

11-16-2020

Interview with Katy Korkos

Katy Korkos

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/auntiesewing_interviews

Recommended Citation

Korkos, Katy, "Interview with Katy Korkos" (2020). *Auntie Sewing Squad Interviews*. 21.
https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/auntiesewing_interviews/21

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access by the Auntie Sewing Squad Oral History Archive at Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Auntie Sewing Squad Interviews by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csumb.edu.

Interviewee: Katy Korkos

Interviewer 1: Gioana Perez

Interviewer 2: Jennifer Villa

Date: November 16, 2020

Location: Zoom

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

Length: 01:06:47

Overseen by: Dr. Chrissy Yee Lua

Interviewee Biography: Katy Korkos is an artist, sewer, restaurant owner, and now blissfully retired. She is of Jewish descent, born and raised in the Bay Area of California but currently resides in New Mexico. From her early years of adolescence, Korkos was an activist with her family, fighting for people's civil rights and freedom, and doing anything possible to make this world a better place. She fights for what she believes in and continues to try and spread positivity. She spends her days reading up on latest issues and making masks for the people that need them. Korkos joined the Auntie Sewing Squad for their passion, dedication, and organization, and for those very reasons she chooses to stick with them till the very end. Korkos is a prime example that we should never stop learning, seeking answers to difficult questions, and never give up hope.

Summary: Korkos discusses her Jewish background, her grandparents' migration from Eastern Europe, and growing up in the Bay Area. Korkos explains how her whole family were activists because of how society had treated Jews. Her first protest was actually when she was sixteen with her whole family, they marched from the ferry building to Kazar stadium with 200,000 people in April 1967, alongside marches all over the country against the Vietnam War. Then Korkos discusses her start in sewing and how she's made up to 720 masks during the pandemic. Then the conversation moved on to discussing the pandemic, the current political climate, and critique of capitalism. Education was the next topic, Korkos said there should be an easier way to access every ethnic history at any time period. Then Korkos ended with a story of her most memorable moment as a part of the sewing squad.

[Begin Transcript 00:00:00]

JV: Okay so hi everybody! I'm Jennifer, I'm a HCOM major, and this is my partner...

GP: Hi! I'm Gioana Perez and I'm a psychology major and this is our guest....

KK: Hi! I'm Katy Korkos, I'm an artist and a sewer and the maker of things. I'm retired.

GP: So first off Katy, welcome and the question we want to start off with is, what can you tell us about yourself? Can you give us a general description of who you are, your background, and your life?

KK: So my background is I was born in 1950 which puts me right smack dab in the middle of the baby boom. I was— I'm from the Bay Area. My father was a schoolteacher in Vallejo, California and my mother was a stay at home mom for some years and then she got involved in politics. Even when she was a stay at home mom she was like a president of the legal women voters. Once my brother was in school, my mother went back to college and got her degree in political science. My father taught journalism and mass media, communications, and English at Vallejo High and then at Solano College. My grandparents, three of my four grandparents were immigrants, Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. My fourth grandparent, my grandfather, grew up in Eastern Washington. He was born in 1900. So my grandmother's family— my Polish Jewish family had a tailor shop in San Francisco outside the presidio and they specialize in making army uniforms. My father's father died when my father was very young. My father's mother owned a children's clothing shop in San Francisco near Golden Gate Park.

JV: Okay...

KK: But my background is really growing up in Vallejo, I'm very much a Bay Area person and now I live in New Mexico which I love, it's a beautiful place.

JV: What made you want to move to New Mexico?

KK: I. You know being born in 1950 California was really empty, I think there were like 10 million people in California when I was a kid and now there are more than 40 million so everything got filled in and crowded and the cost of living in the Bay Area- I was living in the Santa Cruz mountains, I went to UC Santa Cruz and like many UC Santa Cruz graduates I didn't ever want to leave because that was kind of like heaven but I couldn't really afford it anymore. So I moved to New Mexico with my late husband and we opened a restaurant here. We had worked at a restaurant in the Santa Cruz mountains and decided that we wanted to do our own thing and have creative control. The best way for us to do that was someplace with the lower cost of living than California. So we moved here with absolutely no connections, it was kind of like the hippie experience where everybody we talked to said have you considered New Mexico. We just ended up here and it's so beautiful and the climate is wonderful and the air is clean and I am just get hooked on staying here. It's a- it's a really nice diverse population, there are no English only movements. Whites are- white people are in the minority which is something that I prefer. We're definitely not one of those Midwestern farm states, we're more of a liberal caring state. One of the things I learned about the state was that we have one of the highest rates of charitable giving and we're the 49th poorest state. I thought that was a cool thing you know that people have more solidarity when they have less money.

JV: Yeah I think I might just move there, you've convinced me.

GP: Yeah [laughs]

KK: it's wonderful

GP: We should all go

KK: I have an extra room. I got a spare room. As soon as covid is over come on a visit. [Laughs]

GP: Me and Jennifer are used to being roommates so we can go.

