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## Interview with Judith Evind

Judith Evind

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**Interviewee:** Judith Evind

**Interviewers:** Gina Dashiell, Estrella McDaniel

**Date:** November 17, 2020

**Location:** Zoom

**Collection:** Auntie Sewing Squad Oral History Archive, SBS 112: Women and Social Change, from 1890s to the Present, Fall 2020

**Length:** 00:34:52

**Overseen by:** Dr. Chrissy Yee Lau

**Auntie Bio:** Judith Evind was born in 1958 and raised in San Francisco CA. Her grandparents migrated from Ireland and Norway. Growing up, she was involved in different organizations from girl scouts to Anti-War marches. She was a dressmaker for 17 years after obtaining her college degree and now works in immunology.

**Summary:** In this interview, Gina Dashiell and Estrella McDaniel interviewed Judith Evind, a member of the Auntie Sewing Squad (ASS), and a San Franciscan. The first section of this interview consists of early life in San Francisco and organizations that she was a part of (02:25). The next section covers her career choices, from dressmaking right out of college, to working for UCSF in more than one capacity, ending up in immunology (17:50). The third section looks at what sparked her to join ASS (24:15). The fourth section digs into the changes in her views and feelings over time (26:38). In the final section, we discuss her grandmother's death during the 1918 pandemic and how that might have influenced her decision to join the ASS (31:00).

## Interview Transcript

(02:25) EM: So our first question is What was your childhood like growing up in San Francisco and what was it like seeing the changes over time?

JE: This is a sort of complicated answer. So I was born in 1958 and I lived in the Sunset District in San Francisco. I was the 9th of 10 kids. Kids in my neighborhood and kids that I went to Catholic school with were also from big families and were also the younger kids and their families. It was the end of the Baby Boom, and living in a working class neighborhood there were lots of kids to play with. You're just outside all the time. I think it was 1969, we moved to the suburbs. I didn't know it at the time but that was sort of the era of "urban renewal" and white flight, so cities like San Francisco with it's Fillmore District - which you know was traditionally a black neighborhood (although at the time it was a very mixed neighborhood) was completely torn apart to build more housing. There had been an act of Congress after the Second World War for this urban renewal and by the 50s and 60s they started tearing down black neighborhoods and putting up big buildings and stuff like that. So I think my mom (who was a single mom; my parents were divorced) wanted to get out. Some of the older siblings had already graduated from high school, but she moved the rest of us to the suburbs. I wonder now in retrospect if it was sort of the whole thing of 1968 also being an active civil rights year, and my older brother was doing drugs (smoking pot) which just completely flipped my mother out. And the Sunset District is right next to the Haight District so I think there was a lot for a parent to worry about - like what's happening? But still, I have very fond memories of being a kid in the city.

GD: The next question we had was what kind of organizations were you a part of just throughout your life and how did they impact you and how did they affect you?

JE: So unlike youngsters like you guys today where you know you have to do all this volunteer stuff in order to get into college and say speak 20 languages and you know you dug trenches in blah blah foreign country or whatever I didn't have to do anything so I didn't belong to any organizations. I mean I did go to Brownies and Girl Scouts. I lived in the city, so that's what I remember. I don't know if you did Girl Scouts or Brownies?

GD: I did yes

JE: or even like 4-H or something like that if you live up there in that Hick town.

GD: all those things in fact

JE: What did you say?

GD: I said I did all of those things in fact.

JE: We used to make what were called tray favors because the school that I went to was right near UCSF. so the little object that you made would go onto the tray of the patients at UC. A lot of what we made was... you would get a dollop of plaster of Paris and then you put little rocks and little feathers and stuff on it that you had collected in the city. My school was also right next to Golden Gate Park. Then we used little macaroni letters and put Merry Christmas or Happy Halloween or whatever. Then those would be the tray favors. I'm going to have to Google that! Anyway, the reason I bring that up is because what I remember from Girl Scouts is it being very service oriented. I mean obviously we went camping, made badges - or did the requirements for badges - and stuff like that, but week to week that's the main thing that I remember.

Then I took a long long hiatus from civic life and or civil life or whatever it's called. When I got out of college I became a dressmaker. The person I worked for was not exactly in a Guild but like in a group, so I would go with her to meetings every so often (quarterly or monthly or however often you wanted to go) and it was a good place to learn kind of what's happening in the trade, or new fabrics, or how to sew this, or what's in fashion. It was actually more of a fashion group. I had moved back to the city for college and it was just like networking, pre-networking era, and as I say more fashion than sewing but that's sort of where you got information. But there was no service involved in that.

