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Interview with Laura Karlin

Laura Karlin

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Interviewee: Laura Karlin

Interviewers: Lindsey Cowans, Sierra Shaver, Corinn Biglin

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Location: Zoom

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Length: 00:59:41

Overseen by: Dr. Chrissy Lau

Bio:

Laura Karlin is the artistic director at Invertigo Dance Theatre, a nonprofit organization that she started in 2006 and is part of the Auntie Sewing Squad where she has worked up to be a Super Auntie, in charge of organizing masks campaigns for farmworker communities. She is passionate about her work at her studio, her newborn baby, Juniper, and being an Auntie by making and producing hand salves. Karlin is an example of a strong woman that does not quit when she puts her mind to something.

Thematic Outline:

(00:01:07) Karlin describes her childhood growing up, where she lived, what her passions were and her pursuit of starting her dance company, Invertigo Dance Theatre. (00:10:24) Karlin goes into detail about her start of the Auntie Sewing Squad, how her hand salve production became a part of Auntie Care, and her initiation to becoming a Super Auntie of the Auntie Sewing Squad. (00:24:31) We learn Karlin's favorite parts about the Auntie Sewing Squad, how she is inspired by the Aunties, and some of the women of color writers that she admires. (00:33:00) Karlin shares her hobbies of staying environmentally conscious by using low-waste strategies such as reusable diapers for her baby, reusable cloth masks, making her own yogurt, almond milk, kimchi, and more. (00:45:23) Karlin wraps up the interview by describing what she wants people to remember about the Auntie Sewing Squad and asking what the interviewees have learned about humanitarianism during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Laura Karlin Oral History Transcript

0:01

Laura Karlin (LK): Sorry I just got excited about talking to you.

Lindsey Cowens (LC): No worries, okay so I am Lindsey.

LK: Hi Lindsey.

Sierra Shaver (SS): I am Sierra.

LK: Hi Sierra.

Corinn Biglin (CB): I am Corinn.

0:14

LK: Hi Corinn.

0:16

LC: Today is May 4, 2021.

0:19

LK: May the fourth be with you.

0:23

LC: Our interview will be taking place on Zoom for the Auntie Sewing Squad Oral History Archive and we will be interviewing Laura Karlin.

0:34

SS: Okay we made a question guide and we have ten questions for you, so I am going to start off with the first question and we wanted to know a little bit about your background, so like how growing up was for you, the environment that you were in, your family, and passions that you have.

1:01

LK: Had when I was growing up or have still? Well they mostly intersect, but I didn't hear the last word to your question.

SS: Whatever you would like to share with us.

1:07

LK: Okay, well I was born in 1983, which means how old am I now, 37, going to be 38 this year. And I grew up mostly in Los Angeles, but we went to England a lot when I was a kid because that's where all of my family is, and I have a younger brother. And when I was growing up I really loved telling stories, especially through dance and that's led me to what I do now, which is I am the artistic director of a dance company here in Los Angeles that I founded in 2007 and that's called Invertigo Dance Theater. And I have lived in upstate New York and in London. And then I came back to LA in 2006 for three months and that was 15 years ago, oops.

2:31

SS: Okay and we saw you were from England, and like you went to England a lot. Did you live there for any amount of time or did you just like to go there different times during the year?

LK: When I was a kid we would go for summer holidays, winter holidays, so for like quite a while at a time I lived there for a year and a half in college and then a year after I graduated. And yeah and I did a lot of training in my field during those times.

3:17

SS: Would you say there are any cultural differences in England like anything you would like to set apart from here I guess, was there anything different that you experienced there rather than you did here?

3:31

LK: Yes and it plays into a lot of generalities, so I would say that there's a lot of cultural differences there but it depends where. People are like what's the difference between the United States and the UK? And I am like that's a really big question. Which part of the US? Which part of the UK? I'll say between Los Angeles (my family is in Los Angeles) and London, the weather in LA is very different from the weather in England. I think that in the US there's often less of a value put, keeping up appearances by repressing emotions which I see a lot of, there is not much of an emphasis on politeness and manners. And the different elements of white supremacy play out in each place. So yeah.

