

11-18-2020

Interview with Kristine Murray

Kristine Murray

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Recommended Citation

Murray, Kristine, "Interview with Kristine Murray" (2020). *Auntie Sewing Squad Interviews*. 10.
https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/auntiesewing_interviews/10

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Interviewee: Kristine Murray

Interviewers: Jasmine Costanzo and Andrew Granado

Date: November 18 2020

Location: Zoom

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

Length: 00:21:27

Overseen by: Dr. Chrissy Yee Lau

Bio: Kristine Murray is from Washington but she currently lives in Arizona. She teaches English to kids in China and in the Auntie Sewing Squad she is a mask maker. She was already making masks for local needs, but wanted to do more, so she joined the Auntie Sewing Squad.

Summary: (00:00:00) Kristine Murray talks about why she joined the Auntie Sewing Squad and how it has impacted her. (00:03:02) She then talks about her outlook on the Coronavirus and impacts on her family. (00:09:17) She explains what it is like making masks and her thoughts on masks during this pandemic. (00:14:22) She explains the levels and roles in the Auntie Sewing Squad and how it works regarding completing needs requested. (00:17:33) Murray ends with stating her opinions on the government and the new presidencies role in the pandemic.

Interview Transcript

JC: What made you want to pursue being a part of this organization?

KM: I was already making masks for donations at a local level. I was making masks for donations locally, for the school, for kids at school that needed masks. I am a member of my local Buy Nothing group, so I would make a bunch and post them on there. I made them for friends and family and mailed them kind of all over. I don't know where I heard of this organization, the Auntie Sewing Squad, I mean it was definitely on facebook, I think I maybe posted a question and somebody responded that they were a member of the group, maybe that's how it happened. So then I joined, basically just wanted to have a bigger impact, I wanted to help in whatever way I could. Help people that are forgotten or neglected, that are left behind by the people that are supposed to take care of American citizens and I just wanted to help in any way that I could. I have three kids and I stay home, so this was like a way that I could, it was something that I could do. I have the capabilities, I have little bits of time here and there and so yeah I basically just felt like yeah know the situation is out of control, it's way messed up and what can I, little me do, and this was it basically.

JC: How has the Auntie Sewing Squad impacted or changed you?

KM: I think that the way it has changed me the most is it really has made me want to just do more or to be better I guess. I don't have tons of time, I have little bits of time in my schedule

that I am able to devote to doing this. So you know I do maybe 30 masks a week, some weeks more, maybe some weeks less, I don't know. But there's some aunties and uncles in the group who do hundreds a week. So I am always pushing myself to do a little bit more, little bit more, little bit more. It's making me also want to think of how can I help in other ways. You know yes I can sell masks but what else can I do and how can I get my family involved, you know I got my kiddos screwing in beads. Mostly I think the way it has changed me the most is it just makes me want to be better, to do more, to take on more I guess.

JC: What is your outlook on the coronavirus?

KM: Um, I don't know, I feel like, I don't know what I'm allowed to say. I feel like my outlook in general that it's here, it's here to stay, it's not going anywhere and we really need to figure out what we can do. How we can make the best out of a really bad situation. I also teach English to children in China online and so this has been part of my life since before it was part of all of our lives, right, it happened there first. So a couple months before it started here I was talking to kiddos about what they are doing and how they are dealing with it. And to me I also have friends internationally and to me it's really disheartening the way "we" as Americans I think that we are above it all and that's like the royal "we" right. I think that we are above it all and that we don't have to do our part. I think that my outlook is that it makes me really mad and makes me really sad that we can't just pull our heads out of our asses and stay home. You know what I mean like, I don't know. I think that it's here, it's not ever really going to go away. We just need to figure out how to get, as my mom would say, our poop in a group, we got to figure it out, because people are dying needlessly and we just think it's perfectly okay to go to like, I don't know, parties to watch like football games and rally's to support people who don't really need our support or shouldn't have it I guess. That's my outlook.

JC: I think it's really cool that you teach English, my cousin also teaches English to Chinese kids.

KM: Oh really? Online?

JC: Yeah

KM: It's a fun job, I like it.

JC: He made his shed into his classroom kind of and he's up at 2 am because that's like their time there.

KM: Same, yeah I like it, because I can do it when my family sleeps and then you know I'm done by the time my husband gets up for work, I'm done, so yeah it's good.

