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Interview with Cristina Gonzalez

Cristina Gonzalez

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Interviewee: Cristina Gonzalez

Interviewer: Adamaris Cruz Santiago and Rudy M Soto Jr.

Date: November 20, 2020

Location: Zoom

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

Length of interview: 01:08:35

Overseen by: Dr. Chrissy Yee Lau

Biographical Summary:

Cristina Gonzalez originally is from California, more specifically from West Los Angeles, however, she currently resides in Virginia along with her husband, who together have five children. Gonzalez has had the opportunity to work as an Archeologist and Historian, due to her degrees in Archaeology and Anthropology. There she took part in an Oral History study centered around African Americans living in Downtown San Diego. She currently runs her own business alongside her husband and navigates homeschooling for her children. Cristina joined the Auntie Sewing Squad because of her disappointment in the U.S. government's failure to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, Gonzalez holds the role of a “sewist” on the Auntie Sewing Squad.

Thematic Summary:

(00:00:40) Cristina Gonzalez talks about her experiences growing up as Latinx, including some of the conflicts between her family roots and her upbringing, and the sights her education path, and her profession, has given her. (00:20:52) She communicates her thoughts on the shift in the sociopolitical climate, her encounters and observations made when she joined the Auntie Sewing Squad. She expresses her discontent with the current government, and the blind support it receives from Trump’s followers. (00:39:15) Mrs. Gonzalez expresses the commitment the Auntie Sewing Squad tries to uphold to be as open and supportive as they can, how they avoid any problematic symbols or imagery when sewing their masks. The conversation leads to the informal system of support the Auntie Sewing Squad established to help one another. (00:53:00) She goes to express her dissatisfaction with her own shortcomings during this pandemic, expressing that she feels what she does is not enough for her family. (01:05:00) The interview concludes after she once again expresses her discontent with the current government, with heightened indignation, emphasizing the fact that the establishment Auntie Sewing Squad is a form of resistance to the current government, trying to provide a small relief that the current administration has not provided.

Interview Transcript

AC: Alrighty we are all set, hello everyone my name is Adamaris Cruz Santiago and Rudy Soto.

RS: Hello.

CG: Hi Rudy.

AC: Today is November 20, 2020 and we are here with our Auntie, Auntie Cristina Gonzalez from the Auntie Sewing Squad, um with our Oral History Project.

CG: Hello.

AC: Alrighty the first question is: Tell us a bit about how your childhood was? What was that like?

CG: Ohh, it was great. I grew up in Southern California, I'm from Los Angeles. My dad is from Mexico, so I grew up with my grandparents around the corner, who only spoke Spanish and it was great. They were my babysitters until I was in preschool, and my other Grandma, my mom's grandma lived a few minutes away, so I had family around, and that was great, I loved going up in the city, so many great experiences, I could walk to school and the weather is always good. [Laughs.] So that is where I grew up, West Los Angeles and then I started College there and then I went to San Diego for College. And I ended up graduating from Cal State San Marcos, of all places, [Takes a sip of her drink] with my bachelor's Degree, and then I went to San Diego State for my master's and I taught there for a while. [Grasp throat] Excuse me—and then I met my husband who is a Marine, not anymore but, and they sent us here, so here we are—In Virginia, which is fine, but still, you know no 24-hour taco place, so.

AC: Ohh that is true—

CG: Missing that, but uh my parents

RS: That's tragic.

CG: —but my parents are still alive, and my parents are still married and I have a younger brother and we are all very close. and um my two cousins from my dad's side I'm very close too. and we didn't have a super big family, but we were all pretty close. And I mean no childhood trauma, no major horrible things, I was pretty lucky as a kid. To umm, have a pretty happy and solid childhood.

AC: Awesome.

RS: That's great. So, you say your parents could only speak Spanish?

CG: My dad does, my mom [nods head], I mean so mom was a ESL teacher and she tried really hard, but she was from like from, Missouri. So, she didn't really speak Spanish, but she was all

in. Like she was the one who made my abuela teach her how to make tamales and posole and albondigas and all that stuff. [Laughter]. My dad was like “no I am going to grill like the meat”, but my mom the one who was hands on and really wanted to learn how to make all the dishes. So, I spoke excellent Spanish, until I went to school and then my dad was very [sighs] because when he came to Mexico, they put him in school and he didn't know any English. That kind of traumatized him as a kid, so he never really forced us to keep up on Spanish. I'm like [sigh's] “dad, why didn't you force us to keep up on Spanish”, after my grandparents died when I was really young, so like 4 and 5. I lost a lot of that, but I did several Summers of Graduate School in Mexico. It comes back to you when you have no choice [laughter]. So luckily there's like a couple of places here I can go and like talk to people and order food. They all speak Spanish and they know me and speak Spanish, and I am like good, make me practice [laughter]. Make me practice.

RS: So how was it—

CG: —my dad is terrible about that, I'm like dad “talk to the kids in Spanish” [laughter].

RS: That's great. So how was it growing up in a household where not everyone is entirely proficient in English?

CG: Well, my dad was proficient by the time I came along, I mean—

RS: Oh.

CG: —he was in the Air Force and he was in Vietnam. So, it wasn't like, I didn't have to translate for them or anything. My grandparents around the corner, yes but they died when I was 4 or 5.

RS: Oh, that's unfortunate.

CG: —I just remember it was cool being able to speak Spanish with them and the interesting, like the traditions. When they bless your tea when you're sick and all the fun different things. But I didn't have like— when I came to Virginia, I worked in Refugee resettlement. A lot of my kids spoke English, but their parents didn't, I didn't have that growing up. My dad speaks fine English and then he speaks fine Spanish in front of me and I'm like that's great for you dad. [Laughter]. You could've kept it up with me and my brother, so [sips her drink].

RS: Did you feel detached from your roots because you weren't able to speak Spanish as proficient as your parent's?

