

4-29-2021

Interview with Erica Almaguer

Erica Almaguer

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Interviewee: Erica Almaguer

Interviewers: Genevieve Salinas, Alexis Hernandez

Date: 29 April 2021

Location: Zoom

Collection: Auntie Sewing Squad Oral History Archive, SBS 112: Women and Social Change, From 1890s to the Present, Spring 2021

Length: 00:42:34

Overseen by: Dr. Chrissy Lau

Bio:

Erica Almaguer is a Latinx woman who is from the Bay Area and a mother of three. She received her Bachelor of Arts from San Francisco State University (SFSU) and she is the current director of the Early Childhood Education Center (ECEC) at SFSU. Before joining the Auntie Sewing Squad, she made scrub caps for nurses and doctors.

Thematic Outline:

(00:00:44) Erica Almaguer shares about her experiences growing up in the working poor neighborhoods of San Francisco. (00:05:07) She explains how she got involved with activism with Amnesty International in high school and how she felt empowered to use her voice when she attended SFSU. (00:11:19) Almaguer then discusses about how the pandemic has affected her family, especially her children's emotional wellbeing. (00:14:18) Almaguer describes how she made masks for her family and grocery store employees and how she got involved with the Auntie Sewing Squad. (00:24:10) As the director of the Early Childhood Education Center, Almaguer discusses how she was able to reopen the center and protect her staff by providing blankets and food for the children. (00:37:30) She describes the amount of masks, blankets, and scrub caps she has made and the impact it had on her. (00:39:00) Finally, Almaguer discusses her thoughts about the COVID-19 vaccine and how she has helped others to obtain the vaccine.

Oral History Transcript

00:00:02

Genevieve Salinas (GS): Alright hello everybody, my name is Genevieve Salinas and I'm here with my colleague Alex Hernandez. The date is April 29th, 2021 and we are here conducting an interview with the incredible Auntie Almaguer via Zoom. She is part of the amazing Auntie Sewing Squad who provides masks to those in need and today we hope to provide some insight to future listeners as to what life was like during the COVID-19 pandemic. Who are the real heroes? Let's find out! So Auntie, do you mind telling us about the community you grew up in? What was family life like and were there any important social justice issues that were taking place during this time?

00:00:44

Erica Almaguer (EA): Yeah so I grew up in the Bay Area, born and raised, I didn't live in San Francisco proper however I was raised in San Francisco so I went to school {there}. My elementary school was at St. Anthonys and that's in the mission area. It's not in a very good neighborhood and actually after school I would walk to my father's house which was right on Harrison and 26th. So again, not a good neighborhood, it was right across the street from what was back then called Army Street Projects in Garfield Park. So I grew up seeing a lot of poverty and also being raised in what I always called the working poor. My mom always worked full time, sometimes she had two jobs. However, despite that, she wasn't always able to make ends meet in terms of food so we did often have people helping us out with food. My mom did make sure that her bills were paid and that the rent was paid but I do remember food being one of those issues that we struggled with. In regards to social justice issues, I think when you grow up in communities like that you're going to see plenty of them. The first thing was the type of housing that was being provided to low-income families. Army Street Projects were extremely dark and kind of "dungeony", and it was really scary to go through them. Aside from seeing people often on drugs and strung out on the stairwell, it was just a really dark place to walk through so it felt really scary. So I feel like that was one of the first social justice issues, like it's not enough to just say that you're providing low-income housing for communities in need, you also have to make it a space that seems safe for everybody. No one wanted anything fancy. People just wanted something that was safe. I think in regards to that same issue, I also recall when Army Street Projects were being demolished to get remodeled. While that's great that there was an intent to remodel them and make them feel a little bit more like home, make them nicer and safer, all of the people that were living there had nowhere else to go. They were displaced and the government didn't do anything to help them so I think for me that's a huge social justice issue. How do we support our communities? I also recall, I think in the last 10 years it's gotten better, but back then not everyone had equal access to medical services so I think about the people in my family and the people in my community and the lack of medical support that they were able

to receive. When I think about that, I did have two uncles who were heavily involved in drugs, so it's tricky. They were heavily involved in drugs, they didn't have access to any rehab centers because that's just not something that was ever afforded to low-income people and they eventually got HIV and then eventually died of AIDS. And so I think about how a lot of that could have been prevented with some services had they been offered to them. I think just all around me there's always been issues of social justice around people who are "less than" right? They're not as "worthy" because they don't make as much money and therefore they're considered more delinquents to the community as opposed to being productive members of the community.

