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## Interview with Heidi Rand

Heidi Rand

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**Interviewee:** Heidi Rand

**Interviewers:** Nick Castro and Nate Walton

**Date:** Monday, 23 November 2020

**Location:** Zoom

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

**Length:** 00:33:27

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

**Bio:** Auntie Heidi Rand grew up in New Jersey and moved to California after college. Today, she resides in El Cerrito. She has been organizing with Indivisible East Bay since 2017, resisting the Trump administration and GOP. She's on the Governance Committee and among other things, and works on the small team that writes, edits, and publishes our weekly newsletter, and articles to the Indivisible East Bay website.

**Summary of Interview:** [00:00:50] Auntie Heidi Rand talks about her family's involvement in sewing and how she learned. [00:02:36] Auntie Heidi Rand discusses her take on the COVID-19 pandemic and how the government could have handled it differently [00:07:47] Auntie Heidi Rand describes her role in the Indivisible East Bay newsletter. [00:14:39] Auntie Heidi Rand explains her mask-making journey and her knowledge of masks [00:27:42] Auntie Heidi Rand gives us insight into her opinion on the presidential election and the propositions in California [00:31:43] Auntie Heidi Rand paints a picture of what she thinks the future will look like for Indivisible East Bay, considering the change in presidential administration [00:33:09] Auntie Heidi Rand gives us her closing message

### **Oral History Transcript of Interview with Heidi Rand**

NC: And we are recording

NW: Okay. Hi I'm Nate Walton accompanied by Nick Castro and today is Monday November 23, 2020. And we are conducting our SBS-112 oral history project, focusing on the Auntie Sewing Squad by interviewing Heidi Rand

NC: Uhm, so I want to first start off just making sure that it's okay to share this, that everything is okay to be shared and you didn't want anything held back?

HR: That's right

NC Okay. So let's get started. Uhm, when we were reading your introduction uhm, you said you

come from a long line of sewists, so was it passed on from, like, generation to generation?

HR: Uh, actually not so much. I mean my mother did teach me to sew and she sewed a lot. And it turns out, I didn't know but I just recently learned when I was doing this and talked to my sister that my grandmother, so her mother, had worked at the Triangle Shirtwaist factory. So, I don't know if you've heard about that, there was a huge fire there in, I guess I looked it up, 1911. And, uhm, a lot of people died and it led to a lot of reforms for workers. So, yeah. And my mother's sister was very crafty, artsy crafty, I don't remember her sewing but anyway that's pretty much it. And I don't have children so I'm not really going to pass it on. We're kind of a small family so I don't really have- I mean, I have a niece, some nieces and nephews but not really passing it onto them.

NC: Oh, okay, so it's a very artsy family.

HR: Uh, some. I'm probably, yeah, one of the more artsy people in my generation. NC: Oh, you got the art genetics.

HR: Uhm, but, yeah, I'd say my aunt was the most artsy person. Actually my mother drew but she never really had time to do it so.

NC: Wow. Excuse me

NW: Okay, and then for the next question: what do you think the government could have done better to regulate COVID-19 spread? Both legislative and with masks?

HR: Okay I'm gonna go to my notes. I mean I know this, but, so, just my categories and I don't know how much detail you want me to go into, but: shutdown, testing, tracking, masks, PPE. So, obviously, the shutdown, I think they should've just really quickly shut down, told people to stay at home, made it possible for anyone who could to stay at home by financing businesses and employees. Uhm, as for testing, you know, they, early on, I think refused to use tests available from other countries. They didn't really develop new tests here and they certainly didn't do what they should've done which was get tests out across the whole country. Uhm, tracking, I mean I'm unaware that they had- I mean, basically there was no federal response, at all. So, they didn't do proper tracking uhm. As for masks, you know, I think we've all read there was a plan via the USPS to send out masks to every postal address in the country uhm, and they didn't do that. They obviously from the top, never encouraged mask use, quite the opposite, and they certainly didn't mandate the use of masks. Uh, for PPE production, they did not and should have gotten PPE out immediately to healthcare workers and first line responders, they should have invoked the

Defense Production Act uhm. So I don't know if you want more detail, but.