5:07

LC: So you talked a little bit about your company that you started, did that passion derive when you were a kid, or did you dance when you were a kid?

5:17

LK: I did. I think I was dancing from the beginning and then my mom put me into ballet when I was 5. Then I got in trouble for improvising because there was a particular beautiful piece of music that would move my probably six year old soul and I would float away from the bar and I would do whatever was coming into my 6 year old soul and express it and the teacher was herding me back to the bar, because if I looked back she was probably my age now or even younger and I would look back and be like oh my god like having a 6 year old who is free flowing away and disrupting everything was probably like everyone's nightmare, so look back with a lot of compassion now but also for myself because I was expressing it was very genuine. I wasn't trying to be in trouble but eventually I think I was almost thrown out of ballet for being swept away in those moments so she made a deal with me that if I would contain my 6 year old soul during class, I could stay after class and she would play that piece of music which was probably the cheesiest piano for ballet cassette tape but she would play that one plus whatever else my 6 year old soul desired and I would like run around and express myself for a while and that was actually how I did not quit ballet or get thrown out, that was just the teacher being very kind. Yeah so that was my origin story, but then I started writing down dances that I saw in my head, stories and images and things to lots of songs off of Enya's Sail Away album and Seal's first album. I have notebooks from when I was eight. And I just have never quit, I am not the body type that was generally accepted especially back then and in ballet certainly and even in a lot of modern and contemporary dance and I don't have the role of performance talent that I see in so many of the dancers that I grew up with and I now hire. I have performed, trained like a competent mover, I love moving but I never wanted to be a performer I always wanted to be the one telling stories and finding these visions in my head and working with other people and making space for other people and I don't think that I articulated it that well when I was eight but that was definitely an impulse, and so yeah, that's something that kept going, but also a lot of it was just a function of not quitting even when I should have and not doing a lot of other things. I

actually had two majors in college, my second major other than choreography and production was an independent interdisciplinary degree that was essentially pre-law and it was in queer rights and social movements. So actually I was meant to go to law school and be a civil rights attorney and then I didn't. I became a choreographer and started a dance company because they are totally the same thing.

LC: Yeah I was going to follow up with that, you said that you never gave up, was there any point you weren't supported or did you always feel support by maybe family and friends to follow your dreams or you maybe told that you should stick with the more safe option?

9:14

LK: Both. There were many voices that felt like law school would have been a safer, perhaps more employable road, but I was very lucky that it actually was my father, who is a lawyer, who said if you are, when I was about to graduate he was like, if these are your two roads, be a choreographer first. It's easier when you're 40 to decide you don't want to be a choreographer anymore and you want to go to law school than it is to decide at 40 that you don't want to be a lawyer anymore and you want to be a choreographer, and that was so wise and kind of him and I am deeply appreciative of the support that my family has always given.

LC: That's awesome. So, what got you interested in the Auntie Sewing Squad? And when did you join?

10:24

LK: I think I'm one of the OGs in the Auntie Sewing Squad because I joined when there were 12 people in there. I don't know how many there actually were, but not many. It was at the beginning of the pandemic. So I know Kristina Wong because she is in the performing arts world in LA and I've seen her shows. We have both been on grant panels and then also in the same pool of people who received grants and professional development and stuff. So, we sort of had a loose relationship over the years; definitely, it's become a lot closer in the last year. But I was seeing her post on Facebook about sewing masks and then needing other people to sew masks and needing other people to cut fabric and all this. And this was in, I think that this is going to be a little quick side note and then I promise I'll get back, I think many of us forget in those first days, weeks, months of this pandemic, I think we forget how much we did not know, how much information was not provided for us, the lack of centralized voices and leadership and governance, the amount that even people who were studying it did not know about the virus. Like there were people bleaching the fruit that they brought back from the supermarket and whatnot, there was so much uncertainty in those moments, and I think back to the beginning of the Auntie Sewing Squad and we were all in this state of not knowing about supply chains, like the beginning of the Auntie Sewing Squad, people were cutting off like old straps from tank tops and bras and using the lanyards that we had gotten from film festivals and stuff to make straps for the masks, ties for the masks. People were cutting up pillow cases because we did not know when things would be available again, like you could not get things on Amazon to make masks. You could not get masks, I mean forget about it. And you couldn't get hand sanitizer, so much so that for the first time, for many people who have been lucky to grow up in a state of abundance, even not all of us have like money everywhere to get everything we want, but I think very few