KK: Okay!

JV: Okay we can move onto the second question. So how was it growing up in the Bay Area and being Jewish? Was there a Jewish community there?

KK: There was a small Jewish community in Vallejo very small and we knew most of the Jewish people in Vallejo. There was a much larger community in San Francisco which is where my father was raised, his mother lives there. When I was little and my grandparents, my maternal grandparents, used to live there—so one time I went to a temple in San Francisco and saw both families' names on the same wall as members of that temple but Judaism didn't really—it wasn't the most prominent thing in my life. The reason I think was I was born shortly after World War II ended and my grandparents and parents were all very aware that Jews have been persecuted. And so they, my grandmother said to me, have a quiet faith and do not advertise your faith. And I took that very seriously she— she believed that seriously and I live by that. One thing about the Jewish community in San Francisco is they were quite radical in terms of the causes they were involved with, with human rights and that kind of thing. I was always aware of that and aware of the way Jews especially were persecuted under the McCarthy era and the House of American Activities Committee, especially went looking for Jews I think because they might be communist or... they were persecuted. So I didn't really belong to a tight knit Jewish community in Vallejo.

GP: That's actually really interesting because I kind of grew up in a Jewish community myself and it was— a lot of people didn't really know about it or like would broadcast it. I feel like that kind of impact is still around today. Even if World War II did happen a long time ago, we still are kind of quiet about the faith and a lot of people are. Like it's just really interesting to know that's how you grew up as well and it's kind of the same parallel now between how I grew up and how you grew up. So that's actually really interesting to know.

KK: It is interesting, yeah.

GP: So for the next question, we kinda want to talk about your parents a little bit. You had mentioned your parents were activists and we just kind of wanted to know. Do you know the reasons your parents were activists?

KK: I think they inherited some of that activism from their parents. My mother's father was a welder and an operating engineer and he was really big in the union. So my mother grew up with that kind of workers rights type of talk around the house. My grandfather was really proud of the fact that he was a wobbly, he was born in 1900 as I said and he works for various WPA projects, he worked on the Feather River project and on the Hetch Hetchy pipeline. I think workers rights

and the union stuff was really foremost in the 20s and 30s when without unions people were being so abused, I mean they were being killed on the job. It was a terrible time for workers, they were desperate for work. Their companies and bosses were not taking care of them at all. That was my mothers side of the family. My fathers side of the family they did identify a socialist and as socialist I think my father would've been a communist but he never had the opportunity. Like he would not have gotten a teacher if he had said he was a communist. Funny story, he used to tell it, well he told this to me on his deathbed: I was visiting him and I was telling-- he was he was very comfortable with the fact that he was dying and he felt like he had lived a good life. I was talking with him about all the various causes he's been involved with and I said "and you and mom were always such enthusiastic Democrats." He kind of drew himself up in bed and he said "I am not a Democrat I'm a socialist." [laughs] It was so funny it was a great thing for him to say. So he grew up with this sort of socialist mentality. He had a lot of solidarity with the people he grew up with in San Francisco. Then my mother got more and more involved in democratic politics after she got her degree in political science. She went to work well she worked for a democratic party and she was a delegate in the 1972 convention. She worked for a state senator, a California state senator named John Dunlap. She was his administrative assistant for a while. She loved the world of politics. So we had very lively dinner table conversations. Both of my parents were extremely anti-racist so I remember talking about the civil rights movement and the Rumford fair housing act and all kinds of access issue with them. That's really where that all came from.

JV: Wow that's like

GP: Amazing

JV: Yeah, I really admire how you just know all your history of your family like I can't. I can only go back to like my dad when he was like younger but I wish I knew more like that. I think that's amazing to know.

KK: Yeah... It's really coming to me now I think the older I get, the more I kind of see it as a story. I think when I was younger, I know, I remember feeling when I was 16 or 17 "oh that stuff is ancient history, you know that so long ago nobody would even know about it." Like World War II, I was born five years after World War II ended and I thought well holocaust and everything like that I don't feel that way anymore. I had really felt a lot more connected to recent history.

JV: Yeah I think but also I feel like history kind of ends up repeating itself a lot like with everything going on it just seems like all over again but we're just going in a cycle. [laughs]

KK: Yes but I find personally I learn more and more each time we go through the cycle. I believe that a lot of the protesting, a lot of the things that we accomplish during the 60s, so the civil rights movement and we march in civil rights marchers in Vallejo and in San Francisco. Then ending the Vietnam war a lot of people my age, we just kind of thought "well we're done, well just we got it done." Having it come back up now, having all these issues come back up now, like nationalism and racism and civil rights I think it's what I needed to get me back into

activism at first. Feeling like well did my part I'm done like no I've got stuff [laughs] acquired stuff.

JV: Yes so...

