Read an intimate conversation between Daleep Singh and Hobby School associate professor Chris Bronk. Bronk sat down with Singh before he delivered the public lecture on Jan. 18, 2024. The interview is edited for brevity and clarity.

Regarding your background, I wanted to ask you—we have a lot of students here getting public policy and public administration degrees—could you tell me a little bit about what you got out of your experience doing a joint degree at Harvard and MIT and how it prepared you for your career?

Well, I have to start further back. I grew up as an Indian American, as part of an immigrant family in North Carolina, mostly in the 80s and 90s, and of course, my dad wanted me to be a doctor. And so naturally, I resisted. And I was always interested in the stories my mom would tell about her father because he was a public servant in India before, during, and after the partition. And she told me stories about him going to jail when he would protest in order to try to secure more rights and freedoms for Indians and then also for Sikhs within Punjab in the aftermath of partition. And I always thought to myself, I'd like to one day make a contribution at a time that felt consequential. So, I was drawn to public policy as an undergrad; that's what I majored in, in addition to economics. And when coming out of undergrad, I had a lot of debt. I had hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt, and I worked my way through college but still had to get out of this pile of repayment obligations. So I became a management consultant, mostly because someone told me it might be a way to start making some money and to see the world a bit, both of which were appealing to me. So I did and I pretty soon realized I hated it. I just didn't care all that much about whether Procter & Gamble developed better toothpaste in order to gain market share. No disrespect to Procter and Gamble or to management consulting, but it wasn't for me. And I was much more interested in what's on the front of the paper. How is the world changing, why, where, and to what extent?

So I thought, let me go back to grad school. And maybe I can learn enough about macroeconomics, policy and entrepreneurship. And I could start companies in poor countries and essentially try to do good by doing well. That's why I did both programs. I did an MBA and an MPA, so both public policy and business, business at MIT, an MPA at Harvard. But this was the tail end of the dot-com bubble. It was bursting. And no one was going to fund a recent graduate with no experience starting companies, much less working in a developing country. So, there was no funding available. And I had to get a real job. And now I had $300,000 more in debt.

So, I took the only job that was offered to me. There was only one offer. And it was at Goldman Sachs. And they had a tendency, I think, to take a chance on wild cards. I'd never taken a finance course. And I didn't like people in finance, I thought. I thought many of the people I knew who were going into finance were jerks. And I didn't want to do that. But that was my motivation. And that's kind of what happened afterward.

So, basically, you end up going to Goldman and somehow making a leap to public service. Can you tell me a little bit about how that happened?

So, I hated it at first. And this is in New York at the headquarters and one the trading floor. And again, I knew almost nothing about finance. And I kept making mistakes over and over and over again. And I felt like I was being asked to speak a foreign language without any textbook or class in how to speak that language. I remember spending every day writing down concepts or terms I didn't understand and for which I was too scared to get an answer. Because when I tried to get an answer often, there would be profanity-laced responses. And so, eventually, I stopped asking. But I did learn over time. And I began to figure out there's actually a cool niche in finance in the world of global macro. Which is to say, I was interested in how the world is changing, where and why. And that's basically the substance of what global macro investing involves. You're betting on whether countries are going to rise and fall and why. And you can express your beliefs about those trends through currencies, interest rates, equities and different instruments. And it's kind of like an art form. Your job is to understand what the market is expressing. And if you disagree, disagree artfully, differently. So I began to enjoy it a little bit. And I stayed for about eight years, about half the time in New York, half the time in London, initially focusing on US interest rates and then eventually on emerging markets. So this takes me to about 2011. By this point, we're living in London; I've got three kids, five, three, and one. And my wife and I were tired of living in what seemed to be a Tupperware bowl. It was gray and cloudy and raining almost every day. We wanted to be closer. We wanted our young kids to be close enough to their grandparents so that they would know them. And as it turns out, my parents were still in North Carolina. My wife's parents were nearby as well. I wanted to move somewhere in the Mid-Atlantic, outside of a financial center. Well, one day, a colleague of mine at Goldman said, "Hey, I'm going to the US Treasury." And I was fascinated. I asked him, "What does that involve?" He gave me an answer. I didn't understand it. But I said, "Hey, look, if at any point you believe there could be a role for someone like me, someone on the front line of markets trying to figure out how the world's changing and expressing my answer through financial instruments, if there's a role for someone like me, give me a shout because we're sort of ready to make a change. And I've always wanted to do public service at a moment that felt consequential." And this was after the financial crisis. I learned a few things about how markets work well and how they don't. And I wanted to make a contribution. It felt like that kind of moment.

