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## Interview with Kathleen Smith

Kathleen Smith

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**Interviewee:** Kathleen Smith

**Interviewers:** Anissa Santellano and Ally Morris

**Date:** Tuesday, November 17, 2020

**Location:** Zoom

**Collection:** Auntie Sewing Squad Oral History Archive, SBS 112: Women and Social Change,

From the 1890s to the Present, Fall 2020

**Length:** 01:07:46

**Overseen by:** Dr. Chrissy Lau

### **Auntie Biography:**

Kathleen Smith, a retired public health nurse has devoted her entire life to helping those in need. She has been a part of multiple clubs and organizations, including the Auntie Sewing Squad and Peaceweavers. These groups primarily focus on using their sewing abilities and knowledge to provide essential items for those in need, especially now during a global pandemic. Being a part of the Auntie Sewing Squad, Kathleen has been appointed the role of the “Caring Auntie” because of the amount of compassion and empathy based on her core values, that are shown in her daily work. She is a firm believer in the common good and recognizes her white privilege. She believes it is her duty to continue to use her privilege to help those around her, by recognizing and using it to speak up for those who can’t.

### **Summary of Interview**

In this oral history, Anissa Santellano and Ally Morris spoke with Kathleen Smith, a member of the Auntie Sewing Squad (ASS) and a Los Angeleno. The Auntie Sewing Squad was formed by Kristina Wong in response to the lack of protective gear availability and focused on serving communities that are disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Smith discussed her occupation as a public health nurse and her participation in social movements including the Anti-War Movement of the 1960s/70s. Smith discussed her philosophy and how it influenced her motivation to join groups like Peaceweavers and ASS. She elaborated on the idea “think globally, act locally” and emphasized how that mantra influenced her work with ASS. As a member of the ASS, Smith discussed her role as a “Caring Auntie” through acts of service such as baking and other crafting activities. Smith also discussed how ASS connected her with younger generations and with people across the country.

## Written Transcript

00:00

### Topic: Introduction to the Auntie Sewing Squad.

AS: Alrighty Okay, so.

KS: Uh huh.

AS: umm before we dive in, could you tell us a little bit about yourself?

KS: I have the questions here.

AS: \*Chuckles\*

KS: So, did you read what I wrote? Like the summary of like—who I am and stuff.

AS: Yes

KS: I don't wanna necessarily go over that. So, um—just trying to think of what else to tell you that I didn't write in that summary.

AS: Mhmm.

KS: Do you have any questions based on that?

AM: Well, is there anything that um—like you would like to contribute to that summary that you think—that we should know as we learn about the Auntie Sewing Squad? Um, or would like to emphasize for us to write about later on?

KS: Um... just that um—you know, I think one of those things that really distinguishes the Auntie Sewing Squad is Kristina, you know who Kristina is right?

AM: I think so.

AS: Mhm.

KS: She's the one that founded it, okay. Um, her emphasis from the beginning—that it was—that it's really a systemic problem and it's not just about um, charity you know—helping other people one by one with like no concept of like the context of why we're having to do this. So, you

know, that just fits really well in with what I—how I see the world, my world view and what I think the issues are and then what I think the remedies are and the remedies have to be systemic. They can't, it just lets everybody off the hook if problems in the world are perceived as being either an individual's failure or um something that can be helped or remedied with philanthropy or um charity. That's just, That's not the answer. It just—it just lets everybody off the hook um in their conscience and it lets power people—powerful people off, it lets rich people off, it lets um politicians off. We get distracted by that. Let's have a food drive, let's hand out food bags. Not that people don't need food bags but you can hand out all the food bags you want and it's not gonna fix it. So that's been a—really once I figured that out when I was in my early twenties, I have not changed my analysis of the situation and I'm 68 so it's been a while.

AS: So..

KS: Uh huh, go ahead.

**Topic:** What led Kathleen Smith to join programs like the Aunties Sewing Squad.

AS: In the section you had mentioned a significant amount of generosity that you partake in, not only within your community but outside as well. Can you-- um talk about what led you do it- to do that?

KS: Well, It fits right in with what I was just saying in that um you know we definitely have to respond to people's immediate needs but I just feel like 99% of the time it just stops there. Poof! with just most people because they don't--it's especially white people like myself its to um challenging of their privilege um and makes them too uncomfortable to--to--it's just like with systemic racism that--I mean there's so many examples but that's like a very clear example of people saying that you know I'm not racist so and just completely not wanting to see how they benefit from a racist um system. But you know, like I said in my early twenties once-once you see it well I won't say it's true for most people, but once you see it you can't unsee it.

AM: I have a--this isn't on the question sheet, but just out of my own curiosity um because I'm in my early twenties um so what specifically led you to you know to have this um realization like was it a book you read, was it a class you took, a documentary or just your own observation.

KS: Yeah umm well one of the things that early on was this idea of um “think globally act locally” and that's been kind of a mantra in my life too because I think people get overwhelmed. Like now--now is such a good example. It's so amazing that you are living through this as adults, as young adults, because you know It's just gonna affect the rest of your life. It's the most significant thing that's happened in my life as well. Um, so uh you know that's a good question. I'm, um, the second of 10 kids so it's--a kind of an interesting natural experiment and sort of

nature versus nurture you know kind of what--uh because we turned out differently you know. I mean when you have a couple, well one in particular that's like off the deep end, maybe two as far as politics and all that to the right but um you know my parents were just like regular parents and we went to Catholic school and we lived in the white neighborhood. I don't know if you're familiar with LA, but I grew up right near Loyola Marymount.