KK: It's really giving me a change even though it's repeating itself and it's a cycle I never want to have happen, I'm learning more.

JV: So kind of what you said kind of relates to question number four. Did you parents' reasoning influence your decision to become an activist so kind of maybe talk about what it is you did like more depth of what it was like protesting and where did you protest and stuff like that.

KK: So they definitely did. We all marched and there was a huge protest march against the Vietnam war in San Francisco in 1967. My whole family marched in it, I'm the oldest so I would've been 16 and my brother was 10 and my sister was 14 and both my mother and father we all marched together from the ferry building to Kazar stadium with I think maybe 200,000 people and it was a huge protest march. It happened in April 1967 and there were huge protest marches all over the country at that time against the Vietnam War but also there were other issues that were really important like nuclear weapons, weapons proliferation. That one was not so much about civil rights because like I said we thought we're done you know we got the romper fair housing act and the schools are integrated and black people can drink from water fountains. We weren't as aware of the new Jim Crow and the south as we might have been. That was the first thing we all do together as a family.

GP: I didn't...

KK: And septeralty we did...

GP: Sorry [laughs]

KK: We did a few things separately, when I was 14 my father was an exchange teacher in England and he was not a member but he attended all the socialist meetings there and a lot of that was really about rights like. It was, it was an interesting experiment for my family to see what a more socialistic country might look like. For example they had universal healthcare and they had a very strong union, the labor party and had a strong presence in the parliament and that kind of stuff. Then when I was 16 I lived in Germany, I was an exchange student and I took part in one of the largest marches they ever had in Germany. I would've been 17 in 1968 it was called the Easter March and that was mostly protesting the placement of nuclear weapons in Western Europe. At the time the United States felt that they needed to have nuclear weapons aimed at Russia, it was still during the Cold War. that meant they were going to put them in German silos and stuff and the Germans were really upset about that. It was kind of an anti-American March that I marched in. [Laughs]

GP: Speaking of all the marches and protests you've been in, what was your first one and why'd you attend it? Also what age were you?

KK: I think the first one was in 1964 and it was in Vallejo at Vallejo high school and I was 13. It was about the civil rights act. There was a, Vallejo was extremely ghettoized even though we had a really wonderful figment of black people. They weren't able to buy houses in so called white neighborhoods. That's one of the reasons my parents moved out of mostly white neighborhood. So in 1964 was the passage of the civil rights act and we were marching for fair housing as a family. I was 13.

GP: Wow... I think it's really nice to know that like all of your family had the same values and beliefs to be able to march together all as a family and protest. Because I know now a lot of kids have very different views from their parents so it causes a lot of conflict in the family. But politically wise I think it's just so cool how your family believed and valued the same thing to all match together for other people rights and for your rights. I think that's really cool. [Laughs]

KK: I think that's really cool too. I think one thing about my father being a high school teacher is that he really really listened to young people. I believed I inherited that. I really think that young people figure out the creative ways to make a good society with more equality. I don't think that old people know anything anymore. I've experienced this myself. You think you know stuff but you have no idea.

GP: And for the next question, so what inspired you to start sewing? How did you hear about it? Why did you join the sewing squad?

KK: In February 2020 I started making masks because I plan to go to Japan in March 2020. I have a young friend who's getting her masters degree at the Kyoto school of art and design and I was going to go visit Leah in Japan. I've always wanted to go to Japan, as an artist I'm really influenced by Japanese art. I made a few masks, worked out some issues and then the pandemic really became real and pervasive in this country so then I saw that there was a need for masks. I sew all the time, these pieces on the wall behind me are fabric pieces that I made. I would consider myself a fiber artist so I have my sewing machine all set up. I sew every day anyway. I joke about finally there was a problem where sewing is the answer because I'm gonna sew. But I first joined up with a group that was local. They were called Rosie The Respirators and it was a great group. I made about 150 masks for them and what was good about them was that they were very good with logistics like they were good at getting supplies to people and getting masks delivered. I really like that but they kind of faded out after a little bit, they became a county agency of the next county over. So then I made about 150 masks for my friends and family. And then on Facebook I saw Rebecca Solnit had posted something about the auntie sewing squad and I thought well these guys are perfect for me. They are non-judge mental, they are really open to anybody's designs, and they are benefiting so many groups. They were really good storytellers. They were good at telling you "okay these masks are going to go to migrant Head Start or these masks are going to go to incarcerated women who are being released because of covid or these masks are going to go to Planned Parenthood or these masks are going to go wherever." That got me really inspired so I've made, I've done about six or seven pledges for the aunties. I've made as of today 720 masks all together.

GP & JV: Wow!

GP: That's amazing! I used so when I was little like knit with my mom but it was always, I would always get so frustrated with it so I like stopped doing it. But the fact that you've done over 700 masks. That's amazing. You're very determined.