people were like, oh, I couldn't access these things if I wanted to, if I had the money to. Like that for a lot of people in Los Angeles, certainly and in the U.S. and I'm generalizing, of course, because scarcity is a real thing, but the idea that even with money and privilege, like people weren't able to find hand sanitizer, was really just something I think a lot of people haven't processed or even acknowledged or looked back on and like reflected upon. So, I just wanted to say all of that because thinking about those early days of the pandemic, these moments of mutual aid, of communities supporting people within communities, supporting one another, like we were helping our elderly neighbors by grocery shopping for them. I was making sure people in my dance company were okay, there was a lot that wasn't known. And to see Kristina (because I am going to link it back to the Auntie Sewing Squad, I promise you're not going to have to listen to this forever, and I know Sierra has to go to work) but like in those moments like to see people like Kristina posting about helping, about holding people up was something that I connected to. I should also mention that I got involved with the Auntie Sewing Squad in spite of and probably because of I had a new baby. So I had a baby in November of 2019. She was just over three months when we went into lockdown and I went back to work from maternity leave on March 16th, 2020. And that was the day that I stepped back into being the artistic director of a nonprofit performing arts organization. It was like while the world was ending. So, I feel like in that moment the world was ending in a lot of ways. My company lost like a hundred and twenty thousand dollars or something like that in like over the course of 48 hours in canceled touring fees. We were in the middle of our first national tour. I was figuring out how to have a baby and a dance company and all these things. And I was seeing these posts from Kristina about making masks for people. And I reached out to her on Facebook Messenger and was like, yo I would love to cut some fabric because I don't sew, in spite of the fact and realizing that there is sewing machine right behind me and like it looks like phenomenal set dressing. Actually, my husband is the one who sews, I can hand sew, but I'm scared of the sewing machine. But I was like, I could try to do some precuts for people. We need people to cut fabric and I can try and do that. And it just kept being like not possible to do all of the things. And so eventually I reached out to her and was like, hey, you know, I have this baby, I have this dance company, we're all trying to survive. But I would love to do something. I make hand salve. I grow healing herbs in the garden, I infuse them in oil, and I make salve, and people's hands are cracking from washing them so much because apparently before March of last year, we didn't wash our hands, I don't know what happened nationally, but it was like very disorienting to watch people be like how even to wash hands tutorials. So, I just want to say that was very disorienting for me as a person. I'm hoping that everybody has learned that now the pandemic's over, keep it up everyone, this is a good thing. I was like I have hand salve I would love to send it to Aunties and to anyone they were sending masks to. And she was like, yeah, sure. That sounds great. Fantastic. You're in the Facebook group. Here you go. And so I posted something offering it. Over the last year, I've probably sent about two or three gallons worth of hands salve all over the country to Aunties, to frontline workers, to Standing Rock and Navajo Nation, to a lot of organizations that support farm workers and migrant laborers. So, hand salve has been kind of a thing. I actually have a new batch. I just made a whole bunch and I need to post to the Aunties. That it's going to be like shark week, because they're all going to be like, I want, but I don't have that much. But yeah, I make hand salve.

18:52

LC: That's amazing. Can you describe how you make it?