About a year later, he and a few others from Treasury rang me up and said, "Hey, Secretary Geithner has just come down from the New York Fed. He had an army of people who were analyzing markets for him there. Now, he doesn't have anything like that at Treasury. But he's being hauled into the White House to explain what's going on in financial markets and why they are so dysfunctional. Why can't we fix markets and the economy? And he would like to have some on the ground intel. So, can you help build a room or a department that does that?" And I said, "Absolutely, I can do that." And so the offer was to be a mid-level civil servant working in the dungeon of the Treasury where condensate was dripping from the ceiling, and diesel fumes were pouring in from the Secret Service trucks that were idling outside. And I did it. And it was very scary. Everybody on the way out called me a moron and said," 'Why would you take a 90% pay cut?' And I said, "Well, that actually makes me feel better about my decision because I'm making a contrarian bet on myself." And I loved it. And so that's how I got into public service.

That's a fantastic story. The pay cut, I mean, I got the same thing when I left technology to go to the State Department. I mean, even the people who hired me were like, "Are you a moron? Are you stupid?"

That's the call of public service. Sure. And it's scary. But you know, you have to understand yourself, I think, and if you're wired differently. You know what you're optimizing for, and I wanted to optimize my contribution to society and have a better work-life balance. I thought I was going to get a work-life balance. That turns out to have been wrong, but you know I knew my why, and that was enough for me to go. The why is so important. Yeah, and you don't have to explain it to anybody else. You have to understand it for yourself. And I actually think it doesn't even have to make sense to yourself in the moment. It only has to make sense at the end. I don't know if you feel this way, Chris. I've had many moments in my career, my nonlinear and somewhat incoherent career, in which, at the moment, I thought I was making a mistake, and then I began to stop judging moments. I began to take a more confusing approach, which is to say, allow years to pass before deciding whether that decision was good or bad because you don't know the path dependent on decision-making. You don't know what or how a mistake or a setback was necessary for the subsequent opportunity to arise. You don't know that at the moment. You only know it years, maybe decades later. So when somebody asks me, "Do you enjoy what you're doing now?" I almost never answer. I will say ask me, ask me decades from now. That's not an easy thing to tell 22-year-olds. No, I mean it's because they're getting advice from parents, often very firm guidance. Maybe it's not even a choice they're offering. They're telling you. And you know there's a lot of group think. I followed the herd. That's why I went into management consulting, and it was, in retrospect, kind of cowardly if I'm critiquing myself. So, you know, it takes some emotional maturity to start deviating from the pack. But I don't regret it.

You became an acting assistant secretary. Acting is the greatest term for government dysfunction as far as I'm concerned having been acting office director and things like that. Certainly not at the assistant secretary level though. But can you tell me a little bit about the leap from being in a department to how you made it over to the White House, how it worked, what it was like?

This is the difference between just working for the government and being close to the executive team of the United States of America. I mean, the only honest answer is I don't know. I mean, it's almost like serendipity or some kind of forced gum story or dumb luck, in my case. I spent six years at the Treasury, and I had a number of different roles. I started out in the dungeon, but after a while, I started watching how policy got made, and at some point, Lael Brainard, who at the time was the Undersecretary of International Finance, said, you know, you really do understand markets. You're able to translate the message of markets to senior policymakers here, and you help us understand how different policy choices have different implications for markets and, therefore, the economy. But don't you want do the cool stuff? I asked what she meant, and she responded that the cool stuff is making policy. In other words, taking risk, just like you did in the investment world, making policy is the equivalent here in DC. And, you know, so I agree. I didn't really respond, but I completely agreed mentally. You know, I waited for my opportunity to move into policy making. She made the initial offer for me to do so because there was a chance to run the Europe and Eurasia team as a Deputy Assistant Secretary. I jumped at the opportunity. It became a series of crisis management exercises because the sovereign debt crisis in Europe was raging, and then Ukraine and Crimea were invaded, and then we had to figure out how to sanction a large, connected, complex economy like Russia for the first time, and then Greece was about to exit the Euro.