KK: I think who I am as a person. I'm a person who likes to share. I like to share food but nobody's coming over with the plague. I'd like to share books. My last five years of working I worked at the library. I love being able to give something away and that's gonna keep me going with the aunties for as long as they need me. It's just fun, it feels good.

JV: Do you have any masks you'd like to show us? Like any favorites. I'm just curious how they look.

KK: Sure, I'll go get some. [Walks out of frame]

GP: Her fabrics on the wall are so pretty, they look really colorful.

JV: Yeah

[00:23:20]

KK: So this one was one of the first ones I made, it got a pigeon on it.

JV: It's so pretty

KK: This one I wore leading up to the election, it says "vote" on it.

GP: I love that one

KK: This one represents all the sewing, it has thimbles on it. And this one has knives and forks and spoons on it, it's a restaurant tribute. This is some of the ones I'm working on today that I'm gonna send out. And another thing I love about it is the pretty fabric so this one's on fabric from Spoonflower and it's got books on it. What I'll do with these is all finish them by adding elastic or string and then I'll iron them so they won't look quite so wrinkly before they go out. This ones got planets, galaxies.

JV: I was wondering where do you get your fabric. Was it just like laying around your house since you said you had like...

KK: I had like a ton of fabric because I'm a quilter. I've been making quilts for... The year I graduated from college I allowed myself to make my first quilt there weren't any quilts in my family. A lot, all those relatives that were tailors they didn't like and made stuff. They were like "we want a store bought blanket, we don't have to have to make it ourselves from scraps." You know they just really looked down their noses at that.

JV: I think it's really satisfying.

KK: Look at this one, it's so pretty. This is from Spoonflower.

JV: Oh that's nice.

KK: Isn't it pretty?

JV: Yeah!

GP: I love the colors

KK: Yeah and this is Japanese fabric. I've been collecting Japanese fabric for a long time. That's kind of what I do.

JV: That's impressive.

GP: Those are beautiful, all I have is a black mask. [laughs]

KK: It makes it fun to make. Well that's okay too. I'll send you some!

JV: You're sweet

GP: I'd love that if you could.

KK: You can message me your snail mail address and I'll put some in the mail for you

GP: Wow, thank you. I shall do that.

KK: That's what I do.

JV: Okay so the next question is how has the pandemic affected your life? What has changed and what has stayed the same?

KK: So the things that I've lost I think we're all really aware of that, of the things we've lost. For me that includes— I retired about a year and a half ago and I was hesitant to retire because I am a widow and I was concerned about living alone and concerned that it was going to be really difficult if I didn't have social contact. So I set some things up and I've lost all that so. I was going to life drawing every Wednesday evening. I have a book club that I'm still doing on zoom, the Annie book book club (unclear?) and we just talk about whatever books were reading. And I have— I had done accordion lessons, it was a group accordion and it was so fun it was just really ridiculous because nobody knows how to play the accordion. [laughs] We were all just kind of faking it but it was really fun. So I had to give that up. Like I said the book club changed to zoom and I had to give up— I host a potluck every month and I had to give that up. We tried to do some various drive-by potluck things but it was a lot of effort for not too much satisfaction, I mean the satisfaction it's just a short conversation and relaxed being with people and so that's that's gone. I really felt that loss. The extent that you know it feels like depression some days it's really just hard to live alone. I do have a wonderful dog and she makes me go for a walk so I

haven't lost that. On the plus side I'm communicating with my family a lot more. We have a zoom get together for my aunt Carol is going to be 90 in January and she gets on zoom with all of her nieces and nephews. There are 12 of us and we all talk together. You know a lot of times people can't make it but I think I'm closer to my family now and I've been so that's really wonderful. I'm also using this time to read a lot of anti-racist literature like I'm reading— I read stamped from the beginning Kendi book. I'm working my way through how to be an anti-racist in the second Kendi book and been listening to books on tape while I sew and reading primarily books by women of color and other people of color. So I read Sarah Broom's the yellow house and I've just been focusing on trying to have more understanding for the anti-racist movement to really understand what happened to black people after I stop paying attention. And other people of color, I just thought it was fine and that's very ignorant of me so I'm trying to be less ignorant. That's a plus you know really having the time to really study a subject.

JV: Yeah I was wondering...

GP: I think it's really...

JV: Go ahead [laughs] Sorry

GP: [laughs] it's fine but I think it's really courageous of you to take the time that you have to learn the things you don't know. I feel like a lot of people nowadays kind of just get stuck in their ways and in their mindset and they don't try to expand their knowledge or try to understand the other side of what's going on. So for you to say that when you were younger you did protest and you learn and you did try to help other people. And since it kind of like, I don't want to say faded but it wasn't as noticeable as it is today, and now that it is being broadcasted more you're taking the time again to learn about it and try to help other people. I think that's really— that's really amazing and it shows the kind of person you are which I want to thank you for that.