CG: Yeah, uh I would always say that growing up, the community I lived in West Los Angeles, was a lot of Mexicans families, a lot of Japanese families. My high school was very very blended, I wasn't super Mexican, but I really wasn't white. Uh but I lived in a Japanese neighborhood, one of my uncles is Japanese, so like we just sort of have this blend of kids. Who were you know one Jewish parent, one Catholic, you know mixed race um, just like me. So, I do definitely feel a little like that um, which is why I think I made such an effort in college and high

school, to take Spanish. To go to grad school in Mexico, do field school in Mexico, because I wanted to be more connected to that side of my family. Experience the culture, and the language and things like that.

AC: Um, in the Google Sheet that you filled out, a little bit just about yourself. You were asked obviously to write a little bit about yourself, and you mentioned um about being an Archeologist. That really grabbed my attention, and a Historian in San Diego. So, can you expand a little bit uh on those experiences?

CG: Yeah, when I um moved to San Diego area I went to Community College first and then I ended up going to Cal State San Marcos. They didn't have an Anthropology major, they had a minor and they also had a degree, the one I got called Human Development. Which was anthropology, psychology, biology, and sociology. I had to have all four, I guess it was like four minors and from that and just from like my childhood fantasy of being Indiana Jones. I always wanted to be an Archeologist and Anthropologist. So, then I got accepted to San Diego State for Graduate School for Anthropology, and I— one of my professors, was Anthropology and Latin American Studies. So that's how I ended up going to Mexico for Field School, because we were doing like a museum study for one of the villages. There was also a Public Health Study going on and the field school was like ahh ethnographic field methods classes, that we did every Summer. Also, you could opt in to do the Mixtec language program, which I didn't do, because that would've been like six weeks and I had a young child at the time. I mean he's still young, I guess, but [laughs] he's not an adult yet. Um so I couldn't go through the whole six weeks, so I did the field method, and um that was great. I really enjoyed the interviewing, just like you are doing now. This is the kind of thing I did in Mexico and then, I got a job at a Culture Resource Management Firm— Environmental Consulting Firm in San Diego. I worked there for 5 years, I worked there doing archaeology, I mean marketing and public health outreach programs too. We did a Oral History Study of African Americans in Downtown San Diego because the um, the Development Cooperation of Downtown San Diego really wanted to have an African American Thematic District. They already had an Asian American District, which had plaques and historical markers. Detailing key people, key events, key cultural items that happened in and around Downtown San Diego, and they wanted to do that for African Americans too. So, I got to do a lot of Oral Histories, a lot of Census data, building records, all this kind of fun stuff. Who lived here, who worked here, who owned these businesses, what was this business, what would happen in this building? There's not a lot of African American people in San Diego, because it's Mexico. Um, but when the trains came, the porters came and they tended to be African American workers. So then there were jazz clubs and boarding houses, and laundries that were only for African Americans, and that was a great— a great experience. A little different from what I was used to doing with Archaeology, but that was still super cool. So that's why I'm always like "I'll sign up for a survey", because I know how hard it is hard to get people to talk to you.

AC: Yeah.

CG: —and archaeology, I did that for like I said five years, and archeology is fun, but it's manual labor. A lot of times you're out all day, you're sometimes traveling you know weeks at a time and with school and a child, I couldn't keep doing that. When we moved here, I tried to get back—or stay in it, I tried to stay in it, but there were a couple constraints. The firms here wanted

somebody who could travel, the pay was considerably lower.

AC: Wow.

CG: —and I had a four-year-old at the time, and I was like: “I just don’t think it can even pay for daycare.” So, I didn’t do it for a while and I ended up going to work with Refugee resettlement, because the empathize in my undergrad was counseling services. It was something I could do that was close to home, I am in the D.C metro area, I don’t want to commute on the 95. I would rather chew my own foot off so. [Laughter]. People talk about Southern California traffic, [nods and waves her finger in disapproval], no. There is one freeway here, it goes from like New England to Florida and it's the only freeway.

AC: Wow.

CG: —and everybody is on it, all the time, even now in COVID like, D.C is 40 miles North of me, it's like no I do not want to commute. So, I did refugee services for a while, when the families would come, I would get the kids enrolled in school. I was the school liaison and I did that until my second son was almost a year old, because my husband went back to Iraq, when he was four months old. I couldn’t, they wanted me to come full time up in Arlington, and I’m like: “I can’t, I can’t.” I have a baby, another kid, nobody here, I had no — I have no family here. I am not commuting [nods in disapproval] nope. Luckily, I had choices, not everybody had choices, but I had choices. So, I did that for a long time and a lot of those kids, I watched them grow up because they went to the school my son was at. So, that’s been really nice, keeping up with these kids; informally and then, now my husband and I have our own company. Which is ultimately what we had always talked about doing, just because of the freedom and flexibility. We have 5 kids all together and it’s definitely worked for us. So, I miss anthropology, I mean I get to do informal things, you know. Go to museums and see things and teach my kids, but for work maybe when they're older.

AC: Yeah.

CG: —you know, because we have like George Washington grew up here, his childhood home is here. It’s like one thing we’re famous for, right and they have people who—they excavate there and you know, they find Civil War bullets and pottery and things like that. So, you know, I could volunteer there, I actually talked to them about it before um but right now with kids, well my kids aren't in school, nobody's in school here really. So, that will wait I think for my like, later in life when my kids are older and don’t need me all the time anymore. [Laughter].

AC: Why do you think society or humans should care about history and archaeology?