When I stopped being a dressmaker and I started working at UCSF, my first job there was in a department that had mediation for the University, for faculty staff and students. I didn't work as a mediator there but I was able to get the training through the City of San Francisco. So for about the past 20 years I've mediated for Community Boards very irregularly. Like maybe over 20 years probably 1 1/2 times per year so that would be the only other (volunteer) thing.

Now, as you know, I'm part of the Auntie sewing squad. If I've done something else I've forgotten.

GD: you said in your introduction in our Google sheet that you had worked with the food bank and that you were involved in anti-war stuff I was wondering about either of those things

JE: yeah I'm sorry. When I read that I saw that I put down the food bank but actually I hadn't worked for them, just donated to them. Recently and a couple of years ago - I don't know what happened in the city - but there was a big drive so I actually went out and brought food, and as soon as you do that you realize it's better to just give them money. They are super organized; food banks of San Francisco and Marin have this gigantic beautiful warehouse totally organized and you bring in your packages of spaghetti or whatever... it's probably better to give them money. That was really all I did for the food banks.

Regarding the antiwar movement, in 1973 when the Vietnam War was over I was 15 so I wasn't a baby. I lived through that era and that was the era of it being on TV every night. That was weird or not weird but as they say, it is the 1st first war to come into your living room. Then in 1991 was the first Iraq war which was like three months or something like that. The second Iraq war - that is still going on - I protested that. But that's sort of the extent of how involved I have been in an anti war movement. I went to anti war marches for the second Iraq war every year for like 7 years. I guess, like a lot of people, you feel like it (your involvement) doesn't matter when the news shows bodies from the Embarcadero (in San Francisco) to City Hall - like 100,000 marchers - but says there were like 20 people there. You feel like you made no difference so it's really disconcerting. I'm very opinionated about it [the Iraq war] but I didn't really do anything big about it.

GD: But you did go to marches?

JE: Yeah yeah a lot I have the pictures to prove it!

GD: I believe it! What sparked you to actually start going was there a specific thing that you remember?

JE: Well for the second Iraq war it was like yeah this guy (bin Laden) from Iran, who had lived in Sudan, might have, with his buddy dropped these bombs on New York [flew into buildings] and now Bush is bombing Iraq. So, I mean, immediately a lot of people I know were like this is not OK: you don't go to a sovereign nation, that yeah, may have a dictator, but didn't have anything to do with 9/11 and do this like ethnic cleansing. Ruining peoples' lives, families, and all that. I mean yes, that was kind of what spurred me and you know kept me going to marches.

EM: It's so cool

GD: Yeah it is

EM: For our next question we saw that you talked about how your mom took you to the farm workers event and we just wondered like why did you choose this event like what stuck with you; what part of this event like why did it stick with you?

JE: You know it was fabulous when I got your questions. I just suddenly had that memory we had gone (to this event). There was a movie, a documentary. in the 60s I don't know if it's called Bitter Harvest or Deadly Harvest or something like that. I don't think my mother saw it or anything - again you know she was a single parent, we went to Catholic school and stuff, but many people of Mexican ancestry are Catholic so that was probably how they somehow got involved with our church or something like that, Because whatever this [event] was, there were

other kids from school there and I remember (I don't know if I said this in my in my paper thing [questionnaire]) there was a lady sitting next to us at these tables and she wrote a check for \$100! I mean this is like 50 years ago, so I don't know what that would be worth now but I just like freaked out. It must be before 1968 'cause we moved in '69. I think I was still pretty little and in fourth or fifth grade. It was just like, my God \$100 you know? For some reason I just remembered that (when I was filling out your form). It [the farm worker movement] was a real moral issue 'cause there was definitely a lot about it in the news and flyers around and stuff like that. It was around the grape harvest and the funny thing was, you know, we were pretty poor. We never ate grapes! This whole thing was supposed to be to boycott grapes but that was certainly easier to do than to write a check for \$100! I'll have to ask my siblings what they remember about that. [I since have asked my siblings, and they confirmed that we attended an event like this.]

GD: You said you didn't know for sure what \$100 was around now it's about 650 to \$700.00 today

JE: Yeah it's funny when you say that now I think, did she really write a check for \$100? I mean maybe [it was] like \$20 or something and you know how your brain is, but wow that's a lot of money to just, you know, write a check for.

EM: That's just awesome that you were around during the time of SSF Travis (??) because like it's a huge history in the Latino community obviously they talk about it all the time and it's just like that's so insane to me.

JE: It is insane, it is insane. I have since, as an adult or you know middle age person, I didn't meet but I was someplace where Dolores Huerta was and I heard her speak - sitting in an auditorium not very far from her and was like wow you know it's like meeting a movie star or something

EM: yeah definitely. For the next question we wanted to get into your dressmaking times you said you were a dressmaker for 17 years and we just wanted to know why you decided to become like a dressmaker. Did you consider anything else at the time?