KK: Well thank you I hope that that's true for lots of other people too. I'm part of another online book group that's just called women of color book group. And I know that group, mostly white people, they are trying to have a more understanding. A few brown people in that group my—my Physician, my doctor is from India and she and her daughter are quite activists also. So I'm following their lead and having more understanding about the experience of non-whites. This particular town is quite white. So I'm learning.

GP: Well that's amazing, I think you did kind of already talk about how you've seen the parallels in the political climate. Was there anything else that you see between your childhood and now that are repeating itself?

KK: I think that at that time my father was a schoolteacher. My mother stayed home and we had very little money and I remember my mother used to get mad at us for bugging her. We wanted all these fancy foods or we wanted to go out to eat or something like that and she would say it's rice and beans, rice and beans, she was very angry all the time basically because there was no money. And we did make her own clothes and we did make all of our own food of course. So one of the big parallels is that I think people are learning more how to take care of themselves. I think that we got away from that with ease of like ordering takeout on your phone and stuff. I

think how a lot of people in service industries are out of work because pandemic and we—we all have to pay more attention to each other. When I went to UC you know what the tuition was in 1967? It was like 129 dollars a quarter.

JV: Wow

[00:33:00]

KK: Yeah so that was totally affordable but I got into some other colleges but we couldn't afford other colleges. I bet you have classmates who have had to drop out because their families need the money.

GP: That's- It was so like I knew- I knew the tuition had gone up but I did not know by that much. Like We pay thousands of dollars you know? per semester and even now that it's online it's still kinda the same thing. So a lot of people can't afford it especially because of the pandemic a lot of people are out of jobs and they can't be spending money on schools and stuff like that. Like that's crazy.

KK: Yes so I think that is part of history that repeats itself where I think we have to come back to a time when we are aware that not everybody's rich. And I can see that pretty clearly growing up but I think the jerk in the white house really brought that home. It's like who- who even shares those values? I mean who wants a gold plated toilet, nobody wants a gold plated toilet. We just want food on the table.

GP: That toilet sounds really uncomfortable.

JV: and cold

KK: Doesn't it sound cold?!?! I think the first thing I heard about Trump once he was elected and I couldn't believe it umm was that his son had his own floor in Trump towers. So in other words this child was being raised with no human contact other than nannies or- you know his parents didn't even want to live on the same floor with him. It just broke my heart. I thought this- this man is a person without empathy, a person without love he has no idea.

JV: yea I saw a documentary on him on Netflix and the way like his family describes him like as a very cold person and it made sense why he is the way he is. I genuinely think that well I don't know I'm just gonna say it. But I think that like the reason why he's like doing all this and like scamming making all these like...He's trying to be better than his dad you know? Like it's that ego I think from that documentary that's what I got. And it's kinda like that's so sad that like rich people have that power to mess with other human beings like they think it's a game from them, that it's just an ego boost for them. And we're over in the bottom like wow worried about my uncle or I'm worried about my friend, or my neighbor and they don't see that. Yea that's just what I think.

KK: Well he doesn't acknowledge suffering at all and that's another thing that really pissed me off about Trump was that in all those bankruptcies you know who didn't get paid. He came out of it smelling like a rose but all of the contractors and all the people that worked for him. They

got what was leftover, they got- they had already done the work, they already spent their money on building the hotels or whatever and they just got rags ther got you know a portion of what they were due and that's not right.

GP: but it's as long as they come out fine and on top is all that matters not what happens to anyone else.

JV: Yea we say it's capitalism, I blame it on that.

KK: Yup Oh I'm headed more that direction myself I don't know how it's gonna play out but umm I was reading a lot of Rebecca Solnit early on in the pandemic too. Like her paradise built in hell have you read it?

JV: No I haven't

KK: It's amazing it's very hopeful and it gives me hope that we can we can fix some stuff

JV: What are some things that you think like would be valuable enough to share right now. That you think that would..yea

KK: Umm From that book?

JV: Yea yea from the book sorry

KK: Well from the book I think umm she talked about when- when a horrible thing happens, like the san francisco earthquake of 1906. When that happened everybody just pulled together and worked together to try to feed everybody. They would go into shops and bring out food and set up soup kitchens and those soup kitchens ran for a long time and people were taken care of. Umm and It was the government who decided that these people who were taking these things out of the stores were looters. And they brought- the government brought in armies to aim and shoot people who were taking things out of stores. Well the stores weren't gonna be able to sell the stuff anyway. A similar thing happened in- in New Orleans where the government got involved and said oh after hurricane Katrina the-the black people who were inordinately in- in umm out of proportion to the number of residents in the city they were unproportion- disproportionately affected by floods. Umm They're gonna try to be looters and the way they were characterized by the media in the people in the super doam place which was the only place they were allowed to be they weren't allowed to leave town. Umm There were media stories about rapes, murders and child abuse and all kinds of terrible things in the super doam none of that happended. And the government felt that it was important to camp down on these looters. However the people here's the hopeful umm people from all over the south came with their own personal boats to rescue people off of roofs. Because that's what we do as a society we do take care of eachother and until somebody aims a gun at us and tells us we can't do it anymore we're gonna help each other. We are gonna take care of eachother so she had lots of examples like that where a disaster happens and we all get together to take care of each other. And that is also to close the loop and one of things I really love about the aunties is we're gonna take care of each other we're gonna we're gonna make these masks were gonna send coats to standing rock were gonna just do it. I think

that that's more of who we are than the people who are selfish and just want their stuff. I think I believe we're more like the- care about our fellow..

