Sheldon: "Yeah! Moments. Things I like deem as like, special moments."

Tislarm: "Bones, how about you?"

Bones: "Repeat the question?"

Tislarm: "Was there anything that you gained in 2020, whether it's something spiritual, something that you do for your wellness that you've taken into the world when we opened back up?"

Bones: "Um... I think I was the reverse of where Sheldon was, I was showing up for people too, too much. So I needed to show up for myself more. So I'm taking that showing up for myself that I was doing at home into my workspaces and into my relationships and into my career spaces. Like, I'm going to show up for you, but let me show you how to show up for me too in this space. And it's so it's not just like me pouring, pouring, pouring. So yeah, that's what I kinda took."

Tislarm: "Yaya?"

Yaya: "Yeah, honey. The question— what did I learn? I think... emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence. Feelings are facts. So the days when I was feeling low, I was like, alright, cool. Like, this is a moment and, you know, keep going, wrapping it all up, you know, living in the moment, you got to take each moment as it comes, you know what I mean? So whether it's the wedding or it's a family member, or it's an awkward conversation with somebody about what's happening in the time, like— it's a moment thing you give it you give it the energy and the space that it needs, and then you let it go. So that's something for me like that butterfly energy of realizing that if I want to be able to keep that same flutter and be able to, you know, transform the way I need to, I can't carry so much weight on me all the time. And yeah, it just made me lighter. I feel good!" *laughs*

Tislarm: "I felt like for me, I realized that I... I love children. I just love being able to"

Yaya: "I told you."

Tislarm: "I love going back. This summer, I went back to a summer camp I went to when I was 13 years old. One of my best friends named Bradley, we met there when we were 13. So it was just a nostalgic experience. And it was seeing kids from Boston and different places. Every night we had a guest artist. So that night, I was the guest artist, and I was able to talk to them and it was this crazy experience. And I was like, wow, I really get a joy out of speaking life into kids and let them know that they don't have to be a victim of their circumstances. And that's something that, I realized a long time ago, I was saying that I wanted to have an afterschool program. But I think once I'm able to be able to give back wholeheartedly and have the funds and to do everything I want, I think it would be pretty amazing to have an after school program with creative writing, and fashion and photography and dance and all these things to, pour back

into the communities, because I think it really just starts with the kids. Especially now it's kind of sad, like they— This is me rambling, but you know, like, when you're in school. There's people that you see every day that you don't necessarily talk to. You know? But you're like, oh I went to school with that person. They have no clue because these kids got the dang mask on. And to just think about little things like that, and how they just keep being removed and are having trouble building relationships. And I just kind of, yeah, I was thinking about... there's gonna be a gap, somehow with these kids in school right now. It's kind of crazy.”

Bones: “But also, I feel like it's gonna do something also very interesting too. Because like, this alone time is really like— or not alone time. But like, there's less influence happening from like, personal, interpersonal interactions and physical interactions. Yes, like, they may be subjected to like being online more, or you know... But I'm very interested in like, the positive development of what will these kids do with the time that they have now literally being on their own? Because us as kids, we weren't really like, on our own too much. Like, we were always either at school or at our grandma's house, or at our friends or, you know— We were always somewhere but now that these kids are like, at home, and like they do have this technology in their hands. I'm very curious to see how the mind... just like, thinks different. Because like, we didn't have technology accessible, to watch... to watch... Like, a lot of my friends' children online now they'll, you know, be recording them, like playing with the iPads or like playing with the phone or something. We've seen it in person. And they just be like, tapping it, like isn't—but can't say two words! But they know how to digitize their way through, you know, and that really fascinates me. So I'm like, I'm very curious to see where that development kind of goes to.”

Sheldon: “I mean, oh, it can make them really socially awkward.”

Bones: “Which it may! But I do think again, with this whole— and getting into other stuff, but like with this whole, like Metaverse and like... all these things... What's the reason of learning how to work a beeper when we don't use beepers anymore? You know, so it's like, if certain things are already weird... I'm telling you, we're in the very, very beginning stages of this not of this—

Yaya: “A digital world!”

Bones: “We're in the very beginning stages of like... Zoom... all of this. Soon enough—”

Yaya: “Facetime started that, hunny.”

Bones: “Soon enough we're gonna be in the room side by side with the goggles on. But we'll be side by side, and we'll be able to turn our head and be like, “yes”.

Sheldon: “I mean it's really what they allow us to do. It's what the government says— because they have it. But it's what allowed to be done.”

Bones: “It's not— they're not focused. I don't think the children— like when we were kids, we're never focusing too much on... You do think about the things that you can't do. But everything

you can do, or even if you don't think... even if you haven't been told that you can't do it, you still in your mind, you can do it because you haven't been told that you can't. That development is going to get very curious now that like, you know, it's just like, it's gonna be interesting. Like, we're in the very beginnings of them not having social contact. So now that they have this, like, you know, this contact *gestures at Zoom screen* and like, where is it? I don't know, it's just very interesting.”