AG: It's kind of cool how you work with international students, because you got to actually see

the virus kind of “bread”, because it started there, it happened there and you probably heard about it earlier, the next thing you know it was here in the United States.

KM: Yeah, it was really interesting because I was kind of able to track it because it started there and I have friends in South Africa, Ireland, Germany and England and so you know we would like kind of track where it’s going and even know we talk a lot about ya know what’s it like there where you are and what restrictions are you having and you know things like that. So you know it’s been really interesting to me.

AG: That’s really cool, I feel like that’s really cool how you got to be able to track it.

KM: Yeah I mean it’s cool but at the same time it was kind of sad and scary. AG: So rapid.

KM: Yeah, and it’s sad because you know, I have a friend in turkey and they’re like you know basically for all tense and purposes life has moved on. You know and here we are the good ol USA like just.. My sister lives in Wisconsin, I don’t know if you know about Wisconsin but they have an average of 7,000 cases every single day and so it’s like man, get it together.

JC: Has it affected you and your family? If yes, how so?

KM: Yeah, absolutely. My husband is an electrician and so part of his job is I’m going into people’s homes. He does not like, he does like custom homes type things. So when it first started for the first couple of months he was very slow, you know he’s an hourly employee, it’s not like he can work from home, not like he can ya know do computer work or whatever. His job requires him to be kind of in the public with people. And so financially it has been very difficult for us as he has lost a lot of hours and as an hourly employee, you don’t work you don’t get paid right. So, yes it has definitely impacted us in that way. I would say the other way it has most significantly impacted us is, my kids, I have two kids, both of them were home from school which has been not great fun, they do not like online, they don’t like distance learning. They since gone back to school which is good and then we can’t, you know I’m originally from Washington and most of my family is still in Washington and so we haven’t been able to travel and see them or for them to travel to see us. When you’re like basically kind of by yourself in a state, it’s hard I guess. Like little island.

JC: What is it like making masks during this pandemic?

KM: Um, I don’t know, I started doing it because I just kind of liked it, you know I like to sew and for me initially it was a way I could protect my family so I started there and then the more I do it the more I’m learning. I hesitate to say that it’s been fun, because I feel I don’t know, maybe that’s not the right thing to say but it kind of has been. Um I also have kind of turned it into a little side hustle, not like huge but I do the masks for the donations for the groups, that’s

where the majority of my focus has been but I also have been selling them so I can make money back so that I can buy more for the sewing squad, so it's kind of my way of funding my charity, I guess.

AG: Kind of like a non-profit.

KM: Yeah kind of, I mean I could get fabric from Kristina right, that's a service that they provide, they mail fabric but I try to be like self-efficient and yeah it's kind of been fun, is that bad to say.

AG: So my first question is how long does it take to make a mask?

KM: I've gotten really fast, so when I first started I was making the pleated masks they're a rectangle with like the three pleats. They took me forever, they took forever. Those darn pleats are super hard to get like even and straight. And then I moved to the curve style, the fitted masks and those took a long time. But now I would say I could probably make a mask from start to finish in fifteen minutes, maybe. The new pattern and if I don't get interrupted fifteen times from children I think from start to finish I could make a mask in fifteen minutes. Which is probably not super fast in comparison to some of the other ladies or people you are talking to but for me that's pretty fast.

AG: That's pretty fast, I don't think I could picture myself doing a mask.

KM: Do you sew Andrew?

AG: I do not.

KM: Well then it might take you a while then.

AG: Um so my next question is do you believe masks should be required or should they be free, like freedom of...

KM: Here's the thing about that, I do believe in constitutional rights and freedom, I do believe in them. I also believe in the freedom of medical choice. I think, it's a really hard question because part of me wants to say yes, I absolutely believe that we have the freedom of choice because we do just like I feel like if you truly don't want to vaccinate your kid that's your choice that's fine. But I think that there's a line where it's like you get to wear, your choice becomes irresponsible, if you choose not to wear a mask, that's great good for you but I also feel like as a responsible human being and a member of society that you should probably make different choices about where you go. Like I think that if you choose not to wear a mask then you shouldn't be shopping at Costco at 11 am on a Sunday, you know what I mean, because your choice, while it is your choice becomes irresponsible and selfish. I think that's a hard question, it is really a hard

question, because I do believe in medical choice, freedom of medical choice.

AG: That's a very good outlook on it though, because usually people just say yes or no. But you say it as like, if you're going to do it as your choice, do it where it doesn't hurt other people. So like go out at good times of the day.