JV: Yea I was-

GP: That kind of relates-

KK: You gotta read that book.

JV: Yea I will try. Umm Can I get the name again? For the book.

KK: It's called a paradise built in hell. And it's by Rebecca Solnit . She's a wonderful writer, she's the same person who wrote "Men explain this to me". About her experience with men arrogant men deciding that they know how the world works.

JV: Yea I was gonna say that like what also makes me hopeful is like this past election, although like Biden isn't the ideal we also don't really acknowledge the other things that we have to vote for you know. And there's a lot more diversity in the government now. And I feel like eventually they'll work their way up like and like maybe the government will change. Who knows that's something I say- tell myself to keep hopeful as well.

KK: Our entire New Mexico only has three congressional representatives and two senators umm so we only have five people in congress and they are all people of color now. Our entire congressional delegation Deb Haaland who is Native american and two spanish women umm and we have a Latinx governor female. So I feel really good about the way New Mexico works with their politicians. I feel good about who- who will represent us in congress. Another thing that happened is that we had three democrats and one of those spanish women is republican.

JV: Do you think is that like worrisome or do you think-?

KK: I think it's only worrisome in that. I'll tell you the most worrisome thing that I read is that 55% of white women voted for Trump.

JV: I saw that

KK: Horrifying and I blame capitalism on that too because I think people want to identify with the rich. I'm on a rant.

JV: I agree with you it's the whole like American dream and everything, it only works for white men. Its not fair.

GP: Like people wanna try so hard to have what other rich people have so they kinda agree with their ideology even though it doesn't make any sense. Like that percentage of women because of the way Trump talks about women and values women. They wanna try so hard to be rich, to be white, to have the american dream that will agree with someone who completely disvalues them. It's just really crazy.

KK: It is so crazy you know I think don't they get that they're being objectified? I mean all of Trump's wives have always been these objects. They've been arm candy, they haven't been partners or even friends. I don't think they even liked each other. I mean from the look on melania's face she doesn't like him.

GP: The way she talks about him too it's very like distant, like cold. It's not I seen this video I think its umm it was like comparing the relationship with Trump and his wife and Biden and his wife. Melanie is very compassionate, they don't try to hug or be affectionate or be lovey dovey. She just stands there to be there to show that he has a wife. It's not really to be a person like it's like she's a statue to prove that he's a family man.

KK: Yea Look at Barack and Michelle and how loving they are. They really care about each other and she can poke him and needle him and tell him he's being an ass. That's like real people.

GP: That's the goal. That's an expectation and also one thing that I wanted to say was that you were talking about the book about the example of how people show up for each other. It kind of reminded me about all of the protests that happened all around the world after George Floyd like everyone came together to show their support for one another. To show that like yes we've been separated, yes we've been judged yes you know we- there's times where we've caused conflict and hated each other. But when it comes down to something major we can all come back together and fight for one another.

KK: right and we know the difference between right and wrong. And that was wrong.

GP: Like we can be there when you need us to be there it's just that kinda reminded me of that. That also gave me hope like how we just kinda came together and basically showed the government and showed the people in high positions that this isn't okay this needs to change. Also how a lot of people got other people to vote like a lot of the younger generation started telling the older generations you need to vote like this isn't okay nothing's gonna change if the people in power have different values than the values they need to have.

KK: Right and if they think they have a mandate to- to follow up on we're never gonna get the world we want. And another thing that I think really has been brought up to the open with the pandemic is how we bring education to people. Umm And I think that's got to change. The whole school system how kids learn starting at the very beginning has got to change. And it's not just because of the pandemic this just brought it into the open.

JV: Yea because I didn't even know that Mexico was once California and like all these other states and I didn't know any of that. And like growing up I kinda just like didn't that cause I'm Mexican so I didn't think that mexicans had any history. I grew here just learning about pilgrims and the May flower and stuff like that. I never like understood it until I went into highschool and then I started doing my own research. I started seeing everything and then in college as well I learned that Monterey at one point was the actual capitol instead of Sacramento. Just little details like it's just very validating to know that like at one point my people where here too you know.

They just erased us and it's not a good feeling to know that. So yea I agree with you I was actually gonna mention that earlier that maybe I wanna go into education. To maybe rewrite books or something but also it kinda seems very difficult because I feel like the government is always against us. So they won't approve anything if we were to rewrite it.