And all of those tests allowed me to demonstrate what I could do. And I began to interact with people from the White House who cared about the outcome of those issues. So I met, for example, Jake Sullivan. He was, at the time, Vice President Biden's National Security Advisor. And I was in meetings with him only because when Lail Brainerd left, we didn't yet have an Under Secretary. So I was sitting in that vacancy acting on behalf of the Treasury. Now, I then moved into the domestic side. That's when I became an Acting Assistant Secretary for Financial Markets, and it was kind of dealing with the debt crisis closer to home in Puerto Rico and figuring out how we can manage the federal debt. And I was enjoying that too. But then the election of 2016 happened, and it was time to go. And I thought, okay, now it's time to repair my balance sheet and take care of my family a bit. So I went back to the investment world. But then the New York Fed came calling because there was an opening to run the markets group, the group that Tim Geithner had wanted to resurrect a treasury. It is an army of 600 people that implements monetary policy. So, I interviewed for it and was lucky enough to be chosen. And I started two weeks before COVID hit in 2020. So, that was the ultimate crisis-fighting exercise, setting up the emergency facilities to backstop the economy, to prevent another Great Depression, and really trying to be as innovative and creative as we could be to keep households and businesses solvent and to keep the economy from collapsing. After about a year, the election of 2020 occurred, and Biden was now president-elect, and Jake Sullivan was named his national security advisor. I got a call from Jake in December of 2020 saying, you know what, President Biden and I, and Jake and I had stayed in touch throughout the Trump years, thinking about what economic policy could look like if we got another chance. And he said, "Look, the president wants to break down the silos between economic policy and national security. And your career has, in a way, almost accidentally lived at that intersection. So will you come and be my deputy and focus on the set of policy issues at that intersection?" Of course, I said yes. That's how I ended up at the White House. And so there's no formula, no prescription I can offer other than use a basketball analogy – this is the University of Houston – hang around the rim. Eventually, the ball will bounce your way if you're persistent enough and ready. That's what I did. I just continued to stay in the policy arena as long as I could whenever I had the chance. And I tried to build different muscles so that if someone gave me an opportunity, I was ready to get the ball.

It's a good analogy. We could do all the rest of this entirely in basketball metaphors, and it would probably work out fine. This is the pivot I want to make. National security is what people think of as bombs and rockets, tanks and guns. And economic security is some sort of nebulous issue to them. How do you make economic security part of the national security agenda in this country? And yes, I read your Economist article from a year ago. And I thought your points were right on the money: you need a strategy. But how do you make a strategy for something? I mean, military people make strategies for, like, the Korean peninsula, you can kind of think of all the variables that'll go wrong, you know when I lived in South Korea, you know, we knew what would happen if things went wrong how do you make those kind of play sheets and how do you build economic security policy for the United States?

I think the first step is to recognize, accept, and embrace the idea that economic tools can serve geopolitical objectives. That's actually been true from the beginning of this country. Oh, yeah, but you have to almost say so explicitly if you're leading a country like the United States at the very top of our government. You have to decide as President Biden did. I want to use our economic tools affirmatively to advance our geopolitical objectives now. Not every president will be willing to do so. Some would say economic interests are sacrosanct, and they should never be subordinated to our national security objectives, and arguably, that was the case to some extent in the 90s and 2000s. You first have to make that commitment, and then second, I would say If you want a strategy, you have to know where you have an asymmetric advantage. So where do we produce or supply something other countries need and can't easily replace? Either by making it themselves or by supplying it from another country. For example, the primacy of the dollar is an asymmetric advantage of the United States. So is the dynamism of our capital markets, our unrivaled consumer purchasing power, and our dominant position in providing global services. Or our net exporter status and food and energy. Or, you know, our alliances. We have 50 treaty alliances. China, by contrast, has one – North Korea.

From asymmetric advantages, you can think of economic tools that you can deploy or threaten to deploy to change the behavior of a target. So that's where tools like sanctions, export controls, tariffs, price caps, or investment restrictions come in. There are ways to use our leverage in areas in which we have an asymmetric advantage to change the behavior of a target country. That is kind of what has animated the effort to design sanctions against Russia and export controls to all of the tools I mentioned and deployed against Russia. But also our adversaries elsewhere in the world – North Korea, Iran, to some extent China. But what hasn't been done is to embed the use of those tools into a doctrine. So, what are the principles that guide us when we use these tools, why we use them, how we use them, and with whom and against which targets? And do we have the analytical infrastructure to make those decisions wisely with numbers, like actual numbers in the spreadsheet, rather than just words we use at the White House podium? And do we have a strategy for economic diplomacy so we're not alone in deploying these tools? I mean, I strongly believe that the size of the coalition is the most important force multiplier when you use economic tools because we're in a highly interconnected global economy.