AM: I'm in San Bernardino so I have a -

KS: Oh ya, that's good so that was when I am growing up mainly that it was moms at home dad's um working. My dad was kind of the outlier because he was a public-school math teach so most of the dads were in Aerospace because it was you know McDonnell Douglas and Hughes Aircraft and I was born in '52 so this was just like when everything was starting, satellites and Sputnik and the space the space- the whole Space thing and jets you know, passenger jets. So, there was a lot of work on that. So anyway um--so all that's to say that really nothing in my upbringing was oriented to the way I turned out. \*Chuckles\* So that's, you got to wonder like so what was the secret sauce that kinda propelled you in that direction. For some people they do get it from their family, but my father was a member of the union and he, you know, was a teacher and he was um he was very pro, pro-union. I remember they had a sick-out at one point, and we said, "but dad you're not sick" and he said, "yes I am, I'm sick at heart because they're like screwing us over". So, I'm sure that stuck in my mind somewhere. But it -- I went to University of San Francisco and um there for the first time I was exposed to um sorta social movements and one of the big ones at that time of course well one was anti-war because the war ended in 75 -- the Vietnam War -- and I started college in 1970. So that was that and then the other big factor was the farmworkers, the United Farm Workers and uh there was a boycott on it that time and so we --we were in groups where we would go to, do you know the store Safeway?

AM: Yeah.

KS: I didn't know if it was still around But anyway we would go to the Safeway parking lot in San Francisco and try to get people not to go in. Because at first it was to boycott the product either lettuce or grapes and then it was to boycott the store. So that-- so that started it I think, was that exposure and I mean what did I know about Farm Workers living in Westchester you now growing up went to Catholic School. We had one black girl in my class. So that started it and then for part of my school, last part of my school I went to Washington DC and I went to school there and uh that's where I was really exposed to the anti-war movement because that's when people were going-- pouring blood in the White House and burning their draft cards and uhh that was kind of the epicenter. One of the epicenters Philadelphia and then Baltimore and then Washington DC. So that-- I think it was just you know obviously I had to be open about it, you're your question is really making me think I had to be open to it, but at the same time I had to be um I don't want to say courageous but just-- just have you know in Spanish there's a word

"Ghanas" which means the you know the desire to put myself in those situations and I don't I don't know what because I could have just stayed my dorm room --why why would I do that? Go harass people in parking lots, but it just opened up the whole thing of-- of the idea community organizing, Saul Alinsky, I started reading about you know there's a book how people get power that was very informative. I just started reading Paulo Freire, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" just started getting exposed to all that meanwhile we were going to anti-war demonstrations. There was a huge one in the fall of 1970 in Golden Gate Park. At the same time there was a huge one in Washington DC and that's where they arrested people en masse like they did in Chile with (unintelligible) with--again today and held them in the DC Stadium, you know illegally, can't arrest people en masse. Yeah it just went from there it just one from there, I was in nursing. I'm a nurse. I was nursing school so I was I was kind of predisposed to helping people and all that and then ultimately when I had to make a decision to go to graduate school I had already got my certificate as a nurse practitioner from Howard University in Washington DC at that time they weren't masters programs, but at a certain point I realized I had to get my Master's and I was in North Carolina at that time working in a rural uhh health department and um that was a really a fork in the road because either I got a Master's as a nurse practitioner and then spent my time seeing patients in a clinic or I got my Master's in public health and really took that direction of trying to look at the big picture and why things are the way they are I mean you guys are getting a crash course in public health it's-- nobody asked me what Public Health anymore which was my career before I retired I was a public health nurse. And they're like, "I thought public health--" and no public health is not taking care of poor people when they're sick right and that's not public health, public health is what we are experiencing right now and the way my colleagues are getting you know death threats. It's a really uhh disturbing situation so I just continued to put myself in those situations where I would be challenged I met other people other women who um- we're realizing about the white privilege, about systemic racism, about um- the issue poverty but so much of so much in Americans were ingrained with the idea that if you're in that situation your--it's your fault you know because uh- you didn't pull yourself up by your bootstraps or there's plenty of opportunity you know you just have to take it.

AS: Mhmm

KS: And the idea of having a choice is just a privileged people, people just -- white people don't want-- want to see that. So in public health--the idea--the idea--it's the idea is that the environment around the people, that has to be healthy environment in order for them to be healthy. it's not going around saying "stop smoking, stop smoking, stop smoking" that's not public health. Public health is looking at, why do we have cigarettes? You know, why don't we charge like \$50 a pack and that will be disincentive for people to buy them. What kind of--what are we doing supporting the tobacco industry? When I was in North Carolina a lot of the white people also farmed and they got tobacco -- they got a subsidy to grow tobacco. A federal subsidy to grow tobacco. So there's your socialism for the, you know for the white people. So.

15:00

AM: Thank you so much I appreciate your response. That was awesome.