00:04:55

Alexis Hernandez (AH): So our next question is: was there ever a turning point for you where you felt really passionate about taking part in activism or have you always considered yourself as an activist?

00:05:07

EA: So I think for me, activism started probably in high school. I was taking a, honestly I don't remember the title of the course, but I do recall that we focused on social justice issues and we worked with the organization Amnesty International and that's when I kind of started to get more of a sense for things that were happening *globally* that people needed support for. One of the things that was kind of very close to *my* family was my family originates from Nicaragua and they immigrated here to the US at a time when their country was in a lot of turmoil because there was a war between two political parties essentially and one political party was able to overthrow the other and in doing that everyone who worked with the original political party was put in prison, they were political prisoners. That is very personal to me because my mother, after she divorced my father, she actually married a political prisoner. And so it was something that I was living with all the time and so when I took this class in high school, we did a lot of writing letters to support people who were seeking amnesty whether it was political prisoners or people who wanted to come to the US for a better life because somehow they were in danger in their own country. So I think for me that's pretty much when the activism started and then ever since then, I went to college going to San Francisco State University, we are rooted in activism on that campus and so anytime we saw something that felt unjust we made sure to speak up. And I think it was really important to recognize that for a very long time, many communities of color, many *women* of color, felt like our voices didn't matter or that we couldn't use our voices and it wasn't until I got to San Francisco State that I realized actually we can be loud about it, we can express our opinions and we can continue to advocate for everybody.

00:07:28

GS: Amazing response! Do you think that our government could have handled the COVID-19 situation better or do you think that they did enough for the people? What's your opinion on government responsibility and how much relief they owe the people?

00:07:42

EA: That's a loaded question. No, I do not think that they did enough, I think that, as many of us would believe, the government didn't take it seriously at first, right? And I think they did a lot of harm in the way that they handled it afterwards. One, I think it was really important that as soon as they realized something was happening, something *big* was happening, they owed it to the people to come to us and say that this is what's happening, we're working on figuring out how to protect you. Instead I recall hearing "oh this isn't our problem, this is China's problem" and I have a big issue with that again because I think even though that's a different country, if we have resources to support them, it's our duty to do so. So in short, no I don't think they did enough, I think they could've done a lot more to, not shut down the economy, but to really give the people more guidance on how to take care of ourselves. I also think they could have rolled out things as simple as masks for everyone way sooner than they did. Thinking about the tons of production companies that we have, even the ones that are here in the USA, that could have gone from making shirts and pants and all of the above, switching their operations to make masks right away, I think could have saved a lot of lives. However that didn't happen, the government did not offer any support and if I recall correctly by the time they started to offer support to hospitals, they were sending things that weren't even functional. They were sending things that were broken and couldn't be used. I don't recall the last part of that question.

GS: The last part of the question was: what's your opinion on government responsibility and how much relief they owe people?

EA: I think it's difficult to say how much relief they owe people. I think they needed to have done everything possible to keep our community safe and in doing so, I think at very minimum, allowing or even urging companies to start making masks. We offer big corporations tax breaks for everything else, that's definitely one of the things that we could have offered a tax break on, right? Like if you make us 1 million masks, you get an x amount of tax break. I also recall, just locally, we have a distillery, I live in Pacifica, and we have a local distillery and instead of making alcohol, he went into making hand sanitizer for everyone. However, locally he got shut down because he was told that he wasn't licensed for that and while he was trying to help the community providing hand sanitizer, he offered toilet paper because we had the big toilet paper shortage in 2020. He was really doing everything he could to help the community and so I think it's up to the government to ensure that all of the constituents are being kept safe and they surely missed the mark on that one.