CG: Well, here’s a funny story: when COVID started, I got to start watching TV again. So that's something I typically got to do when my older sons in high school. So, he had to get up at 5:30 and get on the bus at 6:30 and we were up; early. So, I didn’t really get to watch a lot of TV, like I would make a commitment for, you know RuPaul’s Drag Race. Like I got to see it live, no spoilers, but other than that it was hard for me. So, I watched a documentary called “Ken Burns”, who did the Civil War documentary. He did one on the Dust Bowl, which was in the about 100

years ago and the panhandle of Texas. When the dust storms came and I was watching it like, masks there wearing masks and they are all getting sick and the experts are like no its fine, and it went on for 10 years. I'm like watching it, seeing all these similarities, even though it wasn't a virus it was still a serious public health disaster. I mean, such a small part of the country, but such a huge humanitarian disaster. I am like, these people were dying; I mean people were dying because of the dust in their lungs. Bankrupt, farms, families destroyed and I'm like "yeah wow this looks super familiar." People can't work, their land isn't producing anymore, they have to leave. They have no food, they have no money, like there is no work, like that sounds familiar. So that, that's one of my big things is, especially in a time like right now. You don't have to look very far back to see, similarities to what we are going through right now. The Influenza pandemic, the Spanish Flu, the Dust Bowl like, these things happen. As painful as it is, we have to band together and remember, like look: that didn't go on forever. It didn't, but how much more do we know now than we did 100 years ago. Like come on we need to do better than this. So, that's why I think it's super super important because there's just so many lessons right there in front of you. Like through this but in the meantime, you can't live on dusty dead land. People are dying, you have to help them get somewhere where there's water and food. I mean it was a lot of lessons, a lot of lessons to be learned in history. That's just with the with COVID, I mean so many other things you could apply the same thing too. It's like wow look how nothing's changed almost, didn't we learn anything so.

RS: That does seem to be the issue that we can look back in history and reflect on the actions of the past. Let's see here.

AC: Did you want to ask a question Rudy or do you want me to go ahead?

RS: I'll go ahead and ask one.

AC: Awesome.

RS: So possibly a follow-up to the previous question: What can we learn from different generations in regards to social change?

CG: Uh, well my parents are both still alive and they're in their 70s and my grandma passed away, about nine years ago and she was a hoot because she remembered like the Great Depression. Her brother died when she was a kid of something called consumption, which I guess a lot of people died of back in the day. Which I think was just the general term for like Tuberculosis or Pneumonia or the flu or something, consumption. Like they couldn't breathe and they died. So, it's it was interesting listening to my grandma's stories before she passed, but even my mom's stories now and my dad remembering things that happened when they grew up and the hard times that they hit and you kind of realize. Like how good do we have it now honestly, I mean we—I thought we struggled a little growing up. I mean I was a very happy kid, but we had one bathroom [chuckles]. We didn't go on vacations and fancy trips, I mean we went camping. We did fun happy things, but I didn't go on a plane until I was 15. There was no extra money for that kind of stuff, like I didn't get a car when I turned 16. I knew I'd have to pay for college, that kind of stuff. I—I remember that and my husband does too because we're like we cannot make things too easy for these kids. Of ours because, it you have to want it and you have to work for it

and that's one thing like. I just get from my dad and from my mom. Like the amount of things, they did and struggling, to grow up. When I was growing up, sometimes my mom would work two different jobs and my dad worked at the post office and he was also the Union Rep. So, he was working all day, fielding phone calls and so I think one of the lessons like long term is just: hustling. Like you, you make it work for you. You're not necessarily gonna fit, in a nine to five box and I certainly don't. I did it, I hated it, um I made it work for me. I've always made it work for me. Whatever path I chose, you know archaeology was nice because I got to be outside all day. But I knew that was something I couldn't keep up forever, especially with kids. A lot of archaeologists don't have kids. They're able to travel, they don't, they don't have a lot of ties holding them to one place. The diggers anyway, you know and the higher up jobs are few and far between. So I knew realistically, this wasn't going to be my forever path in life. So that's definitely something I—I took from my grandma and my parents. Find a way, you know glue it together, put some tape on it and make it work. Make it fit and that's something I do like with my masks. If I have scraps of fabric, I'm like look I can fit the pattern on here somehow. It may not be straight, it might be crooked, but at least I can get one more out of this. Like make it work, make it fit, use every little scrap and figure it out, make it work for you. Don't don't try to fit in, to the shapes that are given to you. You can make it whatever shape you want, like and I'm lucky that I've been able to do that with a lot of things in life, make it work for me.

AC: Awesome, that's a beautiful message. Speaking about masks—

RS: Yeah, it is.

AC: Speaking about masks, tell us about why you joined the Auntie Sewing Squad and how?

CG: When this all started, I was stubborn and like mad and I was like “I'm not gonna sew masks.” This is stupid, like I'm stuck home with my kids. I had to cancel my Spring break trip to California. I was mad I'm like we're home and I mean we followed all the rules, but I was—I sew a lot. I saw a lot of my own clothes and I was just like I'm not—for like a month. I was just like I'm not doing it and then one day I found some fabric. I was like I'm gonna make a skirt of this and then a friend of mine was like, “hey I have a bolt of this fabric” and it was the same fabric. I'm like all right, maybe I'll make the skirt and a matching mask for fun. Um she was like “I'm gonna give you this fabric but would you just make me a mask with it.” I'm like okay, so I made her two and then I just put it out there, after I figured it out because I tried a couple different patterns and made one that worked for me at first. I have a—I have a lot of fabric like a lot of fabric. I have scraps I've saved and I'm glad I saved all the scraps because they are perfect for masks. I mean you don't need a lot to make a mask so I just was like alright. I guess I'm just gonna start sewing masks, so I put it out to my friends and family and neighbors. Like anybody wants one free, like I'm not charging, don't give me money. I have the fabric I have elastic and people would pay me anyway. Like my friend would pick it up and she'd just leave 10 bucks and I'm like no you know. Um and finally I was like I had sewn about 50 for friends and family and I was like you know. Um I should apply for this Auntie Sewing Squad thing I saw and um do it for people who really need it because like I love my friends and neighbors, but they can all afford to go to Target and buy a mask. So I, I signed up, I joined and it's been great. We— I'm still using the scraps that I have. I haven't needed to um buy any elastic or fabric because I'm kind of a hoarder and it's been really rewarding for me. To use up all those scraps that have just been

sitting here in my office and go to places that really need them and that's why I did it. I'm like all right, I've done enough for my friends and family no one else is asking. I still have this skill and it's also strangely soothing for me, to just sit and sew. Like it just—when there's nothing else I can control you know the kids I've done all their schooling. The house you know as clean as it's gonna get, we can't go anywhere we've had to cancel so many things. It, it's something I can do to help and that's something I can control. Like all right I'm gonna do this because it's soothing it calms me down. It makes me feel like I'm accomplishing something and it—it's a really important thing that we're doing.