NC: Any sort of detail

HR: That's what they didn't do and what they should-, that's what they didn't do and what they should've done and anticipating your next question. But if that's okay, Should I move on to the next question?

NC: Yeah. The next question will be, how do you think going forward? Do you think that- uh wait that's the next, sorry. Do you think our generation could do better when it comes to politics?

HR: Uhm OK. Stay informed. Get involved in all levels of government from just the most local up to the top. Uh speak out, organize, take action and run for office.

NC: Sorry. I saw I moved down a little quickly, but we can go back to the other question, how do you think going forward we can do better with COVID-19?

HR: So just everything I've said that the current administration didn't do. They should start that. You know, with vaccines on the horizon, just get production of those up hugely. Once they're they've gotten uhm passed off on FDA and or whatever. Government has to pass on it and to get those out, first in health care workers and first line responders that are vulnerable pop- vulnerable populations. It's gonna be a huge job and I have confidence that the incoming administration can handle that. So, basically, that's it.

NC: What are your thoughts on the vaccine? Do you have any?

HR: Uhm well, my thoughts are that I'm from what I read. I'm really happy, I mean, I guess I've heard some not skepticism, but just- uhm what have I heard? That we haven't seen data or not, we, but the people who are qualified to interpret the data haven't seen it yet. They've just seen press releases. So I mean, uhm knock wood, if it is as good as they are claiming. Uhm I'm very happy. But as a, I mean, I'm very risk averse, so, you know, my husband and I are in total agreement. Even when there is a vaccine and we get it, we would still be really careful. So that's my, I mean I'm very happy to hear. I mean, I wish the current administration would do what it needs to do to let the incoming administration start moving on this and everything, once that happens, will go smoother and more quickly.

NC: Okay, let's see. So what sort of information do you research, or gather, for your writing and publishes on the Indivisible East Bay newsletter?

HR: So that's kind of a long answer. Uhm our primary aim, I mean in the group and especially at

the newsletter, has been to inform people about specific issues in related to our mission and our mission, not to be fancy about it, but that's the easiest way to say it. And the current mission during this administration has been to resist and fight the administration. And with the incoming administration, it's going to be to push them and to support our progressive values. So, you know, there's the informing and then we're always- want to give people direct action so they can easily take. So we have never said, oh, my God, this is a horrible problem- horrible problem and not said what they can do about it. So I have an example if you want?

NC: Of course

HR: I mean, for a depressing example. Uh There's all the judicial nominations that they've rammed through. So on the newsletter, and in our articles related to the newsletter, we would research the specific point in the process at the time we were writing the article. So if uh the nomination- if it was that there was going to be a vote for the nomination, we would let people know when the vote was, when they had to do the action, who to call. And we target it for our readers, our members, members of Congress. So, you know, in California, we are two senators, Senators Feinstein and Harris are both on the Judiciary Committee. So we tell people uh, "Tell our senators to vote no on this nominee." Uh, If it was a different procedural point, and I should say we have like, not me, but hugely smart people in Indivisible East Bay that help us. So they tell us everything about procedure and they follow what our members of Congress are doing. They meet with our, regularly, we, our members meet with uh the staff of members of Congress. And sometimes directly, like usually. We haven't had in-person meetings, you know, with our senators, but definitely with our congressional, our representatives. So anyway, I lost my train of thought. But we would research, you know, their public speaking out about it. And we say, "okay, thank Senator Harris for being so uh strong in her questioning of blah, blah, blah. Uh we thank her." And if, conversely, Senator Feinstein hadn't said anything publicly, we would say, "please speak out publicly on this." So that's just an example of what we do uhm in the newsletter. So I have my kind of pet issues and most interests, and those are voting rights and election security and uh the media. So, you know, I usually would just eagerly take lead in writing those articles. And uh, because writing for me is really hard, so I will usually help edit and write a small part of the other articles, but those I'm so passionate about that I do a lot more on.

NC: Wow, you do a lot. I'm impressed

HR: It- it's been, it's been full time, yeah.