KM: Yeah do it responsibly. Like I believe that if you want to make that choice that's fine that's your choice but be responsible about it. If you don't want to vaccinate your kids then maybe don't send your kids to public school, you know, that's a hard one, it really is a hard question.

AG: It's just a lot of personal choices you can do other than..

KM: Yeah, maybe you should buy your groceries online, I buy my groceries online and I'm a firm believer in wearing a mask. Because I also think that just because I wear a mask and I can go to the grocery store, if I can make that choice and make sure my family and your family or the other people there are safe, then why wouldn't I do that. I feel like it's being a responsible caring member of society.

AG: So also one of the main purposes of the Auntie Sewing Squad is to deliver masks to the needy, correct?

KM: Yes

AG: So how is like the process, like how do you guys ensure that the masks you make actually quote and quote, are delivered to the correct places that need it, like how do you guys find these places basically.

KM: So part of that I don't know, the way I understand it, I'm a ground worker, the way I understand, the generals, Kristina Wong is the overlord, is what we call her, I don't know if she reached out to people or if they reach out to her. They get these requests and then they put it out in our group, our Facebook group, and they say you know we need xyz for such and such location. So then they tell you, you say great I'm going to make however many, and then they give you the address. So a lot of the times you send them directly to that Auntie that's asking for the masks, so whoever is the contact person for that need. But sometimes you send them directly to the point of contact, at that place. So I guess there's a part of it where it's just trust, right, you trust that the person who's asking for them is going to do the right thing with them, they're going to make sure they get where they need to go.

AG: So it's basically like one Auntie would take control of a particular region or area?

KM: I don't really know, I don't know how that works to be honest, I know that it works that way sometimes. So for some people, we have like, there's a hierarchy, there's the overlord,

and

then there's like super aunties and then there's just like aunties and then there's just like grunts, right. The super aunties are in charge of like the really big asks, like right now we have one for the Navajo nation that's 6,000 masks, so that's ran by the super aunties. And then there's also aunties that are like hey my local highschool needs 75 masks or whatever, that's not a huge thing, basically anyone can put that out there as far as I can understand it. So I don't know how the people that need the masks go about finding us and contacting us, I don't know how all that works.

AG: Okay, so that would be like the first level of it, correct?

KM: Me? Yeah, I'm like the bottom, right. There's stacks above me.

AG: Okay so my next question would be do you believe that the government is doing their part in calming this pandemic?

KM: No, absolutely not. I don't think the government is doing their job, I think that it has a lot to do with the government not believing in science and thinking that it's all a hoax and um that basically there's nothing wrong, would be my short answer, I could go on but I don't know if I should.

AG: Okay so my next question is kind of like a part two, so if you could do something, like if you would do one step to better us if you had like ability to, what would you do, like what would be your one step?

KM: Well I voted on November 3rd. That would be my first step, I really don't think that somebody at my level can really do much more than that. I mean because the people at the top, don't think that this is really an issue, I don't think that really average people can do much unfortunately, until the people at the top realize that there really is a problem here. I don't know how much I could do, I guess. That's not a good answer, I apologize.

AG: No you're fine! So my last question would be so like, what with the new presidency coming in, do you believe that there will be stricter masks laws or do you think that certain policies would change regarding masks?

KM: I do, I do think so because I think that the upcoming administration seems to believe that there is an issue, seems to believe that this has been mishandled and not dealt with in a way that it should be. And if you look at the political map and you look at what states lean certain ways and what states lean other ways and then look at who is in charge in those states, you can see that there is a trend, right. Certain people with certain beliefs feel like masks are more important than other people with other beliefs. And I think that since our presidency is going in a different way that those laws will be changing, I think. Again probably not a good answer, sorry.

AG: No, you answered it.

KM: I don't really know how to answer those political questions...

AG: Yeah, you're fine.

KM: ...in a respectful manner

AG: Yeah that's fine. So, you have any other questions Jasmine?

my mic having some difficulties

JC: I didn't have any other questions.

AG: Okay, I'm pretty sure that will be the conclusion of our interview.

KM: Okay, sorry for the chaos, this is my life.

AG: No, thank you for your time.

JC: I apologize for my problems at the beginning.

KM: No worries, okay well thank you.

AG: Bye have a good rest of your day.

JC: Thank you so much.

KM: Thank you.