00:11:02

AH: Wow, that's very interesting about how they shut him down when he wanted to help the community. I think that's crazy! So the next question is: how has your life changed since the start of the pandemic and how has COVID-19 affected you the most?

00:11:19

EA: I mean thankfully healthwise it has not affected me or anyone in my immediate family. We do have friends who have passed away from COVID and that of course is heavy on the heart but I think the way that COVID has impacted me the most, it's more emotionally. Just replaying the images of what was going on in New York for example where people were just kind of lined up dead, like that's an image that you can never get rid of. I think it has impacted, of course, I have three children, they're not very very little, 22, 17, and 10. But I do think about the 17 and 10 year olds' experience and how isolated they felt. Both of them are extremely active. They had something going on every single day after school in terms of extracurricular activities and all of a sudden not only can they no longer go to school, they can no longer hang out with their friends, but they can no longer do these extracurricular activities that for my family was actually keeping them healthier. My family struggles with weight and so that's why it was really important for us to be very active and then it got to the point where even our beaches shut down, our parks shut down, like there was nothing that you could do other than walk around your block. So from an emotional perspective, I think that was probably the biggest impact. I know that I'm fortunate in the sense that I was able to keep my job and I was able to do my job from home. I am a child care director and because we weren't offering childcare, while I was in a lot of meetings, I did have extra time and that's really where I started to, what we call "rage sew". I was just so emotional and furious with the government that I was trying to think of what can I do to support our communities? I did start off with thinking about my local communities before I started to sew for other communities that were also in need.

00:13:34

GS: That's a perfect segue into our next question! What inspired you to sew? So like when you were younger or is this a skill that you picked up recently and will you keep sewing for your community after the pandemic is over?

00:13:48

EA: Yeah so I had a sewing machine that I had bought, I don't know, 18/20 years ago when my son was little because I would make capes and tutus for his preschool. I mean that's pretty much all I've ever sewn on that machine. When the pandemic hit, we started to get a lot of I think it was mostly on Facebook, like you would see pop-up news articles about people making their own masks so that they're safe even just going outside of their house. So I started to do that. I started to make masks, I initially made I think it was like 50 and I handed them out. I have a very large extended family and we all live close to each other so I started making it for everyone in my family and then I had decided that I wanted to make some for my local grocery stores

because while I was able to be at home and keep myself safe, they were not able to. They were still required to report to work and they were exposed to a lot of people in the community and that worried me. I worried for them, I didn't know any of them personally other than just saying "hi, how's it going" every time I went to the grocery store and saw them. So I started making them. I don't know how to sew super well right, I'm not an expert seamstress but there were a lot of things that came to mind for me. The first one was, one, I can do a straight line so let's work with straight lines! And even if they look a little wonky, the goal was to keep all of your breath inside right, so that it wasn't going on to other people. So I definitely was able to do that. I fortunately was able to purchase a lot of fabric from JOANNs Fabrics, we call it the "Big J" and some people really don't like it, however I was able to purchase a lot of fabric from JOANNs Fabrics. They didn't let you go into the store so I ordered it all online and then it was curbside pick up. I already had some elastic at home, just again going back to making tutus, so I had actually a lot of elastic at home and I got to making the masks. But as, pardon, as I was sewing, I think what came to me the most was my grandmother was a seamstress when she immigrated to the US from Nicaragua, she started to work at Levi's which was in San Francisco before. And she would work 12 to 14 hour days and did not get paid very well but it's what she knew how to do. She was a seamstress and it was income. So it was one of those things where I kind of feel like I was channeling her in me and making and *sewing* for the community because that's what my ancestors did. And then of course she also made clothes for herself and for her kids. It was always way too expensive to go out and buy store-bought clothes so she made everything for my mom and my mom's siblings and actually she had made dresses for me as well. So as I was sewing, I thought about my grandmother a lot. I also just thought about how this work is typically considered "woman's work" and I thought about how it often is underpaid, undervalued. We think about sweatshops, we think about the work that sometimes women need to take home because after a 12/14 hour day at the sweatshop, there were still things that they needed to do like trim all the little pieces of thread off just to make it all pretty. So I think that was another thing that kind of channeled into my rage sewing, just knowing how our history has been to take advantage of people and that is one of those things that I think we need to have a lot of respect for jobs, even if it seems like and I'm not saying that sewing is skillless but there are some positions that are even considered "skillless" like garbage men, and I think that we have to appreciate that these are all jobs that somebody has to do. And everyone deserves a living wage to do these things. I also started to think about all of the population of people that were unable to work and therefore unable to bring home any kind of income, put food on the table and I started to think about our farmworkers in particular. Not far from me, in Half Moon Bay there is a big farming community and of course, going down to Gilroy and Salinas there's a big farming community. And while I don't know anyone in the farming community, I do think about a lot of times it's the brown people who are there, they've come from another country, they're just trying to make ends meet, maybe send some money back home to care for their relatives back home and here we are in the middle of a pandemic, how are they even going to take care of themselves? So those were kind of all of the things that I was thinking as I sewed, I definitely