And then lastly, what's really important is how you practice so-called economic statecraft. I mean, unfortunately, the world has come to believe that we prefer using tools that coerce behavior by other countries. If you don't change behavior, we will cause you pain. And there's endless ink spilled about sanctions in that regard. And lo and behold, people don't like sanctions. Two-thirds of the world's population has not joined the sanctions coalition we built to counter Russia. So, the opportunity is for us to use all of the positive tools that also exist that offer the prospect of mutual economic gain and not just those that feed our perception that we're focused on causing economic pain. So, for example, we can make infrastructure investments in developing countries that badly need roads and bridges and investments in the green energy transition, solar, wind, hydro, et cetera. We can form trade agreements with countries that could benefit from having the U.S. as a bigger destination for their exports. We could offer debt relief to countries with too much debt, and 60% of the world's low-income countries are currently in debt distress. We can offer technology alliances for countries that want to leapfrog to 5G, for example or want to understand the promise of AI. Those are all positive inducements that have the capacity to induce and attract countries into our geopolitical orbit. And countries are watching. What is the balance that we're striking in the use of coercive tools versus positive inducements? And for too long, we've not been deliberate about how we strike that balance, and that's a big problem.

It's almost as if it's related to the end-of-history argument that now these countries have developed past a certain point. They're not in the dark ages but still have a long way to go. But somehow the United States has been mired in kind of the USAID world of support that invested in helping the poorest nations in the world. We're responding to crises all the time, which is not necessarily strategic. Although an admiral, I think it was McRaven, said that the U.S. response to the tsunami in Indonesia [in 2004]. He called it the greatest naval victory of the 21st century because the United States could do so much to respond and to help truly. And I do believe that's what Americans want to do. We don't want to go around invading countries all the time. We want to help them. We'd like to have good relationships with them.

I think that's such an important point you're making because I ticked off a bunch of asymmetric advantages we have in the U.S. The strongest is our ability to attract ideas, talent, and goodwill, and it comes from the kind of actions you described in the aftermath of the tsunami. You know, the power of our story is the most powerful asset that we have, and if you don't invest in it, it will depreciate, just like any other asset. I couldn't agree more.

So, I want to move to the world today, and what you're seeing now. We are no longer in the unipolar American world that we grew up in, and your talk here is on the deja vu of going back to the past. And what strikes me is still, despite the imperfections our country has, it appears that we have friends. When we talk about China wanting to do something, it doesn't appear to have the friendships, the goodwill that allows it to reach [for things] the way we can. How do we make sure that not just our traditional friends, the Europeans, the wealthy East Asians, and the OECD countries, how do we become better friends to the rest of the world economically?

I think it starts with being there for countries, not just when we need them, but by making genuine good-faith efforts to lift up their standard of living during normal moments, normal environments, and outside of crisis. And that really comes back to the point I was making before about all of the positive tools that we are leaving on the shelf.

So let me give you an example. This is not an example of it working well, but it's the biggest geostrategic opportunity that exists. And it would be the best way for us to help the most people. I mentioned that 60% of the world's low-income countries are in debt distress. That's double the percentage in 2015. They're in debt distress through no fault of their own. Most of these countries are in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. And they have been beset by external shocks, the pandemic, obviously, but also the invasion of Ukraine, which disrupted food supply chains and energy supply chains, which represent a disproportionate share of what people in these countries consume. Sub-Saharan Africa produces the least greenhouse gas emissions but has the highest vulnerability to the climate transition. The increase in borrowing costs globally is because of the increase in interest rates by the Federal Reserve. That's also not their fault. So, they have a lot of debt through no real fault of their own. And actually, the biggest lender to these countries is China through the Belt Road Initiative. I mean, that's how China, as you mentioned, doesn't have a lot of friends, but it's created a lot of soft power by becoming the most dominant bilateral lender to the developing world. What China lends to poor countries is double the group of Western countries that belong to this alliance called the Paris Club combined. And it [China] lends more than the World Bank does. It lends more than most multilateral development banks do. But China is unwilling to restructure that debt in this moment. That's the opportunity, the geostrategic opportunity.