RS: Have you—have you encountered anyone that is anti-masks [heavily nods] during your time—during with the Auntie-Sewing Squad?

CG: So, here's a funny story. When this all started, our kids schools closed and they were virtual the rest of the school year and then when school went back in August. It started late and then they were gonna have the high schoolers do virtual like this for five hours a day.

AC: Wow.

RS: [Inaudible]—.

CG: —and then my little ones would have to do that for two days a week and I'm like this isn't gonna work for anybody. First of all, like my first floor of my house is one big open concept. So, three of them doing this at the same time, wasn't gonna work. So I moved my older son to the virtual high school, the State offers. He still has to check in every day, but he doesn't have to sit live like this all day. He checks in once a day and does his work on—when you know before the due date, but pretty much at his own speed. The other two we tried it, we really tried, but my kids are in third and fifth grade. It just—it was too much, especially my eight-year-old. He's like [jumps and bounces] this the whole time and it's really— he doesn't want to sit there and watch and he did he really tried. So before it started my husband's like we should just homeschool them and I'm like “no no no”. I would rather chew my own foot off than drive the 95 or homeschool. But we tried it and we were finally like yeah, we're just gonna, we're just gonna homeschool them. So, they are officially homeschooled. I have a friend who homeschooled for a long time, so she gave me a great resource and I made a Curriculum and a Lesson Plan and it's fine. Like they're doing fine I have them doing lessons that are grade appropriate and me and my husband are a super team effort. But we had a new contract start in San Diego last month. We knew my husband was going to have to be out there, to kick off that contract. Up at Camp Pendleton because we do Cyber Security, um for the Department of Defense. So, he was going to have to be out there, so then we got to talking like well maybe we should drive. Maybe we should drive to California and then my 10-year-old was like, “maybe we should go to Yellowstone and see bears” and I was like yeah. So, I was nervous about it, but we took a six-week road trip, across the country around the country during a pandemic with three kids in the car. Um we stayed away from people, we mostly stayed at like campgrounds and cabins away from people. But you want to talk about COVID denial [laughs] South Dakota doesn't exist there. You wouldn't know except for the people at our hotel the, the people behind the desk. Nobody else in South Dakota, it's not a thing apparently. Like we went to Deadwood South Dakota where “Wild Bill Hickok” was shot [connection issues] and all this cool history because this is [connection issues] all. Like

live music, outside in The Square people everywhere and I was like [looks in suspicion] “but, but don't you guys realize like there's a pandemic happening.” No not in South Dakota, not in South Dakota. We didn't make it up to North Dakota which I hear is even worse, but South Dakota, nope ummh. We went to eat one morning and the restaurant was full, like no social distancing. Nobody like it, it was packed, it was like a typical Saturday morning at your favorite breakfast place. Insane I was like this is crazy this is crazy, there's the super, super denial and you can see now how well that's working out for South Dakota. Um so we went to Yellowstone for eight days. Drove down to Vegas, Vegas also kinda pretending COVID is not a thing. There were so many people in Vegas, but they had every other slot machine closed, so I'm sure that helped. I mean I'm guilty, I still was there and I was, “like oh my gosh this is crazy”, but yeah, I have definitely run into the anti-mask crowd. Um my husband has a full beard like a big beard. So, he struggles with it just because it doesn't go over his face. So, he's found a bandana works good for him because it covers his face. It fits over better than a mask does and they'll let him into Costco with a bandana and I guess he looks like a cowboy or whatever. [Chuckles], but oh yeah, I see those anti-mask people and I'm just like, that's great that you feel so strongly about something. Um I don't think it's hard to show a little like common courtesy and decency for the five minutes it takes me to go into Target, you know. Like for the most part we don't go a lot of places. We really—we've really not been and—saves a lot of money we never go out to eat or anything. For the couple of times, I go in the store and you see someone kind of being a dick and you're just like does “it—is it, is your like freedom so important?” This kid gets minimum wage to put carts away and you're giving him crap about wearing a mask. Like just those people you know they're scared, I know they're scared and I know they're upset. They're also really pissing me off, but Cal—or Virginia's an open carry state and I don't feel like getting shot. So, I usually just, like go inside and tell the manager like please go rescue your guy, because there's an asshole out there, excuse my french [chuckle]. Yeah, I definitely encounter those people. [sighs] I just, you know, I have some obscene masks I wear um.

RS: Pardon.

CG: I have some masks that are inappropriate, um that like say inappropriate things and have inappropriate pictures on them. So, I don't really have to say anything to people if they just see the things on my mask. [Laughter and chuckles].

AC: It's like the mask speaks for itself [laughs and nods].

CG: Yeah yeah, it's um I don't need to say anything. I have resting bitch face though, So like people—.

RS: I know how that feels.

CG: So yeah, I definitely encounter it, especially here in Virginia because I don't, I don't know. There's a lot of like redneck military whatever and it's just like I get it. You know this it starts with this freedom and then they're gonna take this away. I'm like yeah okay like Obama [44th U.S President] was gonna come for your guns [sighs]. But I can't, I don't argue with people on the internet. So, I just share pictures of all the beautiful masks I'm sewing and let it speak for itself.

RS: That's great.

AC: How do you feel about the current government especially in regards to its handling of the COVID 19 pandemic?

CG: [Sighs heavily].

RS: That's a sensitive question, I guess.

CG: Yeah so, I'm super—he's an idiot and he's run away from any sort of responsibility. He hasn't been to a COVID task force meeting in months. Not that he would do anything anyway, but he, he just doesn't care. It's all about him, it's all about him and now I think he realizes he's in trouble, like possibly legal trouble, hopefully. It doesn't matter, none of it matters to him and they're all enabling him. Which is really pathetic, to see all these people who—you know you can have principles that are different from mine, but just ignoring a quarter of a million dead people is not really a principle. I am not a religious person at all, so um to see religious people like. Like one of my friends is Mormon and she posted a picture of like Jesus with her arm, his arms around Trump and I'm like “are you kidding me” like—.