KS: Just put yourself in situations where you're challenged and--and I'm not saying you know taking care of people in the clinic is not a good thing to do but we we--we don't have enough of trying to get people to look at the context and the bigger picture. Otherwise it's what they've found more when there is more of a stark contrast like in Calcutta where people are dying in the streets. It's clear to people that go there or even the people that are there to help, that seeing people one by one you know is not gonna solve the problem. You gotta fix the water supply, you gotta fix the-- you know why do they have diarrhea? 'Cause the water is contaminated. Well that's not gonna change if you keep throwing diarrhea medicine at them and you know, why isn't there a good water system? What corporate interests are benefiting from, from uh not having it? That was much more appealing to me than spending my--my career seeing patients one by one. 'Cause the little bit that I had of that, I was very frustrated because you can counsel these people to stop smoking till the cows come home and that's not getting at the root problem.

KS: So you want me to go to the next question? \* Chuckles\* uh.

#### **Topic: Finding and Joining the Auntie Sewing Squad.**

AS: The next question is, how did you hear about the Auntie Sewing Squad?

KS: Yeah yeah so um--I sew and I've been sewing so I was 11-- 10 or 11 and umm Im not an expert but I sew a lot of stuff. So um when everything started and it looked like masks were helping the first thing I saw that, I think it was a video might have been an article about Czechoslovakia or whatever--umm that area and saying that um--looking at their campaign that they did to try to normalize mask-wearing and I remember looking at that and that was like--well this whole thing started for us like the beginning of March-- so it was into March and I was like people are not gonna do that here, they are not gonna do it. Um- and I knew that you had to get a critical mass of people to do--it to um to make a difference--couldn't just have like a few people wear masks it wasn't it had to be a mass-mass M-A-S-S mask wearing effort. So anyway I started making first, for our niece that works at Whole Foods 'cause Whole Foods wasn't giving them anything which that frustrated me too 'cause I was like you know I want her to have a mask, she was one of the only one of the only ones that did because she had someone who would sew masks for her and I made her like six masks so she could launder them and stuff and I-uh I was very disturbed because I wasn't making um an impact on why she didn't have mask which was because of um Mr. "a\*\*hole" Bezos and not you know--can you imagine like not making that provision for the employees? and a lot of people, or maybe people do know that they have horrible health insurance horrible horrible anytime she has to have something she pays like - she has to pay hundreds of dollars--goes into debt I mean it's an endless cycle. Ugh- that's an aside but



anyway um-so that's what started it and um I was just doing and then I made kind of a personal decision to sell masks for a local nursing home which is--I live in a black community and so that's kind of the nursing home staff and the people that are there are mostly black and um so that's kind of where my mask making efforts have gone but it was through another mask making group in LA, I think it's called Homemade Masks, somehow I saw a posting and it might have been Kristina early on so I thought, "let me jump over there" and the first place I went was to the fan page because that was the accessible one and I started reading and everything and I was like, "Oh My god, this is like- this how I'm thinking about this whole thing" you know that the government should be doing this that we are very very reluctantly doing this because people are dying and it's such an urgent need and we going to raise hell and protest the whole way and if you've seen any of her stuff and she's got a lot-- she's been on Good Morning America but she hammers that point that this isn't a bunch of people doing good -"charity work" but we are only doing it because the government- and she always always makes that point and I was like,"okay I can make masks and I can contribute" mainly as a "Caring Auntie" into um in- with a good conscience because I feel like (audio disconnected) [...] we and Rebecca Solnit and everyone else that has a--has an audience, a bigger audience um are--are making that point over and over and over again. So I really can only do that kind of one-on-one work now if it's really really strongly rooted in this idea that there's a bigger context that has to be-- that has to be that has to be dealt with. Does that make sense?

AS: Mhmm

AM: Yes.

**Topic:** Working with the PeaceWeavers. How it was different from the Auntie Sewing Squad.

21:00

KS: So let's see PeacWeavers okay how's it different from ASS? Okay, so that's another example of--the other thing in public health that we that we try to work is that whenever you're going to do an intervention or try to remedy a situation you know obviously it has to be in context and umm partnership with community but um it ideally you're not just um- targeting one thing because people and staff are very expensive so you really trying to--to hit on more than one thing. So the PeaceWeavers and in the ASS group as well it's--it's so great because it serves a number of needs. So PeaceWeavers started with my friend Deloris Carlos who is a Professor of English at East LA community college and her husband's Turkish and when that little boy washed up on the shore, Dead, the 2 year-old from the people fleeing--think his name was Alan--fleeing Syria it just really you know upset her and she really felt compelled to do--to do something about it and we connected with the group there umm- and started and started making things hats and you know all kinds of things um- and selling and then sending them there but it became too difficult to to mail stuff-- just very difficult. So we switched to Border Angels. I don't know if you're familiar with them, but they're a group out of San Diego um and they've