Sheldon: “Well this is very– well you’re speaking about children. But you know, I feel like there's a small percentage of children that don't has this much technology. They have it or they don't have this technology. And I'm worried about the parents who really aren't that capable to teach them certain things. It's just...”

Yaya: “I can say my hope for the future–”

Sheldon: “Well we're just the blind leading the blind, we can sit here all day!”

Yaya: “Yeah well where I grew up, I didn't have internet. There was no internet towers near my house because we live so far out. I did have a cell phone. But before pictures and all of that. I wasn't allowed– like my parents was so strict. I couldn't watch– I had to, like, sneak the code to watch BT and MTV and stuff. You know. But I will say, living, growing up in the country, what it did force me to do is I picked up a video camera at the age of 11 and started making my own movies. I started recording my own, you know, my own songs when I was 11. Because I didn't have that interaction. I lived in the middle of nowhere. My parents weren't paying to drive me into town. So I spent a lot of time alone. But when I wasn't alone, I was building a community with the people who were closest to me. Which was like my cousins or like the, you know, the couple of very, maybe slightly off country kids that lived up the street that, you know, parents never even heard of Michael Jackson. But they became my chosen family because it was all I had. So my hope for the children of the future is that because they do have this new accessibility, that they will be able to be– not only get closer with their families or be able to develop– because all my family's played roles in my films, I didn't have nobody else around, my mom was in it, my dad was– whoever was in the house was in my movie that day. You know? So I hope it'll help them build those relationships, but it will also help them to, you know, because of the diversity that we have, that we didn't also have when we were growing up, that maybe would have helped him to start to cultivate these chosen families that will help them get to the next phase of their life. Being able to choose who you have, you know, your conversations with, you're not just sitting in a class with a bunch of people who think you're awkward. Who don't– who know that your parents can afford new Jordans, or whatever it is. So I really do hope that this will give them that accessibility is– you do get to choose. You're the architect of your life, you know? You can choose who you talk to, you can choose what you look up on Google, or what you choose to spend your time scrolling through on Instagram, I– You know, I tell my little cousins this all the time, I'm like, Y'all should be knowing how to play an instrument by now, the amount of time you spend on your phone. You can look up anything on YouTube, you can learn anything, but it's always gonna start with you. It's your choice. So no

matter how technology changes, how you choose to tap in is up to you. Okay, I was making videos before all of that!”

Bones: “Yes! I agree with you 100%. But again, the tools– the tools change with the times.”

Yaya: “Absolutely.”

Bones: “You know, like, it's not about– we're not going to– I was actually supposed to go to a symphony today.”

Yaya: “Yeah.”

Bones: “And it's shut down because of COVID. Yeah, so, and soon enough, you're not even going to need to know how to watch, you're not going to need to know how to play a physical instrument. It's all going to be some type of synthesized something. And I'm saying like, even my brother, for example, he just went down to school in Florida. And he moved in with this like group of kids, they had another room open. He was talking to this guy online, who he met in Virginia, while playing video games. Come to find out, he moves down to Florida, and the guy lives down the street from him. So now they're like, linking up and have moved in with each other. And it's so interesting, because if it weren't for that online interaction and communication– I've had some of those same experiences. You know, like–”

Yaya: “You gotta be careful with the online!”

Bones: “Yeah you know, meeting people–Yeah, you do have to be careful! You know, they can't... you know, there can be some weird things. But what I will say is, like, I think that, you know, that's something... that mentality of like... the mentality of like... oh, pick up this thing and learn something. That like... it is something that was passed to us in a way. You got free time so get on– get on the thing and learn how to do that thing. No, if my mind is interested here, let me develop and let me give me tools to develop. Like when my brother was just on the video games all day, my mom and dad were just like, “Okay, if this is what you're gonna do, if you're gonna be here, study it.”

Yaya: “Turn it into something!”

Bones: “And now he's like, learning how to build, you know, fashion for meta-fashion. Like... who would have ever thought! My brother is literally studying meta-fashion down in Florida right now! Like, who would have thought that that would have been a thing. And here I am trying to get actual physical clothes. And within three years, it may not even be no more about this.”

everyone laughs

Yaya: “Going back, nothing is impossible! That's what the conversation is about.”

Tislarm: "Yeah really quickly. So two more questions and make it quick. Um, how are we feeling now that the world is shut down again?"

Bones: "I don't know how to feel."

Sheldon: "I'm kind of like, don't be a sucker. We got to push to figure this out. That's where I am. Because it's not something that's going to leave us. People are going to have COVID for years to come, because it's going to be the flu. And the next thing... So I do, yeah... I'm kind of proud of the city that we live in that they're like, 'No, we're not going to shut down.' They're like, 'If you have an outbreak there— You should shut that down. Because we got to push through.'"

Bones: "I feel like we did this before, though. We didn't shut down before. And it landed us in this cycle that we're kind of in and so I'm like, what I'm looking at—"

Sheldon: "We didn't shut down where— the thing is that we didn't have any transparency of where things were or was, right? Where the outbreaks are bla bla bla... I think now that we have the transparency I think we do because the city cannot afford to lose billions of dollars again. Because people don't want to simply try to get to a resolution of how we can keep this thing leveled, right? It's gonna be something that we're gonna have. So... At the end of the day, if we can't force people to get vaccinated then I'm not gonna force the city to shut down. Like, we got money to make. So your choice is your choice. But I do think that... other people who are trying to make the correct decision to try to keep science at a base level... why should they suffer? Because it's morphing because people don't necessarily want to get vaccinated. And that's your choice. But it... everyone shouldn't have to suffer."