JE: Well it was you know financially like really a super stupid decision but my sob story is kind of like my mother was a single parent for us younger kids and she died when I was an adolescent. I was the first person in my family to go to college and because she died I got a little bit of Social Security which I lived on and I had a little part time job and I would save the fees you pay every semester from my little job. Can you imagine that? I mean it was like I think it was something like less than \$300 a semester to go to San Francisco State and I remember when I was a senior (I graduated in 1980), my very last semester I don't know what class I was taking

but it was the first textbook I had that costs \$100 and I just completely thought, Oh my God, what am I going to do? Other books were like \$10. I ended up buying the book but didn't have a credit card or anything. I guess that was 1980 - that was the beginning of the end for people. I know now you guys license it [books] electronically and have to pay like \$100 right? You don't own the book or anything is that correct or...?

EM: Yeah I know the prices have changed since back then although the time is just crazy to me.

GD: yeah dad regularly tells me he like his dad paid his tuition for him for everything room and board at Cal Poly in like 1980 eighty somewhere between 80 and 82 and it's like it was like \$2000 a year and that was it for room and board and everything.

JE: I think it's probably more than \$2000 a year if it was room and board too. I mean I was alive then but still it's you know it was all maybe together.

GD: I mean he stayed in a freshman dorm for four years so he didn't get too extravagant but

JE: Yeah yeah yeah it's insane and I'm sure you know \$2000 was a lot for your Grandfather but manageable; somehow manageable without your Grandfather going into debt you know what I mean?

GD: yeah

JE: So anyway the reason I became a dressmaker you know my poor sob story - I didn't have my mother and all of that. When I got out of college I didn't really have a mentor, I didn't really have an advisor, and there was this crazy book (you can ask your father about it) called What Color is Your Parachute. You read that to get a job. It was sort of like how to do your resume and stuff like that, and one of the questions was what can you stand to do all day? I was like, well I can stand to sew all day 'cause I did that all the time, but it was not that money is everything but you know as the first person in my family to go to college (later my older siblings actually went to college - two of them became nurses and one is a psychologist - got their degrees or got advanced degrees) there was no one around who knew what I should do next. You know what I mean? So then I spent 17 years as a dressmaker making no money - like really living hand to mouth. Although I learned a lot. But then they (my siblings) did sort of get in on like, you know you can't keep doing this... But I was sort of stubborn so it took awhile and I then finally left [dressmaking] because of course I had to have retirement and vacation pay and I was working like 50 or 60 hours. So then I went to UCSF - but not directly into immunology. The first department I was in was a department with mediation for the campus [and I was trained as a volunteer mediator] and also that department had a sexual harassment prevention office (but I

didn't work with that group) and a sort of employee support program. Then I worked in IT in a clerical job and then I moved to immunology.

GD: So was it mostly just the financial aspect that had you moved from being a dressmaker into immunology or was there like a specific

JE: Yeah I mean I was self-employed and you know when you're self-employed, you don't work you don't get paid. I worked for someone great. I took patternmaking class; I knew a lot but unless you really know what you're doing, it is hard to make really good money. I mean enough to like save money so you can take time off for vacation and stuff like that. So that was definitely the driver and also it's sort of like when you're really not making enough money, you can kind of resent your job. I was resenting my job, and customer service is really hard. There's no one between you and your customer, so if they don't like what you did or you did something wrong or whatever you have to redo it and that's on your time. It is really working a lot and stuff. So yeah...

(24:15) EM: For the next question is how did you initially hear about the Auntie Sewing Squad and what made you decide to join as well?

JE: I didn't join until this summer so they were already going for a couple of months. I must have heard about it...I know that they've been on like Good Morning America and you know some pretty big programs. I don't really watch morning TV so I probably heard something on the radio or you know read an article about them and you know every time there's something like that then a bunch of people join. I had already been making masks for my big family, for myself, for presents, and stuff like that. I was making them for the people at my grocery store because it was already - I mean we're in San Francisco, we were the first people to go into the lock down and had a really good result - but grocery stores had to be open and there were just people buying up all the toilet paper and all that. I've lived in my rent controlled apartment a long time and so they're kind of my buddies, you know? The people who work at the grocery store. I made some [masks] and gave them to people there and they didn't wear them, but they have them. Uh so when I heard about the Auntie Sewing Squad, well I sew pretty well and [I thought] this is great. I can sew and somebody will just tell me where to send them [the masks] - I don't have to look for people to send it to. It's organized so it's you have an idea, well you definitely know where it's going because they give you an address of where to send it and who you're sending it to. And it's going to people with no money and people who are essential workers so you know that really worked well for me, yeah

(26:38) GD: Sorry have a fly and it's very annoying is this buzzing around my head. So how did your experiences in all these different areas, and there's a lot of different areas, how did they affect the things in how you viewed well everything overtime, did you ever notice any big shifts



like one day you thought something and then the another day you're like you know I was wrong about that or you just saw something differently if that makes sense?