been--they've been going since the 80's really long-established group. They are the main ones that go into the desert and place water and food for people that are trying to migrate. That's one of the things they do and they support shelters in Tijuana for um the asylees that are waiting there. Anyway we started sending stuff to them. So it serves that purpose and it also is a social purpose for us to get together and support each other. So the main people are Larena who is also a Professor of English at ELAC and Delores and they're Latinas and then myself and now we have Larenas' sister has joined us. So we would just sit around his table and we would sew and we would I chat and talk and solve the problems of the world um--and then COVID came and so now we don't sew anymore but we knit and crochet and we sit in dolores's driveway, socially distanced and we were doing it once a month but now we meet every--week every Friday morning because that's how crazed we are with all this and we need support and of course they had to transition to online which is and you guys are experiencing it from the other but they are just so stressed out- so stressed out with that, missing seeing the students it just its--its unprecedented on how it's affected every aspect of everybody's life. So um- her niece married--on a visit to Turkey married a guy in Turkey and stayed there but she comes home every summer and she uh named us. She came up with that name "Peaceweaver." So others can join us um but we really just had just us few who have stuck with it. So we've been going five years so it's local that's one of the differences, it's just local and small I mean ASS has gotten huge all over the country you know were uh you know Delores in particular and larina at their after school you know are always raising the issues about the border and--but we switched to Border Angels because we thought, "well we have fugees here" you know they're there on our border you know, save use postage, there is actually a faculty member who was going down there every week or every two weeks so that was even better because we could just send them with her. Yeah so that's the story so it's it's it's been great for me 'cause it's been a real strong social support for me and you know it's--it's traditionally what women do is get together and you know do some kind of hand work and talk-- chat. So that's been really helpful um and I think we need more of that kind of thing I hope ASS continues in some way--I've actually had some people say, "after this is over maybe we can you join you to you know join you to sew" um- it's just you know in our life and our modern life there's just not a whole lot of ways to connect with people that aren't just saying, "hey let's go for coffee" and your sorta hounding somebody, please get together with me. Where is if you have like a second thing I don't know--it just--it just is easier to-- to connect with people.

KS: And then I think you asked about the library too, do you want me to address that?

AS: Yes.

**Topic:** Connecting with younger generations and "Caring Auntie."

KS: Well I can talk about number 6 bond well with other generations or people in other parts of California. Yeah, I mean it's amazing I mean it's just the power of um social media you know 'cause of course a large part of my life was without social media, without the internet and it's just--it's just been amazing we actually have a neighborhood group here that the only reason it's possible is because um WHATSAPP and our WHATSAPP uh chat--chat thread and that's what that's a whole other story but I've met people who live like 3 blocks from me that I never --our paths never would have crossed and same with the Auntie Sewing Squad I mean it's I'm a nurse so I'm--I'm at least from what I picked up in the group I'm an outlier. I know Monica Bellard who's in um- in the East Bay is a nurse midwife but so far I haven't--so they're mostly it's mostly Asian-American it's mostly--just because I think Kristina and her contacts its mostly--well I don't know mostly but it's a lot of film editors and people that work in the industry and writers and playwrights and- I'm just uh-those folks are just not in my circle on a on a daily basis you know so it's really been interesting to like oh i'm writing this play or I did this little documentary and I participated in the film that was done you know if you had told me in like February you're going to be in this film and you're going to connect with this group of people I would have just said, "what? I don't-- what is that?" you know so but again it's part I think to just being open to opportunities and so I definitely you know have met younger people most of the people are younger than I am, most all of them ,and it's been it's been great and um- you know across the country and then just hearing I don't you probably read lot of comments and stuff in the thread we have this one poor woman in Florida oh my god she does the Granny Sewing Squad with I guess other Grannys that she's has connected with. But um you know we think it's bad here people's attitudes which is horrible there so you get another window on what other people are experiencing in these other places. You know California is a bubble I am happy to be in this bubble you know I would not want to be experiencing this somewhere else because it's hard enough you know to worry about going to a store or we're pretty both my spouse and I are both really high risk not just because of our age so we uh pretty much don't go into stores so.

KS: Uhh Let's see, we talked about Peaceweavers we talked about- change my view on a pandemic being part of A.S.S. Well I don't know if it's changed my view, it's just giving me hope on a daily basis and not despair. \*Chuckles\* That that we continue to raise this issue that it's the government's job and I think the way that ASS was able to um change as the situation evolved I think is a story in and of itself and was you know flexible because it started off with healthcare workers and then as it became clearer that um there was a greater need elsewhere not that there wasn't a need for them. I know Kristina was conflicted and I can see why cuz it fits in with the sort of context that you know a lot of these are for-profit institutions, right? Why aren't they providing the freakin PPE for their people? you know and to what extent are really like the release valve?

KS: You know, to like mitigate that need, and take their pressure off them, right. That's always, has to be the question when you're doing um- charity work or philanthropy or whatever. It it's what you're doing. A part of it, even unintentionally taking the pressure off the people who really should be solving a problem and have the money to do it, you know. Make less profit this quarter, buy, buy PPE. But in the beginning, you know, you couldn't, you couldn't even get it. You couldn't even get PPE, so, but that changed. So anyway the pivot was to farmworkers and the, the Native Americans. Um, and I think that's great and I think it helps- It also helps people, a lot, because they- people- aunties because they know that it's really really really going to the people that need it and that there's no middle person - it's going, like they make a contact, and it's that and that person is actually going to give the stuff out, like they're trying to do in the winter coats now, with the, with the Standing Rock. So,uh,I don't, I don't think it's changed my view of the pandemic because, you know as a public health person I'm well aware of what a pandemic is and what everything is happening behind the scenes but it's um, I mean, what are we in seven or eight months now. I think it's just really allowed people to um, to survive and not not despair. And then the Auntie care aspect I think comes in cause that's where I decided I would put my focus in the group. And so, um and then there are things that I can do. So I mainly bake, bake. And at first, when we were super super leery, cause that was the other thing, um trying to figure out how to plug in, when we were really really not going anywhere. And so in the beginning, other Auntie's would pick up from my front door. Um, and it was no contact at all, then as time went on, and I found Gale in Lincoln Heights, um [...]