Bones: "Well, I think it's like Australia... Australia, when the first time it happened, they shut down for two weeks. And then after those, like they had high numbers, they shut down literally everything for two weeks. They had a six o'clock curfew, like nothing was really open except basically the grocery store and the drugstore. And you could only go there with, you know, if you needed specifics, and there were time slots and all this stuff. And then after two weeks, their numbers... We saw... We were like, 'How's Australia having festivals?' Like music festivals, but it's because their numbers went down to none, because they just simply said, 'Okay, let's take these two weeks, and they paid the people. Like, don't miss that part!'"

Sheldon: "But we already shut down. Like, that's silly, New York City has already shut down and let's have all these white men who are senators and shit like that shut down the other states, it's not gonna work, that ain't gonna happen. This is America."

Bones: "What do you mean shut down?"

Sheldon: "We shut down New York City for two years! But the other states aren't shutting down. The thing with Australian systems like that is that the entire country shut down together."

Bones: "Right."

Sheldon: "That's not going to happen in a country of greedy white men."

Yaya: "Yeah, yeah Ohio— we weren't doing masks, we weren't doing none of that. I think, I think that how I feel is that it's— well, in the week of Christmas. I don't care what you believe or what—or what your religious, you know, you know, background is. But I think take this time to really listen to your body— to listen to, you know, because these tests, tests... you know, all these tests, whatever you want to, do it. It is what it is. It is science, but you know your body. Listen to your mind. You know what you need to do, where you need to be at, you know who's important enough for you to show up. And I'm not even trying to put tabs on anyone but you know. You know in your mind. You know, listen to your intuition. Listen to your heart. And understand that this time, like money, can't find a cure. Presents don't give you your job back. There's no amount of gifts that you can wrap that is going to be able to take this thing away. So really think about the reason for the season, which is love. Love yourself enough to do what you have to do to protect yourself and to protect the people you love. And also have enough love to understand that, you know, if tomorrow's not guaranteed that it's not about all this extra. All that extra needs to go. What it's about, it's just being cautious and being aware of other people and how you feel. And I think if we can get you the first thing you do when you find out about—let me text everybody, 'You gave me COVID!' I might have COVID because you had COVID and your auntie had COVID— and it's like hold on a second, you know what I mean? Let's take a moment. Let's dial back and bring it back to you. Because you're right. Because we— the controls that we have as a community, as you know, as individuals as whatever you want to call it. We're not up here. *gestures upward* But we are in a position where if we're going to take care of ourselves, it starts with the individual. Be the change you want to see."

Sheldon: "And here's the thing, you can feel— your body feels whatever. But if you're making the choice to just like— not putting things in your body and all these things... Then you can make the choice to get tested every two days. Right? Take care of everybody. But we're not even doing that. It's like, at least do that."

Yaya: "Absolutely! Absolutely."

Sheldon: "I'm not gonna sit here and be stuck in my apartment. Because sis just wanna do what she wants to do, what he wants to do. It's just... it's a fight. So with me, I think personally, we just got to figure out how to live with it.:"

Yaya: "Yeah."

Sheldon: "Like if there's an outbreak in that place? I'm sorry, there's an outbreak here, we have to shut that shit down. You know, at the end of the day."

Tislarm: "So the last question... is the future impossible?"

Yaya: "What! Nothing is impossible, baby."

Sheldon: "Nothing!"

Yaya: "Nothing's impossible."

Sheldon: "Trump was president."

everyone laughs

Tislarm: "You create your own future."

Yaya: "Mm hmm. I believe that children are our future. Teach them well, and let them do it. Okay. Let them go. And how you teach is by action. Just be the best person you can be. Be your higher self. Somebody is watching you."

Sheldon: "And you're not going to get through life without some doubt. So that's impossible."

Yaya: "Yes."

Sheldon: "It's the self-doubt that kills your dreams."

Yaya: "Absolutely."

Sheldon: "Now I'm sitting here like Damn, what else can I do?"

Tislarm: "Push on through."

Sheldon: "Right, exactly."

Yaya: "And you know what, do this! Have conversation, be able to be open with how you feel and still be able to leave space for other people to be open for how they feel. You know what I mean? Like that's what I mean about this. Jesus was born in a manger, honey and ain't always gonna be clean and peachy. It's gonna be a little mess you got to get through, but the miracle... relinquish all of that. Find the miracle. Okay?"

Bones: "Yes."

Yaya: "Always find the miracle."

Tislarm: "I love you guys. Thank you so much for being here."

Yaya: "Yeah! Stay strong. Stay strong and I love— Thank you guys for what you do and for all you guys contribute to, like, not just the community for the kids, but for everybody like we need this. This is important. All of this."