KK: I think our education system is out of date when I look at, I have some old books. And I know My grandfather was growing up in the 2900's to 1920's a lot of people worked on farms and they wanted. When they created education systems it was to standardize knowledge. So that when people came off the farm there was some basic learning out there. But we have a different way of getting involved in things that we're interested now with the internet. And I think people do learn in different and we have- they learn in different ways so we have a body of standardized knowledge out there. There might be a lot of fake news and stuff in the internet like wikipedia but we have access to learning now that we didn't have 100 years ago. And so I think it's really gotta change the idea that schools have substituted for daycares is basically it cause the cost of living is so high so capitalism right? The cost of living is high so most parents or all the people in the family who are working age need to work. Which means kids are brought up by strangers and educated by strangers and parents don't even really have too many ways of filtering what knowledge comes to kids. I think we've got to get a way of delivering knowledge- essential knowledge to kids that isn't schools where you sit there all day and you have a standardized text book. Cause I think that is what you were starting to mention if this textbook is accepted by the california state department of education and that's the only one you get. And if it doesn't mention anything about mexicans or indegenous people then I guess nobody needs to know that part. You so it just seems the whole system seems out of date. I believe textbooks should be living documents. I believe that everyone- the knowledge in the textbook could be and it could also be cretict live like if you read a chapter in your history books about in the missions of california I think everybody should be able to type in and where were my people then? Whose land was it and what indegionous tribes lived on that land and what did they have to eat? And how did they educate their people and you know what did they wear? And how many people were made sick by diseases that mission people brought and how many people were killed by missionaries?

JV: I think their excuse would be it's too harsh for little kids to learn and it's too much you know violence and stuff. But I also another reason why is that the way the designed the education system is for us to stay in the bottom. To make us think that we don't have a right to have a history books so we can't go into office or do these things or go to college. I remember I didn't think I was gonna go to college until my sophomore year of highschool. So that's a prime example of how it succeeded in a way but then at the same time I mean I'm here doing college.

KK: They can't keep a good woman down. And I just think that's systemic racism. A systemic problem where you don't see the role models, you don't see the people on TV you don't see yourself in the history book you don't see it in the toys that you get. The dolls or you know the people on TV aren't cooking food that your family eats. You know all of that stuff. And I think that's another reason you know this is also looping back to the Jews tried so hard to assimilate like oh no we have to be all american we have to eat dinners we have to drive cars. They wanted to fit in and because many jews have white skin they could fit in.

JV: I'm just like process everything.

GP: Yeah me too I was trying to remember everything, going back to the textbook thing I remember one of the teachers in my high school my sophomore year I think it was history class. One of the students had asked why don't we learn about different races or other types of history stuff like that. And she had said it's because they're not allowed to. They're only allowed like the have certain curriculums that they have to go by so if the don't they can get fired or they are not allowed to bring certain things up because it can be triggering or inappropriate so basically we couldn't learn about certain parts of history because it wasn't allowed like they wanted they could get in trouble by the school board and stuff like that. That's kinda crazy because shouldn't we be learning about all kinds of history not just what the government would want us to learn about.

KK: I agree I know two women were hired in new mexico for deviating from the curriculum they had a segment they had worked it all out made up their own curriculum it was two sisters who wanted to talk about the history of northern mexican immigrants who mostly came from spain around the 1600's. And the crypto jews here they were alot of people came to new mexico escaping the spanish inquisition. They had this very well thought developed curriculum and they were fired for bringing it to school.

JV: It almost just seems impossible at this point like trying to fix anything.

KK: I know I do believe the only way we can fix anything is by talking about it and that's another sad thing about the pandemic is that we can't get together and have conversations about the things that worry us.

GP: That's so- did they ever get any jobs anywhere else like in teaching?

KK: I think they ended up getting their jobs back but maybe not in the same school district that it was the school board that objected or something. I think they did but the had to move in to Albacurky they were in Las vegas New Mexico

GP: That's so sad that like people try so hard to spread knowledge that people aren't aware of like there's certain things about history I didn't learn about in highschool I learned about it in college and it wasn't even in history classes. Like different classes it's like we have to get high educational classes that we actually have to pay for to learn everything we should've been learning from K-12 schools. That;s what the whole education is set up for for us not to learn what we should be learning.

KK: right if you don't even know that something exists how are you gonna look into it. Like I believe that education is to stimulate your curiosity and should be for your reference work. To help you understand that there's resources for whatever your,e interested in. Like once you've gone through college you're really looking thigs up you're really good at requesting in a library and phone books and stuff like that. And that's the best part of education is knowing that something exists and that you can have access to it but if you if they spend twelve years and they don't tell you that something exist they don;t tell you that there's resource out there that's a waste of time it;s a waste of your time.

GP: Exactly. So back on to your sewing background. We had a very great conversation but what was one of the most memorable moments of all of your sewing groups you've been a part of?