18:58

LK: Yes. Oh, I'll describe that after. So just to wrap up how I got involved with the Aunties and what I do, it started with hand salve and generally encouraging people and then at one point Kristina was like, hey, somebody is reaching out to us I think from New York about these farmworkers, because all the stuff on Facebook was like people posting oh, farmworkers need masks and like this and that, but they were posting addresses and then it turned out the address was incorrect and it was just wild, there was no centralization, there was nothing, there was so much unknown. And so, Kristina was like, hey, this thing with farmworkers, can anybody call, look into it? And I was just like, obviously, I have so much time with a newborn and running the dance company, of course I will do this. I did it on my lunch break, I called New York, this grassroots network that supports farmworkers and it kind of went from there. So now I am one of the Super Aunties and one of the coordinators. So, there's a number of coordinators that basically vet and connect with and create genuine conversation with the organizations or networks that we send masks to. Somebody doesn't just hit us up like hey I need masks and we're like, okay. So, my focus has been primarily since then organizations that support farm workers as well as migrant laborers. And that has just been what I stumbled into, I do a lot of work with farmworker justice and then connections that they have, and then the Beatitude House in Guadalupe, California, which is run by an extraordinary woman called Tensie Hernandez. And yes, so that's how I got involved as one of the Super Aunties. So, most of the work that I do is connecting with the organizations, figuring out what they need, how many masks they need, what kind, anything that we need to know, and then posting a campaign for the Aunties and the Aunties pledge. And I put things that I called the Spreadsheet of Glory and named the Spreadsheet of Glory that one of our Super Auntie's partners developed. And that's how we do all of our tracking. And I wrote a poem about it because I spent a lot of time on the Spreadsheet of Glory. And it's going to be published in a book y'all that Chrissy is editing. So, yeah, that's how deep this rabbit hole goes. So, I'm involved in that. And I'm involved in helping with Auntie Care, which Gayle Isa is now the queen of Auntie Care. And I feel like the salve was alongside the pizza money that we had in the beginning to like send food to Aunties to be, hey, stop sewing for a second and eat something, thank you, and put hand salve on apparently. So, I sort of kicked off like Auntie Care isn't just pizza money. Yeah. That's probably more than you asked, but yes. And you asked about how I make hand salve.

LC: Yes.

22:43

LK: Okay, I harvest the herbs that I grow or I get them from my mother in law's homestead or other places. And they're herbs that are healing for the skin like calendula, yarrow, chamomile, rosemary, lavender, all have lovely properties. So, there's some I'm not thinking of and that I use. And then I put them in a jar and I pour oil over them. And I allow that to infuse in the sun for a few weeks. And then I melt down beeswax and shea butter or any other kind of butters that I'm using, I like shea butter. And it's affordable. And then I put in the oil and arrowroot powder,

which helps it sink in. Mix it all together once it's melted. If I'm going to put in any essential oils, I generally really like the smell of herb infused oils, so it doesn't need much, and the beeswax is lovely. Then melt it all down, pour it into tins, put a little label on the tin because I'm fancy and pay way too much postage to send it to people.

24:09

LC: That's amazing, that's great, I bet it smells so good.

LK: Aw well, if you send me addresses I will happily send you some.

LC: Thank you, so just wrapping up on what you were talking about. How do you enjoy being an Auntie or a Super Auntie? And what is your favorite part of the community?

LK: My favorite part is that Kristina instigated and the rest of us have participated in creating either a cult or a feminist utopia. I'm not entirely sure which it is. And I think it might just be a matter of whether you're tilting your head to the right or the left. I love that we have created a sense of connection and care and fierce commitment to looking beyond ourselves during a time where panic, scarcity, fear, uncertainty has made many people turn inwards that we have seen over the past year. The worst, most selfish and devastatingly harsh nature of people that we have seen some of the worst of ourselves. And I say ourselves, because we are all implicated in this culture and that we have also seen some of the most loving, selfless, generous, courageous sides of ourselves. And many people have looked for a space or for spaces in which to be, to embody those best sides, those lightest sides, those most caring sides. And the Auntie Sewing Squad has created a space in which kindness and generosity are given structure and an outlet, and that people bring their full selves. So that is something that I love, and I love the radical commitment to social justice within that.