For so long now, for decades, China has been the only game in town if a country wants to borrow to develop. We have an opportunity to offer a positive alternative, which would involve the following. We go to countries that are in distress: Ghana, Zambia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan. You can name at least half a dozen. And you say China is unwilling to restructure your debt to give you some breathing space. You should walk away from that debt above a certain level of tax revenue. In other words, if you're paying more than a third of your government budget in debt service, we encourage you to tell China we're not going to repay you until you express a willingness to restructure that debt. That would be step one.

Step two would be to convince the IMF [International Monetary Fund] that you should do for these countries what you did for Ukraine. In 2015, for the first time and the only time in its history, the IMF led to a country that owed money to another government. In that case, it was Russia. Ukraine owed money to Russia. But the IMF was still willing to lend to Ukraine because Ukraine had made good-faith efforts to renegotiate, and Russia refused. The IMF should do for Africa what it did for Ukraine.

And then the third step would be the US and the G7 say to these countries that are in distress, if you walk away from Chinese debt, we're going to backfill that financing at scale and pace. Because, of course, these countries are going to be very nervous to walk away from the only lender that's really stepped up for them in recent decades. And this is where we have to reimagine and invent new tools that increase our financial firepower. Even at a moment in which our budget deficits are really quite high, [and] are causing all sorts of political dysfunction in Washington. And there are ways to do that. I won't go into all of it here, but that's an example, I think it's the most important example right now of how we can think about using our economic tools and our economic leverage in a completely different way that would convince some of the two-thirds of the world's population that actually is a geopolitical alliance that's worth pursuing.

I couldn't agree more with the stress of debt-serving in Latin America and watching. It was just a guarantee that in your country if you spend enough time serving in a Latin American country, there is going to be an inflation or debt catastrophe that will blow up the society. And you're a bystander to this crush of financial mess. Yeah, and it leads to distress, which feeds political polarization, and polarization feeds even more intensification of geopolitical conflict. So we have to break that cycle.

Yes, and that costs a lot more to deal with than what I'm proposing here. Much more.

It almost seems like we want to be the banker to the world that we were during the Second World War and the First World War without the war.

That's right. I mean, people talk about the US being the arsenal of democracy. Yes, we have to repair our military industrial base, but we need an economic analog, too. We could be an economic arsenal of democracy. And the bang for the buck, I would argue, is multiples more than a dollar we could spend on anything else. Yeah, when bullets fly, things get very expensive and very complicated. Teaching security studies, as I do, people say, well, you must believe in this stuff. And I say, no, I teach this so we can avoid it. Yeah, I mean, often when you confront a crisis, you're dealt with a range of lousy options. And the goal is to find one that's less worse than the other. And I think using economic tools is almost invariably less worse than going to war.

The United States has a complicated relationship with China. I got to hear Henry Kissinger a couple of years ago restating the point that China, the U.S.-China relationship, is the most critical relationship the world knows today and we have to figure out a way to bury the hatchet. I'm old enough to remember the Cold War and our leaders saying, well, if the Soviets don't like it, tough. Are we at that point with China where we can talk about adequate policies where, if China doesn't like it, tough? Or are we in a more dangerous world because we don't have all these benchmarks that we developed over the Communist era, from the end of the Second World War to the end of the Soviet Union? How do we, in your very well-experienced and educated opinion, say, draw a hard line to China? And you look around, and you say, how can we do life without China in this country? And it very rapidly becomes impossible. So, how do we strike that balance with Beijing? What are your ideas there?

It's easy to say that a policy if you don't like it, tough, is misguided. That should almost go without saying. China is just a far more formidable competitor than the Soviet Union ever was. It's nearly a peer to the U.S. on military, technological, and economic dimensions. So, we have to find a way to manage the competition with China. And the unfortunate reality, I mean, this is not the world as it should be, but the world as it is involves an incompatible model with ours. I mean, this is really more about President Xi than any other leader in China since Deng Xiaoping. President Xi believes the U.S. and the West, more generally, are in structural decline due to our own fiscal profligacy, social cleavages, and creeping pessimism. And that now is the time to do away with Deng's mantra of "Hide strength, bide your time." And it's a moment in which China can flex its muscles, at least in the Indo-Pacific and maybe beyond. The Belt Road Initiative is an example of the ambition going well beyond its backyard. And that it's going to pursue that ambition primarily through economic and technological primacy. And it's trying to achieve primacy by competing under a different set of rules that we've become accustomed to.