KK: I think really hearing the stories of where the masks were going. That felt like the best.

JV: What was one that really touched you? Where you were just like wow I'm really helping these people.

KK: All of them but I think in particular in Fresno there was this there was a need for masks for migrant headstarts so in order for people to come through and harvest crops they came with their whole families. And there was a prohibition for the kids to be able to stay- spend the day in headstart while their parents were in the fields. But none of the teachers and none of the kids had any masks. The migrant laborers were only given disposable masks and the ones we're making around reusable and washable. So it improved the lives for their parents but it also improved their lives for the kids.

JV: That's amazing. So our last question would be what are you- why are you considering sewing- for this to be your last sewing group and what's one thing you want to be remembered for? Like in your sewing history and stuff

KK: Well I don't really wanna be remembered at all I want the whole society to be involved in bringing each other up. I would just assume to be anonymous. So that's the last part of the question. The first part of the question was really about being involved with this group and the reason i think they are the last group is if they continue with the same philosophy they've had all along which is nobody who's in need has to be in need we will take care of you we will supply with masks if whoever needs them. If you have money to buy them we're not helping you. If you don't have money to buy them we make them for you don't worry about it. And I think that's why it's my last group; it's because they have the right philosophy.

GP: That's amazing hearing your whole story from your grandparents, to your parents and then to you. Just everything that all of you have accomplished it's an amazing story to hear because like Jennifer had mentioned earlier I don't know a lot about my family's history. I just kinda know stuff about my my and about my dad but beyond that it was never really I was never really curious about it. But now hearing your whole family history I kinda wanna know about my family. It's really inspiring.

KK: and a lot of families don't wanna talk about their trouble about the hardships they've been through. They don't. It's kinda like how you were saying that history textbooks cause they don't wanna give you the harsh reality of it. But they need to be healed from that too you know they went through hard times. Probably most people do go through some hard times and they had hopes and dreams that they couldn't always follow. A lot of my relatives had a lot of hopes and dreams like my grandfather who was the wobbly had to drop out of college. After two years he was in an engineering program in Washington but his mother needed money. He needed to support his mother after his mother died he had to work. You know that kind of story we should

all know this about our families and I think it helps them heal in a way. Well ask them questions. Ask them open ended questions.

GP: Yea I know like for history class assignments most of the time they ask us ohh who's your role model and stuff like that so I know alot about my mom's history and the things she's been through and I feel like knowing more about a person's background gives you more reason to sympathize and have empathy for them. And I feel like that's what's kinda missing in our government and our society we don't know enough about people and what they've been through to be able to realize you're an actual human being you deserve respect, rights and values and a lot of people don't see that they don't try to empathize and sympathize with people who aren't themselves it that makes sense.

KK: Right and that's one thing that has the atmosphere has been really poisoned by Donald Trump because he's created fear and I'm really trying to examine that in myself. Maybe I am afraid of homeless people because they might be crazy or they might yell at me or something like that. Well my sister lives in san francisco and she sees almost the exact same homeless people everyday. And she has a relationship with them and it's not a friendship exactly but you know she has a working relationship with them and she's not afraid of them. So I could be more like her and I hope that everybody loses this fear when they are constantly being bombarded with oh we're afraid of immigrants because they brings diseases and were afraid of homeless people were afraid of black people and were afraid of all these kinds of we got to just get over that and here their stories like you were saying.

JV: Yea I think people kind of obsess over differences. When I think that it should be beautiful because of diversity and it's colorful and whatever you know. And it's just more... I feel like it's just more at peace when you're in an environment where you feel accepted and you don't judge anybody and nobody judges you.

KK: I agree with that completely. I think I am happier person than people who are living in fear. I think that people that have to live in fear are afraid of all the things that can happen and worry youre not as happy.

GP: So we don't have any more questions but is there anything else you'd like us or anyone who watches would like to know?

KK: I'll tell you another anecdote. So this anecdote is really about my cousin. My first cousin Bob was murdered in 2011 and he had four kids and the oldest one is the one who committed the murder. The second oldest are a pair of twins Sal and Tanner and hey made it their mission so they changed their middle initials and a lot of their friends changed their middle names to JKLP "Just Keep Loving People" their reaction to their father being murdered was Just Keep Loving People and I really take that to heart. So that's really my last words is just keep loving people.

GP: that's so beautiful. I love that saying. Like that's that's so beautiful cause a lot of people have so much anger after bad things happen that they just forget that it's okay to love it's okay to open your heart. It's okay to want peace and justice and for other people. I think those were beautiful final words. That was just amazing.

KK: Thank you thanks for the opportunity.

GP: Ofcourse.

JV: Thank you

GP: It was amazing to get to know you to hear about your life. Thank you for the opportunity.

KK: Take care. I'm hoping that you guys go on to great things

JV: Thank you

GP: Thank you so much.