27:33

LC: I really admire everybody that's in the Auntie Sewing Squad, just cause you guys took action and you guys stood up when everybody else didn't really know what to do. And do you have any influences around activism or anyone that inspires you?

27:55

LK: Yes. Well, first of all, all the Aunties inspire me and the uncles and the unties and the cousins, all of the people that we have sent masks to inspire me, because one thing that I think we have embodied in the work that we do is we have never sunk into what I call poverty porn or trauma porn. Where we think of like, oh, the poor farm workers or oh, the poor people who are needing the things that embodied in the way we speak to and about and with the communities that we are sending masks to. There's always a deep respect, I say always but I can't know that, I have observed deep respect in those moments, I don't want to say that there aren't blind spots for myself. But these masks are a recognition of, or an embodiment of the deep care and respect that we have for the people that we're sending them to. And so, I'm really inspired by the people that we send these masks to. In the beginning with frontline workers, the people who went to work not knowing so many things and not knowing how to keep themselves and their families safe and

even knowing ways to do that, not being given the equipment, the PPE to do it. And that's really what kickstarted a lot of this and then farmworkers who through individual and systematic discrimination and international and national policies, are subjected to huge injustices and are often not afforded the kind of respect and motivation. One of the things that I think about as every mask, as a way of saying we see you, we respect you, we care about you, we are with you, and thank you for doing the work that you do. So, I think that's one thing that inspires me. And then in my own life, I have a long history of activism. I've been a queer activist since I was in middle school, certainly since I was in high school, I was involved in queer activism. In the last five years, I've done a lot of work in reproductive justice activism. So, I've done clinic work and clinic defense and in grassroots networking around access to abortion care and aftercare and reproductive justice really is at the intersection of a lot of social justice movements. So anti-racism is a big journey that I'm on and that we are all on and within that, some of my heroes are, Audre Lorde, whose writing is absolutely pivotal to my understanding of race, of gender, of sexuality, and of the intersection of all of these things. Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw, who named intersectional feminism. I am inspired by a lot of the work that women of color and specifically Black women have done to expand our understandings and our main means of these movements and the work of Sister Song, which named reproductive justice and works their collective in Georgia. I highly recommend looking them up. So that's those are some of my influences.

32:38

CB: That's really great to hear. I love learning more about activism and just people that I should look out for. We're going to change the subject a little bit.

LK: Sure

CB: I know you have a baby and are super busy and when you do have free time, if it is very little of it, what do you typically do with it?

33:00

LK: I don't even know. I make hand salve and I send it to people. No, I do things, I do stuff. I mean I do try and find moments, like pockets because that is a way of staying human. Sorry I'm looking out the window, I know it looks like I am being dreamy and thoughtful but actually there is a whole bunch of bees on the tree outside my window and it's really lovely. Which brings me to I love being outside. I garden, my partner and I grow fruit and vegetables and flowers and herbs, obviously, in a little patch. And I love going to the beach and outside especially with Isaac, my partner, and with Juniper, the baby. So being outside and especially with Junnie now, just watching her, she's super brave and likes to adventure into the world and I really love doing that with her, and so I'm simultaneously like, lets adventure but also I'm trying to keep you from dying. So, a lot of my free time is spent enjoying keeping my baby from the brink of disaster. Juniper, by the way, is known in the Auntie Sewing Squad as the LB or the lazy baby. Kristina dubbed her this because there was a photo of her at about four and a half months, when Isaac was making masks for us and I posted a photo, she's not on social media very often, but I posted a rare photo of Juniper, like four and a half months with her little seat sitting next to Papa while he's like running the sewing machine and he's making masks. Kristina was liked why isnt that baby cutting fabric? What is the lazy baby doing? And it's like turned into this whole long