(audio disconnected)

[...] person.

Um, I thought,oh, I, I can do this. You know, I can go to her house and like, have a no contact drop off.

But in the beginning I think everyone was so, being so cautious and we were being cautious too, like not even not even going out at all. So, um, so anyway I've just established a relationship with her, and um that's been really, really great. So, I make things. Like right now. Well, it's in the other room, but I got - Have you seen our, uh eye decent button, because that's the other thing my spouse and I do is we make buttons for the group.

AS: Wow!

AM: Ooo, very cool, I love that.

KS: I'm decent , yeah, so we, when Trump first was elected, uh man, we're going to be going to a lot of marches, so um,

We- she got a button machine, and we just make em on our dining room table. So any of the (audio disconnects)

[...] are ones that we made. So the John Lewis one, this one, Smokey says resist- I don't know if you've seen this one- Auntie fa- we made that one. This one, John Lewis- Get in Good Trouble,

Good Trouble Necessary Trouble. Yeah, so we made those. And then the ASS one, which I hope you guys have seen, or gotten. This is like the first one that we made. Where we just took the logo, and we made buttons. Anyway, the Aunties love them!

AS: \*chuckles\*

KS: Oh my God, they love them. So that was a big part of it. So, doing that, and making the bread, and then I make, I make pouches they take a little longer for me to make. And just kind of see where... anyway they say 'Mask maker' on 'em. Oh-- here's one. I have them on my bulletin board with them. So, it's a little COVID virus and says, 'Mask maker'. So, I make these pa-pouches- zipper pouches and um, and then I give those to Gale, and then she gives them out to people. So that's an example of what I do for the Auntie care. So that's, that's been good for me um, to um, to participate in that way and that's the other thing I'm sure you're studying that- that is a unique, two really unique or three unique parts to--to the Auntie squad. I think the one we already talked about, which is to try to always, always hammer this concept-context that we shouldn't be- have to be doing this at all.

AS: Mhmm

KS: The second is the way that it's kind of burgeoned into this national thing. And then, you know, God bless 'em, uh Kristina and the super Aunties figuring out like how to coordinate that. What a logistical, um, example of, of uh you, you know, mutual aid, grassroots, uh logistics on basically no money. Um, and then the third aspect is uh, the Auntie care. You know, where the people who are actually doing the work--need, need to be taken care of in some way and it needs to be acknowledged. And um, that's really unique because usually people do this it's just like thankless work. You know- nobody's, nobody's thinking about them and their stress and we have so many people too, everywhere that are out of work that are struggling with dealing with their kids at home. I mean all the aunties, not all of them, but many of them have all the same struggles that everyone else is going through, umm. So I think that's really helped. Um, you know, for it to persevere, all this time, because people feel valued even if they're like in the middle of Pennsylvania. You know that they might get a care package. Um, and um, uh you know they can go online, and--and, and they can see, oh you know Kathleen made a new button, you know, I'm gonna, I'm gonna tell Gale I want one of those buttons, you know, and they just go crazy over em, it's great! We also have mugs. You see these?

AM: Oh, really cool. Oh, that's awesome!

KS: We have all kinds of stuff. But uh- with these, of course we didn't do these- Gale did. Just keep sewing. Keep sewing. Um, and I think they were \$10, each. Um, but then, you know, they said they had a mechanism that if you wanted to, I think it was through Pay Pal whatever, that if

you wanted to, to pay more and sponsor an auntie, who couldn't afford one. So that was great. That meant, even if you didn't have the 10 bucks that you could still get one, if you wanted one. Uh, yeah, I just uh, those three things really make it uh- something to write about. And of course, your professors, writing the book, right. Do you know that?

AS: Yeah.

AM: Mhmm.

**Topic:** Teaching classes and sewing.

KS: So that'll be so great to see that. Um I'm looking here. Okay so we talked about being a caring Auntie. Uh, yeah. So, um, the classes. Since I retired, um, I always liked uh sewing of course but vintage sewing machines, specifically singer sewing machines, so I fell into the hat and I watched a million YouTube videos and figured out how to fix them and how to rehab them.