RS: Oh Lord.

AC: Wow—

CG: MMMH Jesus would not have any time for his nonsense. I grew up Catholic and I know Jesus would not have any time for this bag of lard honestly. So, I yeah I'm super glad that he lost. I mean Biden was not my first or second or third choice, but he's not gonna make things worse. I'm not gonna have to wake up every day, like great what horrible thing is happening today. Are we drilling in the Arctic wildlife refuge yet? How many more kids are in cages? Like every day for four years has just been like, ahh what cartoon villain thing can we do today. Let's make National Parks smaller so, we can open it up for drilling and I'm like. [Places her hands on head as a sign of frustration] Are you just looking for things to do to be terrible because that's what it looks like. So yeah, I'm not a fan and um I'm looking forward to, like some decency and kindness in our leadership, so.

AC: I think many people are hoping that too [chuckles], you're not the only one [chuckles].

CG: Like I just don't want to wake up every day like what now you know. In the scheme of things, I am fortunate that a lot of these terrible policies do not affect me personally. I have a great privilege in that, you know. I— I'm not at childbearing age, oh and I guess I am still a childbearing age, but I'm not a childbearing willingness anymore. I don't have a lot of the issues, that—I have a tremendous amount of empathy. For people that do, for my trans friends, for my immigrant friends; my dad is an immigrant. Like I just have a tremendous amount of empathy so, you know one of the ways I can show it is to sew masks for people who need it.

AC: Yeah, the world needs a little bit more empathy today for sure—.

CG: —and I'll be the first to tell you that I'm a terrible person. Like I always joke about that I'm like I'm a horrible person because I—I will tell the truth when people don't necessarily want to hear it. Like when you asked: Like do you like the President? I'm like “no he's a effing jerk.” Whatever look at me I'm like you wanted me to answer you.

AC: This leads to my next question, if you had the opportunity to sit across the current president of the United States what would you say to him and what would you ask him to do?

CG: Well, first I probably have to ask him to wear a mask [laughs]. I don't know what I would say to him, I don't think he's very smart. Like I really just think he's skated by on money and intimidation because he has so much money, or at least pretends like he has a lot of money, and it's kind of a bully. He reminds me of a boss I used to have, so like I'm pretty sure he wouldn't want to listen to anything I have to say because I'm not a supermodel anymore. But I don't know, probably just... I don't know what I would say to him, cuz it wouldn't matter cuz it's all about him and he's got it in his head that everyone's out to get him and then, you know, that his money is going to protect him. So maybe I pull some like Ghosts of Christmas Past sort of like “Not gonna save you this time” [evil laugh]. So yeah I don't know. That's a tough one. I could be mean, and I could be frank, I don't think he'd get it, I don't think he'd care, I think he'd probably insult me for my looks or something. Cuz he's a petty small person like that so...I don't know.

RS: Earlier you mentioned someone posting a picture of Jesus hugging Trump, what do you say—what correlation do you see between the religious demographic and the current Trump supporters?

CS: I have a lot of religious friends, a lot of my Methodists and Episcopalian friends are super just appalled at the administration, they post a lot of beautiful biblical quotes about loving thy neighbor and taking care of the others. And then I have like some other neighbors and people in the neighborhood who are Mormon, and my other neighbor I forget, they go to church but I'm not sure the denomination. But they are very much like “he's a man of God” and “Jesus is looking out for him,” and I'm like he don't even go to church. Like he's doing any church thing and any meetings with any religious leaders is just to shore up support like he doesn't care about you, you know, he doesn't care. And as a person whose non-religious, I personally don't care about his personal life and whatever arrangements he and his wife have made. Like, good fine, live your truth, but to see religious people who claim that like “He's so godly,” and “God sent him.” I'm like, but- but no, like, how can you say that? Just the hypocrisy just is beyond me, and it's part of the reason I don't go to church anymore [laughs]. Like it just makes me- I can't imagine going to church and having them pray for Trump, like “We need to pray-” like no, no we don't. There are more people out there who need good thoughts and prayers and not him, not him at all. He did it to himself. There are people who are not working for nine months, there are people right now whose kids haven't been in school and they have to go to work and what are they supposed to do? Like there are other people who need help, not him not. Not him.

RS: That's unfortunate to hear.

AC: Did you want to ask another question, Rudy? Or did you want me to ask another one?

RS: No, go ahead please.

AC: Um, alrighty, um let's see. Oh, have you seen any challenges or heard of any challenges of people who are like and the Auntie Sewing Squad whether that's people saying mean comments on Facebook posts, like or any type of challenges that the team or members of the group have felt or seen?

CG: I've never seen anything talking bad about the group, I never seen anything in the group that's negative. If anything, everyone in the group is super conscious of their language, conscious of being inclusive, conscious of even down to the patterns of fabric we sew for different tribes. We want to make sure we're not putting anything offensive, any colors that are offensive, any images that may not be appropriate. So, we are always super mindful of the things we're sewing and- and who it's going to. You know like obviously you wouldn't want to send Pocahontas fabric to The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. Being super super mindful of that kind of thing. I saw I haven't seen any negativity towards the group from anyone outside the group and in the group, it's definitely very supportive. Yeah, I haven't seen any negativity, and when people are like— occasionally there will maybe need correcting. Like well “Actually we're going to do it this way,” people are very receptive to criticism which is so refreshing right now. Like agh “Thank you for educating me, I did not know the color red wasn't good for the Lakota,” or “Thank you for correcting me, I didn't know that we should be sending this kind of style,” “Hey I want to double-check, is this fabric going to work for this group because I want to make sure it's appropriate?” So it's really refreshing to be in a group of people who are willing to be educated, and learn about different cultures and different groups and what they need and what's appropriate. And instead of being like “Well, they'll take what I give them.” Like, no we're going to be mindful to their cultural preferences and things that are offensive. Like, we're not going to purposely send them things that we can't- they can't use, we're going to be mindful. And we're doing this with love, like we're doing this for free with love. If you're putting all the effort into it, send them something that they'll use. So, I would say it's been overwhelmingly positive, even in times— cuz there's been a couple times where someone's been like— maybe used a term... I think they used like Indian or something, “Like well, we're going to refer to them.” We don't refer to them as Sioux, we refer to them as Lakota, or like one of the indigenous terms they prefer not to use on themselves. Like “Thank you for telling me, I didn't know that, I appreciate that, I appreciate being educated, you know. That's been super refreshing cuz there's not been a lot of that in the world lately.