think that I got better as I kept sewing. I remember my initial goal was “I’m going to make 100 masks”. The way that I actually came to the Auntie Sewing Squad is because one of my friends on Facebook, I had been posting like “oop here’s my first mask, like not too bad” and then after a while I was like “yay I was able to pump out 10 masks for my local Safeway or for my local post office” because I just went in my community and started giving them out. I also offered to send all of my teachers a mask. I’m also an instructor at San Francisco State so I had offered to send all of my students a mask. I mean my thing was let’s just get masks on people to help keep them safe and as I was posting all of this on Facebook, one of my friends, Grace, who is also part of the Auntie Sewing Squad, she said “hey why don’t you join this group, it’s new” so I was like okay so I joined it. Before I knew it, we were getting offers like if you need fabric just let me know! We call her our “overlord” Kristina Wong, she would say if you need fabric let me know I will send it to you. And so after I had depleted my supply I said sure I’ll take some and she sent us fabric and I remember some of those masks, we had kits where it was all pre-cut and some of it was really really complicated. Like it was difficult to make all of the folds and I know that they tried to make it easy. But then the other thing we did is when we were done making all of the masks we would wash them so that we could send it to the communities without them needing to worry about washing it before they put it on because at the time, early on, we had no idea how long COVID could stay on fabrics for example, right? And the last thing we want was to be sick and then to pass that on to somebody else. So I started making a lot of those and I do remember at first it was just like just make masks and send it to the communities in need and then it was make masks but you have to send it to *this* community. And I remember that irked me a little bit, I was like “no I don’t want to send it to *that* community I want to send it to the communities that, I mean I’m not saying that I don’t care about all the communities but I think there’s some communities that needed it more than others. And so I would say wait a minute who are we sending it to and what are they doing with it, who is it going to? And then shortly after that is when we started to have I think they’re called Super Aunties, where they started reaching out to different organizations that would need the support and then they would say “okay if you’ve made masks I can give you an address to send it to” and we started pledging. Someone would say “oh we need 500 masks” and at the time I was rage sewing so I was doing probably about 100 a week, maybe a little bit more. Then after some time I started to get tired, like my body started to get tired, but I still wanted to continue to help out the communities so I did slow down for some time and I was probably doing 50 to 75 masks a week. I mean I’ve pledged for a lot of different communities but I’ve made for some local communities like Homies. I also gave some to an organization in San Francisco called PODER and they’re all about community organizing so I gave a lot to them. My daughter is part of a group called Radical Monarchs and it’s young girls of color who come together, form a fierce sisterhood, and talk about social justice issues, so I made for them as well. Let me see, I made for Loco Bloco, there’s another organization called United Playaz in San Francisco and so these were all communities in need and they were communities of color. We also sewed for homeless. At one point, someone reached out and said “you know the nurses have masks but they don’t have scrub caps, they have to reuse their