NC: Yeah, it seems like a lot of intense work

HR: We really, we really burned out. I do the newslett- I've for a year or two, I've been doing the newsletter kind of me, myself and one other person with a lot of people helping, but it's fallen mostly on us. And uh before the election, for a few months, we finally got a reprieve. That we switched over to just a more streamlined elections email and just told people exactly what to do to help get out the vote. So we got a break and we're trying to figure out now what to get back to. But, yeah, we burned out majorly.

NC: Yeah, especially with that election. I can't even imagine how much work went into that beforehand.

HR: Yeah. Well, thankfully, it worked out.

NW: Uhm, so how did you find out about Indivisible East Bay? And what made you want to work with them?

HR: It was uh let's see. So where did I write that down? Sorry. Let me find it. Oh, here we go. Uh, So just a little bit of background. I was playing. OK, so the election Trump stole the election. And I had previously planned to retire from my job. I was a staff attorney at the Federal Court of Appeals. And uhm we have a code of conduct where we were not allowed to engage in any partisan politics. So the timing was perfect for me to leave that job because I just needed to speak out. So anyway, before I retired, I started looking around for a group. I had found a few kind of really small hyper-local groups like within a few blocks of me. One an indivisible group and another that came kind of out of the women's march and I- they just kind of flailed along at no one in them really wanted to do as much as I did. So it got frustrating. So then I found another group that was related. It's like the congressional I live in El Cerrito, which is part of CA-11, which is Congressional District Eleven. And so there's CA-11 team of the Indivisible East Bay, and I went to their meeting and from that I got into the larger, Indivisible East Bay group.

NW: Okay, uhm and then uh what influenced you to start making masks in the first place?

HR: So if you remember back. Uhm, I mean, people were saying don't wear masks, responders need them, do wear masks, they help. Do this, do that. So I just started researching and I wanted to make masks for my family and friends, and we had, because of the California wildfires, we had N95s that we had stockpiled. But, you know, I donated almost all of them to the local police department and fire department. And so I didn't have- plus they're not reusable. So I thought, okay, I'll sew masks. You know, in that time, it wasn't even easy to buy masks. So that was it. I started sewing masks for myself and my family an- and close friends.

NC: So. I mean, this is kind of jumping all over the place, but uhm is that kind of why you started wanting to join, like, the Auntie Sewing Squad and some other people, just because you wanted to, like, broaden?

HR: Exactly, yeah. So I had uhm, you know, I've giv- I've given masks to everyone I knew who couldn't easily get them, I mean, I didn't wanna, if they could get some otherwise, I didn't want to bother making them. Uhm and then I had donated some to local nursing home. But I- I just really wanted to find a group that was already like vetting and finding out where the masks would do the most good. So uhm my good friend, Auntie uhm Melissa Coulter was just sewing huge numbers of masks to donate, and she was working with another East Bay group that I was thinking about joining. And then she told me about the Auntie Sewing Squad. Uh so that's how I got into it. I mean, uh my husband, who prefers to be called Auntie instead of Uncle, Unc Auntie George, he helps a lot. He made me a template to easily cut out the masks. He does the steps. He turns the mass right side out and cuts and inserts the elastic. Uhm so, I mean, basically, I didn't know this at the time I joined, but uh just there's so many benefits to sewing with other people in the anti sewing squad. You know, the just really generous and loving support. And it also made a really big difference. There's another group I'm in that does voting rights uh. So they posted asking whether people can sew masks for people who are doing voter registration in Georgia. So I ended up being kind of forced into organizing that project. We donated over a thousand masks, about half from the Aunties and half from another similar group in New York.

NC: That's a lot of masks, uhm so I guess that kind of leads into, like if, you said you weren't super passionate about sewing you know, it wasn't your favorite thing. I think you said you're more into, like, knitting, something like that.

HR: Yeah.

NC: Uhm, what made you like, really get into joining the Auntie Sewing Squad? Like just really you know like uh like super like, you know, just like dedicate part of your life to it.

HR: Yeah, I mean, it's a simple answer. You know, I'm able to do it and there was a huge need for it. You know, I'm remembering back to the early days. I was, you know, I think like everyone else, I was so frightened and stressed out and it just helped to have something concrete to do, you know, with my hands that felt like it was a small part of the solution. Like, I, I had just been spending all my time on Indivisible East Bay and I kind of put that aside a bit because- to sew masks. So really, that's it. I could do it. You know, I had- I was lucky to have a sewing machine, access to materials and time, and there's just so much need.