AC: It's beautiful to be a part of— it would be beautiful to be part of such a group that truly works together.

CG: Yes, they do.

AC: That's awesome.

RS: Early you mentioned offensive colors, what kind of colors would constitute as an offensive in the group?

CG: So, it depends who we're sewing for, but currently we're doing a big a big ask, we call them asks, of several thousand masks for Standing Rock in South Dakota and North Dakota. And one of the colors is red, this is not a color that they want. Also, anything with like Day of the Dead, or skeleton imagery. They don't want any of that, so um that I'm mindful of and they're getting. They're getting R2D2 Christmas masks, and then there's another asks where she wanted kids masks but no Christmas masks. So, I happen to have a scrap of fabric that had dog paws on it. And I was able to get 10 masks out of that, and it's perfect it's not Christmassy. It's just paw prints and it's perfect for kids. So being mindful of cultural— each ask has its own requirement. Sometimes they'll have no requirements at all. We just need adult size, any pattern, any prints. Sometimes they want gender-neutral fabrics, sometimes they want more boyish fabrics. Because a lot of times, you know, you'll get Disney princesses, but not a lot of plain colors like gray, black, blue, that are plain and anybody could wear them. Maybe not all kids want a big pattern or whatever. So, every every ask is different. Sometimes there's no requirement but this one I'm finishing up happens to have some. And luckily, I have a lot of fabric to oblige.

AC: That's so cool, many people might think it's just simply making masks, but there's so many things taken into consideration. I think that's awesome; I think that makes the group unique, and it's not just “hey we make masks.” But you guys take into consideration a lot of things and that's really nice.

CG: We do

AC: What does a day look like for you? Like when you're selling masks?

CG: So, because I was gone for six weeks, I didn't do any sewing, but to alleviate my guilt I donated money [laughs] and—so right now I have um, I think 30 masks that need to go out. Ten of them by Monday and then the other 20 by the end of the week. And I don't commit- unless I know I'm going to have time to do it. So, a typical day cuz we're homeschooling and I'm working, is I get up, I get my kids started breakfast, started on some schoolwork, and then I will do some actual work and I won't start sewing until the afternoon. Till they're- they're done with the things that I need to help them with, and I'm—they're playing outside or playing video games, whatever, they're done with their work for the day and I don't have to be on them anymore. So, I can sit and cut, cuz I had to cut out all the pieces first and then also... So today I didn't start sewing until about 4 o'clock my time, and I cut out all the pieces first. I did that the last two evenings, I stopped and cut, and then my kid sat at the table with me yesterday, doing some work sheets while I was cutting at the same time, cuz I could do that while I'm sitting with them. And then—so I started sewing at about four, I took a break for like an hour, and then from five to six—No, from six to seven, so I started to call. I was back here [pointing to her sewing area, right behind her] sewing that pile up, and ironing them to get ready to finish them. So, I don't really have a schedule, it's just sort of slapping everything together and hopefully it all gets done. Like I said I have a curriculum I made for the kids, and a schedule, so I have days that they do Spanish, days they do science. Every day they do math, and reading, and writing. One of my sons plays piano, so he has practice every day. So, it's kind of like a checklist, every day I have a little list on the computer. Like “Okay, did you do any math? Let's do- go practice piano.” I have to give them things that necessarily I don't have to help them with all the time, cuz I'm still trying to run a business. And you know things come up that you have to do right away for work, and

that's been hard to do with them home all the time. Like uh, right now, we just got into a small business administration program, and I need to update my business plan. And I did my business plan about five years ago, but the FDA has all these requirements. So, I'm just sitting there like- (sigh) I have to update it I know I'm going to do it, and they're gonna send it back like "well you need to fix this-" Cause that's how they are, they send it back like five times. But it's hard to get chunks of time to do anything during the day when all my kids are home, and doing school, and things like that. So, I just kind of pull it all together whenever I can and a lot of time by stuff waits until the afternoon. Like they're done with school, and the house is in order, the trash is out, things are cleaned up, the mail... whatever. And I'm able to stay in here for like an hour, and either or sew, or get some actual work done. So, it's chaotic [laughs].

AC: You want to ask a question Rudy?

RS: Yes, what are some challenges you see people in this role, or on the team encounter?

CG: Some challenges on the Auntie Sewing Squad? Well, some of our members might be caregivers to disabled family members. A lot of us have her kids at home all the time, a lot of us are working still and balancing so many things, but that's something that a lot of people are really good at. You know we're crafty, we can figure out how to make things work, we can figure it out. Like, I originally started sewing masks, I downloaded some patterns, I sewed some up, I figured out what I liked and didn't like and I have two patterns that are basically my own. That I've taken pieces from here and there and just sorta have made them in a way that I like how they fit my kids, like how they fit. My friends who have given them to, like how they fit. Just the challenge is just life is still happening for so many people, and I think about it all the time. How fortunate I am that I don't have to go anywhere, you know, I don't have to be up at 5:30 [AM] and driving to DC and I'm not a nurse. I mean technically I'm an essential worker, but I don't have to go at base, I don't have to go in the building, I'm at home and I'm fortunate that I'm able to stay home with my kids, and also do some good for other people and I think so much about the people who have to go to work at the grocery store, at the hospital, the police department, you know, the mail. I feel so bad for my mailman and the UPS guy, I'm constantly foisting water and snacks on them like "Hi! Sorry!". So, it is a challenge because you want to stay home, you want to stay away from people, but people still have to work, people still have to go to the grocery store. And I have a nice house with a big property for my kids to play, I can't imagine living in a little apartment with all of my chaos, you know? I definitely know that the challenges people are facing right now, just not enough space, being stuck inside, not knowing when you're going to see your family again safely. You have to work, so many Industries have been out of work. So, a lot of the-the ladies in the group, they have the flexibility and freedom to do a lot of things. But they are still facing challenges; disabled family members and work, and life gets in the way. So, we did an Auntie care exchange this month, where you- you put your name in and you agreed to send a care package to somebody, and then you got a care package. So, we try, they try, the moderators try to do little things like that, and I see in the group a lot of the ladies who live in the same area will swat like "Hey, I have lemons if anybody wants some." Or "Hey, this guy gave me a bunch of sandwiches today if you're in Pasadena, come get them!" You know, so we got the Auntie care exchange, and I got a bunch of boxes filled with candy, and sewing supplies, it's great. My kids are like "M&M's" [chuckles] and I got new scissors, and a new measuring tape, and a box of moon pies which is a big hit with my kids. So, you know