disposable scrub cap” and it gets, I mean if you can think about wearing a scrub cap all day, it gets oily, like you’re sweating a lot under there and they had to *reuse* it! So someone put out an ask for “can you make scrub caps” and I was like “I’ve never made a scrub cap but I’ll try” and then before you know it, I was pumping out scrub caps. And then around June I was able to work with the University and we decided that I was going to reopen the childcare center. The childcare center that I direct is on campus. We were going to reopen it for two reasons. One, we wanted to be able to support our students who were still trying to complete their school classes, but two, we also serve a population of non-students that work full-time so they needed the childcare. When we went back, I was doing everything that I could to try and keep my staff safe and so whereas before parents would bring their child’s extra clothes, their blanket, a lot of things from home, we were thinking what can we minimize, right? What can we provide so that the parent doesn’t have to bring it from home so that the teacher doesn’t feel like “oh my gosh is the child bringing something with them that might potentially be contaminated”? So again I went to JOANNs, I bought tons of fabric and I sewed all the edges and made blankets for every child. And I said “okay parents you no longer have to bring blankets, we’re going to provide the blankets” and then we just washed them every day at school. I then sprung into action and was able to get a hold of a company called Revolution Foods and I said “look, I know we’re in the middle of a pandemic and you’ve never served us but can you start providing lunch to my center again so that parents didn’t need to bring a lunchbox and who knows what was on it back and forth.” Really what we wanted was just give us your child, that’s all we’ll take and so we started to do that as well. So I did take a little bit of a break when I started to reopen my center, but I always came back to sewing and while I do continue to take some big breaks, it’s one of those things where I feel like for as long as I’m needed, I’m gonna continue to sew for communities that need it. I think about the Indigenous communities and one I mean just the things that our country has done to Indigenous communities and displacing them, taking their land and then not offering them any kind of support because they wish to be sovereign nations. So I of course did sew a lot of masks for Indigenous communities. Indigenous communities are one of those groups of people that I just have a lot of deep respect for. Just recently, early April, I was on spring break in Arizona and I wanted to visit either a cultural center or just a community so that my children can learn from them as well. But out of respect that we were in the middle of COVID, I don’t want them to fear that we’re going to make them sick, I didn’t. But what I did do is I looked for booths to sell artisan crafts and jewelry, things that they make, and so I made sure to visit that so that I can support their community that way as well.

00:27:21

GS: I really love your compassion and the passion that you have for the children and I wanted to thank you for bringing attention to the Indigenous people, I think that’s super important especially nowadays. Now people are starting to really pay attention to where we come from, what our country was built off of so I want to thank you for bringing attention to that! What does

it mean to be part of the Auntie Sewing Squad? I know you touched on that a little bit but do you consider yourself a hero?

00:27:51

EA: Oh not at all. I'm definitely not a hero. I think that I'm using what I've been afforded to help other communities in need. So when I think about being part of the Auntie Sewing Squad, I'm part of a larger community that has, I mean we have similar beliefs and similar end goals, right? In the end we just want to keep everyone safe. We want to help people who don't have the means to maybe make themselves a mask or purchase a mask. So it's kind of, I don't want to call it a sisterhood because I know that there's also men who are part of the Auntie Sewing Squad and a lot of them actually don't even mind being called Auntie, but it's just a group of people that you know at the end of the day you can talk to, who are having shared experiences as you. I don't consider myself a hero for a couple of different reasons but I think mostly because I think it's all of our duty to support our communities. It's our duty, right? I think about it kind of like our civil duties of when you're called to jury duty you have to do that and to me this is the same way, this is what we do, we take care of each other. When you think about societies, I don't believe in an individualistic society, I do believe in a collective society and I'm the person who, even with my own work, there isn't something that should always fall on one person, we always need to think about ways that we can support each other while also maintaining some sanity. I think that the Auntie Sewing Squad, in the early days, we would hold something called "Bitch and Stitch" so someone would open up a zoom, we would all be cutting fabric, sewing but we would be sharing stories with each other just to make each other laugh because again, a lot of us were missing that human connection and it really helped us to connect with each other. I know that another thing that some Aunties did, there was Auntie Care provided in so many different ways. I had an Auntie send me a gift certificate and say "order some takeout for you and your family, don't worry about dinner because we know that you're working really hard sewing". We had other Aunties that were bakers who would say "oh who needs a sugary treat"? Before I knew it, I would sometimes just have stuff on my doorstep and so to me that was just like oh my gosh there's people who recognize that they one, don't have a machine or two, have no idea how to use it, but they wanted to do something. So to me the Auntie Sewing Squad, it's a group of people who came together with a shared vision of supporting those who may otherwise be at higher risk while also taking care of our own. We had an Auntie who offered a kimchi workshop and she told us like a couple weeks in advance "make sure that you purchase all of the supplies", we jumped on a zoom and she taught us all how to make vegan kimchi which I've started to make every two weeks here at home, my family loves it! It's just a community that I will never forget and I have very few friends, I can count on one hand who my best friends are. I *know* a lot of people, but when I think about the Auntie Sewing Squad, like these are people who for some of them, especially my local hub, these are people who just out of happenstance became really close friends. Are you two familiar with what a hub is?