running joke, we've been doing it for over a year now where like everytime I post a photo of Juniper, an update about her or something or she comes up, Kristina's like, why isn't that lazy baby sewing or some variation of that. And my answer is always one variation of like, relax she's taking her driver test next week, after that like for sure, time to get her on the fabric sheers or whatever, like time to get her on the sewing machine, or like relax she's getting her pilot's license super soon, or she's taking the LSAT, but I am having to come up with like crazier and crazier things that the baby is doing, and eventually, I am like running out of, relax she's, I don't know, accepting the Nobel Prize in Neurochemistry next week so that's like an ongoing thing. So I think my free time is spent thinking of accomplishments to tell Kristina as excuses for why Junie isn't sewing yet, she's not even eighteen months. I also genuinely love reading, and whenever I have a chance, I am in the middle of Carmen Marie Machado's memoir right now and it's harrowing and so when I need a break from that I am reading a trashy lesbian romance novel, I will not apologize for that. What else do I do with my free time, what even, yeah and oh we make a lot of our stuff from scratch. In our world we try and live with relatively low waste, so I do things like make yogurt and oat milk, almond milk, kimchi, and various things. I'm sure I'll think of other things that sound more interesting when we get off this call but right now I can't even think about free time I feel like.

SS: Okay

LK: I am looking forward to eventually hugging people like licking their faces once the herd immunity is achieved.

SS: It's 12:30 and I have to go, cause I have to go to work.

LK: Okay Sierra it was lovely to meet you, apologizes again for being late.

37:27

SS: It's okay, thank you. We will probably keep in touch if we need to reach out to you, but it was really nice meeting you and thank you for the time.

LK: It was lovely to meet you. Is that the end for the two of you as well or do you have more questions?

CB: I just have two more questions.

37:48

LB: Okay that's totally fine, I mean, yeah I just wanted to make sure it wasn't Sierra was like peace out and you guys were like okay bye.

37:55

CB: No, no, not at all. Speaking about low waste and how COVID has seriously impacted the whole environmental movement and everything. What was your reaction to the whole pandemic

and how did you respond, like how did you stay low waste with the masks and everything like that?

38:14

LK: Well we wear cloth masks and also when I say low waste I do mean low waste and not zero waste because I don't really believe in absolutism. I believe once you have a goal to do something everyday or get down to zero or whatever and that's so much pressure and at the moment when you don't achieve that it's like well why even bother in the first place or you beat yourself up and I have more than enough to beat myself up about other than occasionally forgetting my cloth mask and needing to use a disposable one. So cloth masks is the short answer for the mask question and we find moments where we are very lucky and privileged where we have washing machines on site and so we do cloth diapers for the baby, not for me I am fully housetrained but we do cloth diapers and that is both a choice and a sacrifice also that stands at the intersection with privilege and ability to do so because of our circumstances so we do cloth diapers. We use very few disposable things you know whenever possible and that is both a choice and involves sacrifice because it's time and effort and it would be much easier to buy yogurt at the damn store instead of making it at home or like all of these things but they are also a function of various privileges and so yeah I think a lot about that. And I also buy, well I don't know how this is going to work Corinn, it's Corinn, yes?

CB: Yeah

40:32

LK: Just making sure I am pronouncing, Corinn I don't know this is going to work because I used to buy most of my clothes second hand at thrift store but now I'm like, y'all, we used to go into stores like into enclosed spaces and pick up clothes that people had touched and probably put on their bodies and go into even more enclosed spaces and put those clothes on our bodies and decide if we wanted them, take them off and then put them back.

CB: Yeah

40:50

LK: What? And I think about that now like how am I going to buy clothes, so I don't know yet. I don't know how I can handle that, right now I am wearing really fun baggy clothes and nobody has to know that I have worn essentially the same 5 articles of clothing in the past year so I don't know. But yeah there's a lot of ways that if you find things that you think take so much time they actually don't, like making our own almond milk or cashew milk or oat milk or any of those things take me literally like five minutes every few days and then I use those grounds to make like sort of snacky biscuit-y things for the family which means nothing is wasted, we have delicious snacky cake things and you know like we both are helping the environment improve but I don't know. I hope that some of these things make a difference, we also wash like plastic bags and things and we've reused the same ziploc bags for like three years until they fall apart and we have like a little bag drier.