making an effort to show that you're appreciated and just do a little care package, was a nice thing. And I sent one, I sent one to LA. Which is fun, it's nice to be able to do something for somebody else that isn't just sewing masks but taking care of each other.

RS: So, from our position you do a lot more than most people would during these troubling times, but do you- do you yourself feel like it's not enough?

AC: I always feel like I'm not doing enough, I always feel that way. I think maybe that just comes with parenting, I just always feel like I'm— it's never enough, and they're going to be so far behind by the time they ever, if they ever, go back to school. They're not learning enough and they're not doing this and they're not doing that. I always- I always feel like that, like oh "I didn't cook enough" or "I didn't this," "I didn't that," and my husband is always like "You- you did this, you did that, we did this together. They're going to be fine." I know, okay, but I do, I worry tremendously I mean my fifth grader, he was in the gifted program, and the chorus, and piano. He's supposed to be going to middle school next year. My oldest son is a senior, he has no senior year. He was in ROTC, he was in leadership that's gone, like it's gone. None of it's happening, prom, I mean I don't know you know. He's just here all the time, like, I feel so bad for him cuz he works so hard all these years in high school to move up to be a lieutenant and ROTC, and they just say they're not- they're not doing it. So I do, I do feel bad, I know I'm not alone, I do feel like homeschooling was the right call, because I'm making them do Spanish which they weren't doing in school. And going on a road trip was hugely educational for them, I mean, we learned so much history and science and biology. I mean, we saw bears like 20 feet away from us fighting over an elk carcass. How many other kids got to do that this year [laughs]? So, I can logically talk myself down, but I do feel like it's never enough, like some mornings I'm like "You guys just go make cereal, because I have this form I have to fill out," you know? "I have this you know tax document to do, I have this thing I have to do today," So there are times where it is a struggle, like it does- it does feel like it's never enough. But I'm sure my kids will tell you different, you know. I'm sure they're just thrilled that there are lucky charms [laughs].

RS: I'm su- I'm sure that all your family appreciates all your efforts.

CG: Oh yeah, I'm sure they do too. It's just as the mom, you know, you just- you always feel like it's not enough and your kids are going to be, like, scarred for life. In reality I think they're thrilled that they don't have to get up so early, and that their lessons are pretty much done in a couple hours and they can go like—I don't know. My kids have been dissecting one of our jack-o'-lanterns in the backyard, and like, throwing their like— We have a... a kids crossbow that shoots pencils. So, they've been doing that, you know, building like a mud trap for something I don't know what they're doing out there. But they're having the time of their lives so I'm like "All right." You know, don't feel so bad, they're having fun. They're doing science.

AC: Awesome. What do you think are the responsibilities of an individual, especially one of the new generations, in regards to issues of social justice?

CG: So, like younger than me kids?

AC: Yea, like kids of whether it's Generation Z or Gen Z.

CG: Well, I think of my son, he's a senior and this is something we talked about a lot. You know "Just because you have what you need and it doesn't affect you, doesn't mean- doesn't mean it doesn't affect somebody else." And my son doesn't look like me at all, he's really tall, he has blonde hair, blue eyes. Don't know how that happened. And I'm like "Look, you- you are the apex predator in the country, like, no one's ever going to give you grief, no one's ever going to stop you, or accuse you of doing something." Me and— My brother looks way more Mexican than I do, he could like sneeze funny and the cops will pull him over growing up. Like I'm- You- Thi- These are the facts, son. You are not gonna have the struggles, because in this country you're the one that nobody- nobody thinks anybody like you does anything wrong. You got the blonde hair, the blue eyes, you're tall, you're handsome. You know? You're the one who gets away with stuff. And with that, comes responsibility and like you have to look out for the other people. Just because you might get away with stuff, you got to speak out when you see things aren't right, and you have to help the less fortunate. So that was a really good thing I'm glad that he was doing ROTC, because they had a huge community service component to it. And they did you know meals to the elders, raking leaves for people who are disabled and homebound. So many different things like the food bank, he volunteered at the food bank a few times. Just opportunities to see what you're responsible for in this world. You know, you— we have a responsibility to each other, we have to look out for each other. And just because the government doesn't legislate it, that's fine, but we can still do what we feel is right. Which is you know, Toys for Tots, let's go give some of these toys that you never opened and never played with. Let's go take some meals to the food bank, because we have enough food this year and not everybody else does. Like, laying that foundation for him to see that his-his view is going to be different from mine, just based on how he looks. So, trying to not put it in his head that he's better than other people, cuz he's not. He's 17 he's kind of dumb, like all teenage boys. But giving him that foundation that you have to be responsible for other people, you got to be responsible for the kid who's being ignored for, the kid who maybe doesn't understand things the way you do. For the people who don't have enough money and I think with him I've done a really good job. He- he had a friend whose parents are going through a pretty contentious divorce, and they were struggling financially and him and a bunch of other kids pooled their money and bought this kid a guitar for his birthday. I had no idea that he was doing this like "It was my idea," I had nothing to do with this. Like, "You did what?" Like, "Yea, we pooled all our money and got him this cool used guitar and he loves it," and I'm like "Aw." You know just looking out for other kids, and so just you know; legally we might not have to do that. But it feels good to help people, and it really doesn't take anything away from you to make sure somebody else has what they need. When you have plenty, so that's my hope for the future, and for my kids, I guess.