NW: Uhm, Speaking of materials, you talked about finding the right material and pattern for masks uhm. What have you learned about sewing masks during this pandemic or the rise of your mask making?

HR: So this is a long answer. So let me know if I'm going on too long. So for designs, I just, I kind of tend to, I tend to research things. Take a while to settle on them, so that happened here, so I just watched tons of YouTubes. I read a lot of you know blog posts and then I just settled on an adaptation of the 3D pattern. So, uhm It's also called the Origami mask or. So it's basically, I don't know if you can see that, I don't know if you can see. And the reason, so a few reasons I like it, it's, it's pretty easy to cut out and sew, uh it fits a pretty wide variety of faces and it allows space for people without pulling off the nose. Uhm I think it does a lot of the same things, as that what they call the pleated masks do. But I hated sewing pleats, so. Uhm about material, so, I read all the same articles we all did about what was effective. Different fabrics. And I settled on using uh two layers of quilter's cotton. So, I mean, back in the beginning, it was hard to get fabric. But my friend Melissa, who I mentioned before, gave me a bunch of batik fabric, which is the best and that was just hugely wonderful. Uhm then for filters. Do I have...? I thought I had my box here. I think it's somewhere else. But I tried a ton of different filters and the same thing doing the research, if you were involved back then, you know. You know, there were articles about what filters worked, what didn't work, and then all this stuff. So I just read it all. And then another factor was how easy it was to get the stuff, how expensive it was and uhm just all these balancing things. I mean, if you remember, people probably still talk about, "Oh, use a paper towel" or use this or that. So, what I settled on, it's actually, I, I do different, if I'm gonna make, when I make masks to donate, I just try to simplify. So, I, I use a permanent sew-in filter rather than a filter pocket because I just don't trust that a lot of people will be able to get new replacement filters. So uhm right now, I use either interfacing of a specific kind or what's called NWPP. It's non-woven polypropylene. Have you heard of it?

NW: No, ever had heard of that before.

HR: Okay, and to be easy about it. It's kind of, you know, the shopping bags that are kind of woven and reusable, kind of fabric waffle-y. Anyway, that's NWPP. So in the beginning, people were using for something that they had around the house to use. You remember people who were using T-shirts for masks. So anyway, that's NWPP. And the research shows that it's just highly effective that uhm. And so I sew that in permanently. So the other aspect is the nose, nose piece to clip over the nose. And I, I, some people, excuse me, don't use them, but I, I use them in every mask because it gives a better fit. And I see you don't wear glasses, but for people who wear glasses, they fog. If there's not a good enough fit, they fog up. So anyway, I went through the same thing, I bought a ton of different kinds of nose pieces and have settled on one kind. And I

again, I sewed them in permanently. So people don't have to fuss with taking them out to wash and then losing them or replacing them.

NC: So you said you have a preference for knitting over sewing. Is there, like, some sort of difference between them for you? Like, what's, what's your take on the both of them?

HR: Yeah, so that was a really good question because it's hard to articulate. Uhm let's see, you know, I feel like I'm not very good at sewing. Like uhm, when I think about sewing anything other than masks or just really simple things, I'm just not interested. Uhm I don't enjoy the steps of sewing, you know, before making masks. I would think back to, like, making a garment or something and I would just want to just get into bed. It's like, oh, my God, I just like cutting out the bits-. Do either of you sew?

NW: No.

NC: I've seen people sew before.

HR: Yeah. Just like cutting out the pattern and pinning the pattern and sewing. It's just like, oh, my God, I've just really no interest uhm. Knitting, I learned really late. I, actually my auntie, my Indivisible East Bay co-editor for the newsletter taught me how to knit. I never had interest and uhm, but I just really I took to it. I just love, I love yarn. I have too much yarn. You can't see it. But the back there is a huge amount of yarn and I love fabric too. I mean I, the, the reason I would sew at all is, I love to design my own fabric from my photographs and I print that fabric and I have it some of it printed for me and larger yardage so that I love to sew. But again, the process of sewing, I- I just really don't enjoy it.