(audio disconnects)

[...] And um, they had started a sewing group and they were just using the library and the sewing machine wasn't a vintage singer. So, then I started going and talking to them-she eventually left- a librarian, his name is Rudy came on board. Anyway, the whole thing of that was that I said I would get the machines, so I'd get them off eBay or wherever, rehab them, and then I would donate them to the program because you can't have a sewing program without sewing machines, and you have to have somebody who can fix them and take care of them, which is- That's why you don't see a lot of sewing programs because who's, who's gonna get the machines and fix them? Plus, we needed other things like thread- consumable things- thread, you know, stuff. We're able to get donations of fabric and have like a Friends of the Library group that were able to buy some scissors and thread and stuff. So, we ended up with, and then ultimately I gave Rudy his own machine and taught him how to sew. He had watched his grandmother, um because I think she was- she sewed at home as many Latinas do/did. And, but he had never sewn himself, so he was such a quick study - Oh my god, just, fastest person I've ever worked with- to learn how to sew, to then be able to teach others that were coming to the program. So, it was a monthly thing before COVID. So, I'm really hoping he doesn't get transferred and we can start it up again, but everything's in a closet there, all the machines and everything, but it was great. There was a lot of homeless people that stayed in the library all day. And, uh, and they would come, they would join us. Uh, and we made like practical things like fleece hats and, you know, we had a few, a few samples of stuff that were like, were within my realm of teaching somebody how to do because I'm not a super expert seamstress. Uh, and also Rudy's commensurate with Rudy's level of being able to teach somebody. So they could choose - they can make a pouch, they can make a pot holder, or they can, they can, they can make a fleece hat. Um. So we just went, it was--just drop in. Drop in. Yeah, so they would come. So that was great and it's only

like--five minute drive from my house so I was, I really like to. And I hope, I hope it gets back and then. Then the other thing was that Dolores wanted to start a program at ELAC. East LA college. They call it ELAC. And so I said okay it was, it was twice a month and we were, you know we had just been doing it a few, like, maybe four or five months before COVID hit, but um, it was very well received, um and, um we had a number of students. We had a room; they provided a room. And same thing--I-- my spouse and I bought the machines, and I rehabbed them, taught Dolores how to machine. Lorena, who also participated, got her a machine. It was actually, um, one of the faculty in her department so quadri--He's a paraplegic actually from the gang shooting when he was, he was a late teenager. Uh, but anyway, I was able to get him a hand crank machine. So, that was great, cause, I mean he just, it just opened up that whole world to him, because he could use, use his hand.

AS: Mhmm.

KS: So anyway, really hoping, again, everything's in storage, you know, just waiting for us to be able to, to uh go back. So between the library once a month, and ELAC twice a month, that was a lot. For me, you know to keep up. And then every whatever I had it on the schedule, either at the library Rudy and I would, would, he and I would get together, or at ELAC, me and Dolores, and we pull out the machines and do the maintenance. You know, oil them and cleaned them up and everything. So, we had a regular schedule, for that. But um, it's so empowering for people to um, be able to make stuff, you know. Uh, and either a useful thing, or something that's just, just a creative thing, you know that they want to make, and using fabric is the medium. Yeah, and it's a great skill, boy. What, what things kids need to know. Let's see how to touch type without looking, how to swim for as long as you need to swim for--so good swimmer and learn how to sew. Four things. You heard it here.

AM: \*laughs\*

KS: Because I'm, I'm telling you, I don't know peo--how do you, how do you live your life you can't mend your clothes, you know, and now, there's much more awareness that we do need to mend our clothes and get out of the fast fashion. And, you know, sickness that we're in. We have so many sicknesses, don't we?

AM: Yes, it can be overwhelming.

KS: Plastic. It is. It is overwhelming but, you know, you got to curse the darkness. You know you gotta, you know, public health and use it, because we, I was a field nurse for a number, number of years before I went into nursing administration and, you know, I was there too in the beginning of the HIV crisis, and you know how it really took its toll. We used to have people that were diagnosed, um, and when they got tuberculosis, uh because their immune systems were

so compromised so they ended up getting two diagnoses at once. Being told they were HIV positive and they actually had AIDS at that point, and um that they had, you know, rampaging tuberculosis. So anyway, I did a lot of fieldwork. I was in the field a lot. People saying you know you're coming up burned out you know you've been doing this for so long, and I said well, very early on I--I figured that um me being there was going to be better than me not being there.

AS: Mhmm.

KS: You know, I, I really did not never got burnout, you know, um, because I had that in my mind that plus I was a smoking good public health nurse, so I knew that they had me in their corner, we were gonna move heaven and earth to do whatever we needed to do get them housing, you know, whatever. So, I think that's the thing that's important and I knew I was doing, like the right work. You know, I was in the right place--I was doing the right work. I mean I'm, I'm a true believer in public health. And this, this concept of the common good. And that's um, that's what I've kind of fought against all my life. The-- the erosion of this concept of the common good. And that, and it's so easy in our society because we're so individual focused, or as, you know, the more you, Rebecca Solnit has a little comment on it I think today. That's why I really like reading her and her thinking because we really, we really think the same but if you feel that you're just an island and you're and you're isolated and nothing, then, then, nothing you do makes a difference for, for the wider world and, and uh, you don't care about 'em. Like we, we don't have kids, and uh, we get taxed quite a bit for public schools- I don't care. Tax me some more. You know, why? Because if we don't have a public school system- you know, we're gonna be screwed. You know, so, you first have to accept the idea that you're not just gonna sail through your life as an individual and touched by anything else, even if you're very wealthy. You know that's a big delusion that people in this country have. And so, uh, we can't just have everything based on a user fee. We'll have a library, but you know it's going to be private, so there'll be a user fee. Well, we'll have a park, but you know it's going to be private so there's going to be a user fee, you know, and then you live in a world of user fees. And then what do you do if you can't, if you can't pay that user fee, like our healthcare system. So, I just have railed against that my whole life, my whole adult life. And I'm also active in the Sierra Club - I'm on the water committee because that's the other crucial thing- is water. And then, the West. The water is- water is going to make or break us and the privatization of water and water sources, uh.. is very very dangerous, so I'm, I was a supporter of Bernie. We are 100% in favor of anything that is essential to human life needs to be provided-- provided. Good health care, food, decent housing, education, you know, and if you want to start a company and make, you know, jalapeno potato chips. Knock yourself out, make a profit, you know. But, um, because you know those aren't essential to life. So, you want to make something else? That's fine, but everything else should not, not subject to profit. So, you know, whatever I can do to support this idea of, of the common good. I'm also very active in the biking, bicycle community. I bicycle every day. I was, before COVID, I volunteered for the bike coalition once a week, because we need to get off our car