00:31:59

AH: Not necessarily.

GS: When I think of a hub I kind of think of “pub”, like what brings people together, you know?

EA: Sure! Yeah yeah, so our local hub, it started off, it was someone who lived in the Mission area and Kristina, our overlord, would send her like rolls and rolls and rolls of elastic and then we would go to our hub to pick up elastic so that way Kristina didn’t have to send it to each of us individually. However, it got bigger than that, it was like okay who can I send all of this fabric to? And so we had somebody else, Melinda, who said I can be a local hub. Now her parents were not so thrilled that she was a local hub because they sent tons, like *literally* tons, of fabric to her. She would cut the fabric from the *bolts*, put it together and the hub would be open everyday and she would call it the store. And so before you knew it, people started to not only go to the store to pick up elastic, fabric, sometimes woven propylene just to put in the middle of the fabrics as an extra layer, thread, thread cutters, it was everything that you could possibly need to make the masks was being sent to her house. She would open up the store and we could go and get it there. Then people started to say “you know what? I have this growing in my garden, I’m going to bring this to the hub to share my bounty with everyone else” and that just reminded me, I’ve always thought when I retired I want to live in a very small community farm, grow my own food, just help take care of the land. It started to remind me of that, I was like “oh my God I love this! I love that I can pick up lemons from your house, oranges from your house, tomatoes that you grew in your house and all of it was at Auntie Melinda’s house. Then Kristina was able to send us some other stuff, I think she had someone who donated cases of wine and so she sent like four cases to Melinda and when we went to go pick up our fabric and thread she’d be like “and here’s a bottle of wine, keep going!” So the hub is just one of those places where it was really needed for us because I think for Kristina’s own sanity, we needed someone here locally who was able to distribute a lot of these things but then *other* Aunties started to bring stuff to it as well. So if I went to Melinda’s hub today, I’m sure I would find tons of other stuff! Little notebooks, little hand cream, just a lot of different things that people have made as a way of saying thank you. I also think it breaks up the monotony of feeling like sewing has become our job, right? To me, sewing is something that we are doing because we are passionate about what we are doing. Once it starts to feel like work, I stop doing it because I already have a job. Kristina is based in Los Angeles so I think that’s where maybe the larger community originated and now, as far as I know, it’s nationwide. Then we had an Auntie who did a Google map and started to pin all the locations of where people are so that we could see it really is nationwide.

00:35:37

AH: Wow, I think that’s just very interesting how she has a lot of fabric and she just has her own little store, it reminds me of a little JOANNs/ like a pantry!

EA: Yeah, that's exactly what it was.

AH: So our next question is the Auntie Sewing Squad is an organization that wishes it didn't have to exist, how will you carry on the Auntie Sewing Squad legacy when the pandemic finally ends?