The economic model of China is just very different than ours. It relies upon very heavy state subsidies, propping up of state-owned enterprises and national champions, discriminating against foreign competitors, and occasionally technology theft. And so, if we just do nothing, if we did nothing, it would be an unfair fight between American businesses and the Chinese government. We would lose that type of competition. Indeed, we saw those communities that were most sensitive to trade with China really lose a lot of jobs and a lot of wage growth. And that fed a lot of polarization in our country. So, it was unsustainable for our political economy not to confront an unfair and unequal set of rules between the U.S. and China, the world's first and second-largest economies.

So, what do we do about it? It's mostly what we are doing, quite honestly. It's mostly investing in our own sources of competitive strength. I think the investments that have been made in R&D and technology and infrastructure are the right ones. That ultimately is going to be what allows the U.S. to compete effectively. There also have to be some defensive measures. For example, to the extent that unfettered flows of technology starting from the U.S. and going to China are advancing China's military development in ways that can undermine U.S. national interests, there have to be some controls. And that's what we're doing in terms of potentially limiting the most advanced semiconductors and other forms of AI, quantum technology, and biotech. You have to pay attention to where unfettered flows could undermine national security in a very competitive environment. The same is true to some extent of trade flows, and maybe even capital flows for direct investment, maybe portfolio flows.

But then the third leg of this is [that] you should not go it alone. There are many other countries, not just in the G7, but also beyond, that are also suffering from an unfair terms of trade with China. And we should agree with them about what does a new rule book look like. And can we collectively encourage China to play by the same set of rules? And that's the best chance we have. Unfortunately, the direction of travel will probably remain down, but we can manage the slope of that decline and the pace. We owe that to the people in our country, China, and people all over the world. Yeah, it's very clear that as a nation of immigrants, we've brought wonderful, incredible people here. We have to have a perspective [that] we are the children and grandchildren of people who were in the only industrialized economy in the world that wasn't crushed by the Second World War. So, of course, we rose to stratospheric heights, and of course, there can be a rebalancing. And looking at the positivity of things, we see that, you know, less people are living in poverty around the world than ever before. Governments are more responsive in many ways. You look at the infrastructure plays that India has made over the last decade. Why is the Indian government popular? Well, life is improving for many people in India now. It's not ideal. It's not what we would consider perfect, and there are deep cleavages in that society as well.

I have one final thing that I wanted to ask: if you could wave a magic wand and build something new in government to deal with this, what would it be? Would it be a new agency? But do you think that the United States government needs to overhaul itself to deal with this [new economic] reality, or can we depend on the structure that, you know, the State Department is the oldest agency in the federal government, the Treasury is also incredibly old. Can they adapt and change, and can leaders go into these places and shake them around to deal with this new reality?

People often talk about how markets fail, but governments fail, too. Governments can fail to adapt and evolve and to innovate. I think the premise of your question is spot-on. It is a moment for innovation. Perhaps it's organizational change. I actually don't think that's the binding constraint. I do think we need an infusion, a multidisciplinary infusion of talent. I think we need a SWAT team of people with skills in economics, financial markets, trade finance, financial forensics, diplomacy, the law, supply chains and science and technology. We need another moment that, in fact, we had in the 1960s, in which we bring in the best and brightest who want to solve some of these problems we've been talking about. Because you know, although you're not going to get paid very much, you're going to work more hours, and you may not see your family, there's never been an opportunity to do more good. Can I say one more thing? There's something that should be said. The government's not going to be able to do it by itself. Neither will the private sector, and neither will academia.

Now, the one last thing I have to do to prove that you're a human being is ask you a regular question, and I thought a lot about these. It's a two-parter, and it's cats or dogs. Why?

Dogs. I like creatures that express themselves with affection. Nothing against cats. I've got a crazy dog, and she is an emotional drain, not a support, but she's deeply affectionate. It's helped my kids through their teenage years, and it's helped me in my most stressful moments just to be able to have a nice furry, warm creature, not ask any questions, not say anything at all, but acknowledge that you're the most important thing in their life.