AC: Did you have a question, Rudy? Or did you want me to...?

RS: Sorry, I muted. What do you think- What do you think are the responsibilities of an individual, especially for one of the new generation, in regards to the issues of social justice and what can be the most effective way to partake in his responsibility?

CG: I think that's what Adamaris just asked.

AC: Yes, I just asked that one.

RS: I'm so sorry.

CG: No, it's okay. But, just continue to- it starts with awareness, I mean really being aware of your privilege. Being aware that you have— yeah, I earned all of this, but I have enough to help other people. So, I- Do I have to? No, but I think it's the right thing to do, especially right now.

AC: Did you want to ask something Rudy, or did you want me to—.

RS: Yes.

AC: Okay, go for it.

RS: What other messages would you like to send to the youth who decide not to participate in social justice issues?

CG: I understand a lot of kids are afraid to take a stand or we don't know what's going on in their home or how they were raised. I'm fortunate that my parents and I see eye-to-eye when it comes to political and social justice movements, for the most part. I don't have that estrangement or difficulty with my parents when it comes to, like the election. We don't have that now that fight issue, of um “Oh how could you think that way?” or “Whatever, the president is great.” Whatever, we don't have that today, but you don't know the struggles of the kids today who—who may not have parents who are supportive, or who understand them. And so, I think it's okay to be a quiet observer and I think it's okay to figure out your convictions before going all out on something that maybe you'll regret later. It's okay to take some time and learn about different issues before you're really comfortable speaking about them, and it's okay to be wrong and get corrected. Maybe you're really interested in gun safety laws you know, but maybe you don't know a lot about. It's okay to get educated, it's okay get corrected, it's okay to speak up, and it's also okay to be quiet. Learn to listen, don't always feel the need to talk to fill space. You learn a lot more from listening than talking, so it's okay to take your time and kind of digest the issues. You know, you may not have any stake in reproductive rights, maybe that doesn't really matter to you as a—as a guy. Like maybe that's just not something that's an issue to a guy. But maybe gun rights are, so go with your heart to what's important to you and see where your talents can best be used. But take your time, figure it out, don't be afraid to try. You know, “I'll go to that rally, I'll go to that meeting, I'll check out what this candidate has to say.” It's like a date, it doesn't hurt to go have coffee with the person one time. It doesn't mean you're getting married, it's just coffee. Just learn and listen and maybe that particular issue isn't the one that stirs your passion. You know, maybe child hunger is you know, maybe immigrant rights. Maybe you're just more comfortable being in the background and doing postcards instead of making phone calls.

That's okay too, everybody has value and everybody has something to bring. You know, I don't mind public speaking, but I- I don't like political stuff. I've never gone to a rally. This is my politics [points to her sewing area, which is right behind her], like, quietly here and my house. This is how I show my support, you know. In a different—we all have different ways we can do things. So, don't be afraid to be quiet, don't be afraid to be loud, learn.

AC: That's nice. Lastly, to wrap it up I have a last question. How would you like the Auntie Sewing Squad to be remembered in the future or talked about?

CG: Well, it's funny because as-as a great of a thing as we're doing, a lot of it we joke about being so angry. Like we're rage sewing. We aren't doing this as a joyful thing, we're doing this because of a catastrophic failure of our government to prepare when they knew. When they knew something like this could happen. There was a pandemic plan in place, there was a pandemic team in place, there was stuff stockpiled and it was all frittered away and ignored. So as much as we're doing a good service out of love, we're pissed. Like, we're really mad that we're having to cobble together this informal system of supplies when they had every opportunity to do it. So, we're happy to fill the service, we're mad that we're doing it and the government has failed. Especially because they knew and they had the plan, they had the- the items, you know. I mean the stories of like, the feds interfering with shipments of equipment to the states. And it's just mind boggling, and here we are just a bunch of random ladies and men, and all genders in between who happen to sew are like "Alright fine. If you're going to fail these people then we will- we'll do it. We'll- we'll complain about you the whole time though." Like and we do- I mean, some of our chat groups are like "Uugh," you know? We're- We're happy to do it for the groups that need it, we're mad that the leadership had every opportunity and failed. So, what I hope they remember is that we weren't all just like these joyful old ladies sitting beside our sewing machine like this was- this was an act of rebellion and activism and anger. Rage sewing is honestly my favorite word, cause that really describes it, like, this shouldn't have to happen. They had every opportunity, and they just didn't care and so we're doing it and we're cursing their names the whole time because they failed. They failed to have infrastructure and supplies in place, but they knew they needed. They knew this was gonna to happen again, it was inevitable. There were plans in place for when a pandemic hit. I mean, SARS [Severe acute respiratory syndrome] hit and everybody freaked out, and it killed a couple people in the US. Still, everybody freaked out and now people are actually dying and they're like "Well, they actually died from something else." Like any excuse not to believe it, fine. The fact is you knew this was coming, you failed to prepare. So, I hope they remember that we were angry too [chuckles].

AC: Well, alrighty we thank you for your time.

CG: My pleasure!

AC: It was awesome getting to hear your story, and you know, the work that you're doing and... you know. It's really- it's really nice.

CG: Well if you need a mask let me know I'll sew you one.

AC: [Laughs] Awesome.

RS: I'll be sure to be contacting you.

CG: I have Buddy the Elf fabric right now [laughs].

AC: Awesome. Thank you so much, and you know, thank you for everything you're doing and I'm more than sure that people who are receiving those masks are just as much more appreciative of it.

CG: Well, thank you and good luck with your project and with school.

AC: Alrighty thank you so much.

CG: Bye, bye Rudy, bye Adamaris [waves].

AC: Bye-bye.

RS: Alright, keep marching, ma'am.

CG: Thank you.

AC: Bye-bye [waves].

RS: Bye-bye.

[End of Interview]