EA: I think the way that we carry on legacies have definitely been evaluated, but one, I think about communities of colors and storytelling. For generations, this is going to be the story that obviously my children lived through it with me and they would sometimes help me cut fabric, they would help me cut threads and things like that so they're very familiar with the Auntie Sewing Squad. And my daughter actually, when I tell her I'm going to Melinda's, she's like "ooh can I come with you?" and I'm like "why do you want to come?" and she's like "I want to see what goodies she has". And so to me, it's partly oral storytelling, it's something I'm going to tell my grandchildren and my grandchildren's children. But also I know there are Aunties who are publishing a book to put all of this out there in print, and I think that's really important as well because that's how you keep letting people know what it was that a group of people did to basically do the government's job. Like it really was the government that was supposed to do this and like I said at the very beginning, they missed the mark so, we all did what we do best as our community caretakers. We organized and said okay if no one else is going to do it for us then we're going to do it. And I've lost track to be completely honest, I want to open up my note but when I reached 1,000 masks I was in awe, I was like no freaking way, my goal was 100! So as of now I have made 1,547 masks, 24 blankets, 20 crochet caps. I needed to take a break from sewing so I started to crochet and I made beanies for Indigenous communities and I mailed those out to them as well. And then I also made 88 scrub caps that were sent to nurses and doctors. So to me this is one of those accomplishments that never in my life did I think I would sew this much because it was rather recreational for me, but I do think that it brought me back to my ancestors and just kind of brought me closer to my communities. I have a lot of respect for the people that do this work.

00:38:34

GS: Congratulations on that mark, that's amazing!

EA: Thank you.

GS: I love how you call it rage sewing too, I thought that was so funny when I heard it earlier. This is actually our final question so if you have any last thoughts or comments, if you could find a way to tie it into this answer that would be great! So our final question is what is your honest opinion of the vaccine? Should we ask everyone to take it or should we all be skeptical?

00:39:01

EA: I have a lot of faith in our medical system and vaccines. I am pro-vaccines, I recognize that we don't know, I mean the vaccine was just created, right? We've only been in the pandemic for a little bit over a year so we don't know what the long-term effects of some of the vaccines are. I think everyone should get the vaccine, so far the side effects completely outweigh the benefits and I know that at one point Johnson and Johnson pulled the vaccine because people were getting blood clots but I think everything needs to be put into perspective, right? Like I have some health issues and I am on medication that has a higher risk of blood clots than the J&J vaccine did, so I do think that everyone should get it, I also believe it is a very personal decision. I don't think we can ever tell people what to do with their bodies, however, there are implications to the decisions that you make and so with me working in childcare and working at San Francisco State University, the CSU system has said that the way that we're going to return to in person everything in the fall is you *must* be vaccinated so it's going to be a crossroads for some people. People are going to have to decide whether or not they want to continue in the work that they are doing because the position does require a vaccine. Now of course, there are some people who are going to get medical exemptions, just because of the way that they've responded to vaccines before, and I think that we have to also consider their experience and if they can't get the vaccine, what can we do to keep them safe? Then this one, I'll probably get a lot of flack for this, but sometimes people say "oh I'm not getting it for religious reasons" but I also don't know of any religions that specifically prohibit vaccines, right? And so I think that we have to be very careful in the way that we force people to get vaccines. It's not our role to force people but they have to understand the implications. But I am pro-vaccine, I got it myself. I think making appointments for the vaccine was my full-time job for about two weeks because I was making the appointments for my family and it was one of those where every maybe 5 to 10 minutes I would refresh and I would see if there was another appointment. But I was able to get it for everyone in my family, including my 17 year old, and so I am pro vaccine. I wish it would be something where it was one and done, however, as we know, we're learning a lot about COVID and the various strains so, are we going to need a booster? Probably and I'm okay with that.

00:42:03

AH: Wow well I'd like to thank you, for meeting with us today and for actually doing your job to help other people getting the vaccine because it has been very hard for other people to get the vaccine recently. So Auntie Erica, thank you so much for taking the time to join with us today, we appreciate all of your hard work and cannot thank you enough for your generosity and compassion during this unforgiving pandemic. Thank you for all listening and have an amazing day!

EA: Thank you, bye- bye!

00:42:33