addiction. We need to provide safe infrastructure for people to cycle, we need to stop accepting motor vehicle death and disability. Just as, well it's just what happens when we're driving cars, you know, like this idea that there's an acceptable level of, of, of death.

In order to continue the way, we are. But the same thing applies to polluters of air and water. Uh, anyway. All that's to say, that it was very clear to me early on that all this stuff's connected.

Right? And it can be overwhelming, in, in, in one way, but that's why I just felt like I had to have the mindset of this is where I'm going to plant my feet. And this is um, this is what I'm going to do for my career. And um, you know what I'm going to do my part and I'm going to support other people that are, have planted their feet and other aspects of it. But um, another thing I guess it's been a guiding concept in my life other than the common good idea of the common good, which is this idea of rationing and prioritizing, which can apply to your personal life, in your professional life and in the bigger picture because there's never going to be enough resources to meet every need to the fullest extent. Um. And so this idea of rationing, in public health, it's a very strong concept because we--we come across it all the time. That's why public health ethics is different than medical ethics. Because in public health, it's not what's best for the individual, but it's the greatest good for the greatest number. And that might be, it might be that you, as an individual are um, don't get optimal, optimally what you, what you need, and it always comes up with - wait till the vaccine. Oh my God. We, we - when we saw this with H1N1, when we thought we were going to have a flu pandemic. Where we were saying that there's going to be priorities for who's going to get this vaccine. Oh my God, the privilege people just had a cow! Well, you know, I, I can pay money I should be able to get this, and say no. And nothing to do with how much money you have, you know. So, it's going to be the greatest good for those who are most essential to the operation of society. That's going to be the operating idea. And that means- will some people die from COVID because of that? Yes. Yup. Yeah. Because we're going to have to ration. And we're going to have to prioritize. But when doing that, you have to--you have to be clear about what your criteria are for the rationing, and for that prioritizing, and that that goes for your personal life, everything. So, example in our life is that we need, you--you--you have the opportunity to make those decisions. Well, we have the privilege of making this decision, so we decided to buy our house here in a black neighborhood. We moved here in 1991. I think this 1990 census showed there was too

(audio disconnected)

[..] area. But, you know, it's a middle class, it's the largest middle class and upper middle class, African American community in the country. It's called Leimert Park. And um, this is the biggest investment we're going to make in our life- is buying a house. And so we deliberately chose to buy a house here. So that was a deliberate decision. Another decision, we had to, it's not there anymore, we had uh, a Pontiac dealership that sold Honda's down the street from us. Black-owned. We bought our car there. Could we have gotten it cheaper elsewhere? Yeah, probably. Yeah. So that's, I'm just saying that every day, every day, you're making decisions and making priorities of how you're going to spend your money, how you're going to spend your time. Right. And uh, you, you, what has been useful to me throughout my life, is that it's very clear to me

what I base those decisions on. Very clear, not, I'm not lukewarm, or mushy about it at all. So, I feel good. I feel hopeful, you know, because I feel like I'm in the right place, doing what I need to do. And, and it's, I've, I've had a very satisfying life I think because of that, because I did what I could do. Within you know the constraints of being white being privileged and, you know, trying to recognize my privilege and do something about it. Use it, use it. Speak up. Speak up. Which I have, I have. You know, so, uh we're going to see that we were already seeing it so strongly, the whole thing of- -with Bernie. I mean that's why Bernie was so great cause he just- I mean, he's a grumpy old man. He just, he was so clear--crystal clear, and then people started having memes, saying, you know, here's like the list of things that we say we can't afford, and here's the list of things that we say we can afford. You know, well we can't afford universal health care and everything, but we've got like a zillion million times bigger military budget than you know any other country in the world. So it's not that we can't afford things. It's that we don't want to shift our priorities to, to, to where it needs to be. and I think that's a great lightbulb moment for a lot of people, because you're constantly being told oh we can't do that and you guys are a bunch of moochers and you're just want free things and you know I think Hillary Clinton wrote in her book, you know, "Bernie's gonna give everyone a pony and everybody wants a pony." You know, let's say screw you, you know, these are like basic things. No, but we can, we can have all these other things, corporate subsidies and, you know, the, the uh, the, the private taking of public goods, which is such a big erosion of what we, what we own. Take, I mean the biggest thing is person sitting in the White House. Just fleecing us to death--looting, looting the American people and money. So, you know, there's money for some stuff and there's not money for other stuff, you know, and there's a reason for that, and there's an ideology behind that and there's a, a class system behind that. And, you know, race, and structural and systemic racism is a huge issue in this country. And, and so is class. The issue of class. That's why I kind of laugh when people talked about our neighborhood, because I said, "You know this really is not a stretch for us. I mean yeah we're white but um, the people that I live with are the same social class that I am." And that's a fact. So, I uh, I'm comfortable. Does that make sense?