JE: Well one thing that I was reminded of being with Auntie Sewing Squad was from my days of when I did mediation more regularly (I do it through community boards in San Francisco and also through San Francisco Police Department) was when you're more into it you see your colleagues more and everybody is volunteers but you see that the more you're into it you talk about (just like the sewing guild) what's going on out there, or what have you run into. It's all confidential so you, you can't talk about it except you always do, you really gossip about (for example) this complete ass you ran into, or Can you believe blah blah blah? you know they're all nuts....So what I've been reminded of being in the Auntie sewing squad is that there are many ways to do things; there are many ways to do things well. And as much as I think my way is right - and I actually have some authority in this line of business and sewing - but there are other people who sew really well too and there are other people who don't sew well at all, or have for speed or efficiency are not sewing as well as they can, and there's something to be said for just getting masks on faces. You know it's not like a ballroom dress or something (not that I'm doing that level of stuff) so it's kind of humbling to remember that always there are many ways to do things. I cannot get caught up in what's better or worse. I mean like if it is really messed up, really inefficient, you can come into problem from a lot of different perspectives. It's sort of like with the coronavirus itself - people trying to make vaccines, or any element of this whole social thing that we're going through, that there are many, many solutions and so for myself I'm trying to take the more "shut up Judy" perspective and just listen instead of speaking so much because when I listen it's like I really am learning from people. And when I disagree, it's not because it is not true, I disagree because I kinda don't see that, you know? Like if I don't think that that's efficient I don't have to share that, you know? What I mean is it's this gigantic problem for us to get our arms around and it's OK that there are many solutions and that it isn't just one thing or we have to come upon the most efficient, the most cost saving, the prettiest the most long lasting solution, the most organized thing. It's been good to especially good (even though I'm not in quarantine, but being locked down or locked in or in prison or whatever we want to call it!) to have some virtual association with other people and be reminded of that everybody's rowing in the same direction even if it doesn't always feel that way. Yeah we really are trying to accomplish something and I just feel when I've been thinking about it lately that there may be many solutions out there so don't get in the way. I guess that's what I would say. I remind myself just don't get in the way. You do whatever you want Judy, but don't get in the way, you know?

GD: Oh yeah

(31:00) EM: Yeah we accidentally skipped the question right here so we were going to it was your grandma's passing in the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918 did it play a role in deciding for you like to join the Auntie Sewing Squad or did that?

JE: Um well do you want the long story or the short story?

EM: long story

GD: we have time

JE: So this is a long freaky story. So first just to answer the question, no when I first got into it I didn't think of her even though I actually know a lot about the 1918 pandemic. Starting about maybe more than 20 years ago (because I never knew how she died but when I found out) I started investigating the 1918 pandemic. So now actually I know a lot about that pandemic but the weirder thing is that my father was born in 1916 and she died in 1919. And then his father married the babysitter and they had more kids so I actually never knew about this woman until I was a teenager or something or in college. I know my father never talked about it, probably didn't really know very much about her himself. or the subject never came up. So about 30 years ago my father died and when one of my sisters was y going through papers in his will and all of that she had to get his death certificate, and on a death certificate it has your address of where you were born. My father was born across the street from where I live now. He used to write me letters here so he didn't know that he had been or he didn't remember or didn't look at his birth certificate [to know he was born across the street from me]. So that means that this woman, my grandmother, actually just lived across the street from me. I mean I can look out my bedroom window and look right into their window. So once I started making the masks (and then the picture I showed you one of my sisters has that picture and she had put that on Instagram with a little bit of information) and I started thinking about it more and more and sort of felt like yeah I I don't know much about her, but in the sort of Dalai Lama/Buddhism or whatever there's this idea that you can't help your brother who committed suicide, but you can help someone else who might feel that way. So in the same way, there's nothing I can do for my grandmother but maybe I can help someone else. That's not the only reason I'm doing it, but that's sort of my connection with her: that I'm doing it now and definitely thinking a lot about like, Oh my God she's just across the street! That's a pretty long story. You'll see as you get older and out of college, that is precisely how life works! There's all these weird stories - you know one after the other.

Wow this was awesome! I hope it will work out for your project. I mean I know when I was in college I felt like, how am I gonna pull this off....