NC: What about uhm crocheting. Have you ever tried that?

HR: Yeah. I've, do you crochet?

NC: I have family members that are really like knitting, crocheting, sewing.

HR: Yeah, I just, I don't know why. I just like knitting. I mean, when you knit certain things you have to learn simple crochet steps like. A sweater, like a neck of a sweater, whatever, so I've done a little crocheting, but I just, I don't know. I just took to knitting.

NC: Knitting is your passion.

NW: Uhm, but then for sewing, do you use your mom's old sewing machine or do you use a new one to make the masks?

HR: Yeah, unfortunately it's broken and it may be fixable. There's a guy, Eric, in, lives in Berkeley near me, in the Auntie Sewing Squad, he fixes these old machines. So at some point I could ask him, but it's just sitting on a shelf gathering dust uhm. And I had, several years ago, you know, when I started printing my own, printing and designing my own fabric and getting it printed. I got a machine so I could sew that. Into kind of useful and fun things uh like garments and bowls and stuff like that. Handbags. Uh so I bought a kind of nice, not expensive, but a machine for that. So that's the one that I'm using.

NC: Uhm how do you feel about the results of the presidential election? And do you have any opinion on the props in California?

HR: So I'm just, I'm hugely relieved and just very happy. I feel like my hard work and the hard work and so many people paid off. I mean, you know, planning up to the election, just thinking what, you know, I would do if it went the other way. I just, it would have been so horrible. It, I mean, first of all, it would have meant that the work of so many people just didn't pay off. Uhm I mean, I'm really still concerned about a lot of things. I mean, there's still a huge block of people who voted wrong. You know, then there's the continued attempts to steal and discredit the election and, you know, stall the transfer power to Biden. So those are really concerning. Uhm I'm working hard again now on the Georgia runoff election. My husband and I just wrote 200 postcards and got them in the mail to uhm unregistered voters in Georgia to try to get them to register. I mean, for the props of several of them went against the way I voted, but I haven't really focused on them too much. I think the one I cared about most was and we worked hard on this Indivisible East Bay, was the schools and communities first and that didn't you know, that went the wrong way. So, we have to get money out of politics. There's so, you know, so much money. Dark money in politics.

NC: Do you have any concerns about the president that will be in power in January?

HR: Concerns? I mean, my uh my main concern and I'm just having faith. I think for several reasons, that Trump and his administration and people around him need to be held accountable for what they did. And so, uh I, this isn't so much about Biden himself, but about who he puts in as attorney general. That they need to investigate. I think that if there's an independent commission, to investigate and just not, we can't just move on. Things have to, you know, crimes have to be prosecuted. So that's my main concern. Uh otherwise, I mean, I love Kamala Harris. She's my senator and she's fantastic uh. Other concerns, I mean, that's what we do in Indivisible East Bay, as you know, like I say we fought and resisted the Trump administration. And the Biden administration we hope to just you know support them and what they're doing right and gently push them if we think that they're doing something we don't agree with. But we can work

with, you know, we can work with them. Whereas with this current administration, not.

NC: So what do you think like the future is for the Indivisible Easy Bay, like, with the change in administration? I mean, you guys focused a lot on Trump in terms of his administration, how do you think it's gonna work with Biden?

HR: Great question. Yeah, I mean, the newsletter team is meeting right now. And you know how the direction the newsletter is going to come out and working on the job of looking at our website and updating any language that's going to be stale and out of date. So we're going to update our mission statement. I mean, I think kind of like I said, it's gonna be so much easier and more fun and hopeful to be able to be, you know, not always on the defensive, always fighting something horrible like kids in cages and, you know, deportations and people not getting food stamps or whatever. It'll just be such a huge relief to be pushing for maybe more progressive policies than are being, you know, advanced.

NC: Uhm, I think as a final closing question, if Nate doesn't have anything?

NW: Uh, go ahead

NC: So if you could say anything like the world is watching and everyone is listening, I think, what would you want to say to, I mean, America or like the world?

HR: Can I swear?

NC: Sure

HR: Wear a fucking mask and stay the fuck at home.

NC: I agree. That's a, that's a good message to get out there. I think that is a good closing, so I will stop recording.