AM: Yes

AS: Yes,

AM: Yes, that does.

KS: You know, it wasn't, it wasn't a huge deal, the end but I knew that, but most, most people, they think every - I don't know if you know our freeways- but the Santa Monica freeways like the big divider. And they think everything south of the Santa Monica freeways, is the ghetto.

AM: \*chuckles\* Yeah

KS: And yeah, have no concept of the idea that--that African American people exist in different social classes.

AM: Yeah

KS: It's like they're not all poor. So, so anyway. Uh, and I think those beginning days of understanding about community organizing and all, really opened my eyes to the idea of social class, because that's another myth that we have, is, white people especially, that we don't have class and it's not like the UK where they have social class we don't have, we're a classless society. We miss, we're a colorblind society, and we're a classless society. And of course, that's not true. So let's see if anything we didn't cover.

**Topic: Advice for those struggling with mental wellness.**

AS: I think the last question, with the world being so divided, can you offer any advice for those struggling with their mental health and wellbeing.

KS: Well first, um, I think it's really--really difficult to talk about that, recognizing that a lot of reason that people have poor mental health and are so stressed is they don't have what they need to survive. You know, they need money. They need, you know, that's the other thing people. Oh, you know, in the guinea I'm just like treating the symptoms. Well, what's the root cause. Well, I live in the super overcrowded situation and, you know, we don't have enough money and I'm really stressed. Well, that, fix that first, you know, or fix that, at the same time it's helping them with their depression. You know, but giving them medicine and, you know, counseling them as an individual. You know, it's not. That's not getting at the root problem. So, um you need to try to, try to people, but I think generally gauging with other people, which is, in a meaningful way. Like, ASS group is very helpful to get people to connect with each other to realize they're not alone. And, you know, get off, get off, social media, if it's stressing you out. You know I think a lot of people are in their echo chamber of the right-wing conspiracy theories. And it's, it's just more upsetting for them. But what's helped me, is um having my spouse, which I think people that that have a spouse or a partner or, or their spouse or partner has good mental health, it's helpful to them, to not be try not to be isolated, which is challenging during this time especially if you're like us in high risk. Um, but look for, you know, look for ways that you can engage with other people, I think that's, you know, it's kind of a trade saying that it's like, "Help other people and you feel better.", you know, but I think it's true. And then um, for me, just like exercise. And you know, getting out on my bike every day, a lot of people, I think it's hard because they can't go to the gyms. Like, there's like that exercise equipment in parks and here, was like all taped off, you couldn't, you couldn't use that equipment and you weren't supposed to. Um, so. Struggling with your mental health and well-being. Well, the big contributors are isolation. Right?

AS: Mhmm.

KS: So, trying to find ways not to be isolated. Even if it's a social media connection and not a in-real life connection, and then um, trying to get out, yourself, and help other people. And to control what you can control, because I think a lot of this is, is that people just feel like they have no control. So, look, look for ways, or things that you can control. Um. But that's about all I have to say.

AM: Thank you.

KS: But you know, you have, having this conversation with you is a good example. If you had told me--like in February, "Oh the students from Cal State Monterey Bay, you're going to have an interview with them." I'd be like, "What?!" So random, isn't it? So random. But I appreciate the opportunity.

AM: We appreciate you, taking time to speak with us. This was really incredible. Thank you so much.

KS: Yeah, so and I, I know how it is being a student, I know how it is on both ends, but I thought oh man we got to schedule this as soon as possible because they need to have now the time to do whatever else they need to do with the interview.

AS: Mhmm.

KS: And then you can analyze it and digest it and do whatever else you need to do. So, are you the first ones to have your interview?

AM: Um, possibly. It's pretty early in the week but we're not really sure. Um and it's hard to like connect with students you've never met virtually so we're not really sure where everyone else is at.

KS: Yeah. Well, that's okay, check off that box. You've got your interview done.

AM: Um, I believe we need to email you, just the consent form so we can ...

KS: I did,

AM: Oh

KS: I sent it back.

AS: Um, we'll send you our information. We have to sign it. And then we'll send it back to you so you have it for your records.

KS: Okay. Did you get it. Did you get--?

AS: Mhmm, I did.

KS: Okay, good. Yeah, I thought I sent it., All right, great. Well thanks thanks for the opportunity to uh, to talk from, from my perspective. It's-- it's so weird to be older and hope, I hope you get to, I hope you have the privilege of living a good long life. But, um, you know in your own mind, you're like about 30. You know, you don't. It's weird getting old, but you know, better than the alternative. Right?

AM: Right.

KS: So, great.

AS: Thank you so much.

KS: All right, we'll see you. Bye.

AM: Bye

67:00