42:19

LC: I think so many people are almost afraid to take that step into like renewable resources because they don't want to mess up, they are afraid that they are doing it wrong but its really just baby steps.

42:28

LK: Yeah and also we're all doing it wrong. And we are all doing it right. There's a lot of pressure and a lot of pureism that can happen and I think the more that we can always just do one thing and figure it out. The bag rack that we have is literally, we found, cause we are who we are, we found a patio umbrella that was abandoned in an alleyway because it didnt work and flipped it upside down and put a thing around it so that it stands up like this and you just put a bag over it to dry, its not that hard. But thats what we did for a really long time, and you just wash bags out and stuff like and its just a practice. You start finding ways to do things and also because now environmentalism is kinda a cause that a lot of...I've been living this way for like a really long time cause I am really old I'm in my thirties guys, I had time...a lot of people feel like they have to come into this movement fully formed or they are going to get dragged for it and its like oh my god calm down. Also most of the waste in the world is on a corporate scale that we can't even touch. I do these things because it makes me feel like my individual impact is smaller and I hope that it has a ripple effect. If enough people behave this way and are less bought in to what can I buy to solve this problem then I think that does have a small impact but really like be a lobbyist and figure out how corporations can shift their practices, but I do believe in individual actions as well like as cynical as that may have sounded before. Do one small thing and then in doing that you pave the way for the next step you are going to take, which paves a way for the next step you are going to take and eventually you are going to realize you're walking and then from there eventually you are going to realize that you are walking with other people. So yeah.

CB: It's all about doing what you can.

LK: And you dont have to be perfect about it. Sorry, go ahead Corinn.

45:03

CB: Oh, I was just going to ask my final question. So how do you think people will look back at 2020, the year of the pandemic and how do you want people to remember the Auntie Sewing Squad?

45:23

LK: I want people to remember, it's what I was just talking about within this idea of living in a low waste way, to know that we faced something that felt insurmountable and in a moment in which we each felt so small, collective efforts were so powerful. I see this as the Super Auntie adding things up on a spreadsheet, it sounds silly but I now, like in the beginning I would post like oh a really big ask was for three hundred masks, like I could get that filled, if you needed three hundred masks for an unhoused population, I could get that filled in like an hour at this point but in the beginning three hundred masks was a huge deal. The last campaign I ran was five thousand masks and it was filled within a day, something like that, not even a full day and no one pledged more than a hundred masks, I think Mikey was the one, sometimes you get pledged for a hundred or a hundred and fifty but generally the pledges are ten masks, twenty masks, sometimes

fifty masks and some of them are like I have five masks, like generally the pledges are around twenty or twenty five masks, that's the average I would say. The person who has made twenty masks might feel like it's a drop in the bucket, but I watch these pledges add up, I watch them come in, I am entering the numbers and I watch us hit five thousand masks, that is five thousand faces, well it's probably more like twenty-five hundred faces, I want everyone to have two. But that is thousands of people who have masks on their faces who have been told we see you, we respect you, we care about you, we stand with you. And these individual actions by the collective are powerful. And the fact that we have done it without asking people to sacrifice themselves, that we have placed an emphasis on care and community care within our own ecosystem is radical and it is beautiful and I think that's what I want people to know and to remember and to know that I think that means if and when the next thing happens that is big and confusing and insurmountable and overwhelming and terrifying that we know that whatever it is can be faced and if not, I mean certainly not solved but certainly that we can make things better for one another.

49:11

CB: Yeah, I definitely agree, like this pandemic has taught everyone a lot about themselves and just how important it is to have a community and have people and just care about others and be a humanitarian.

49:24

LK: Yeah, and that is hard to do, and also that takes sacrifice, like there were times at 11 o'clock at night that I could have been asleep. That there were times that Kristina Wong could've learned to bake sourdough bread or whatever it is. Like people who were like oh my god I'm so bored during the pandemic, I was like, why? When there is so much you can be doing. But that there was so much that everyone could have been doing and that the Aunties, the Uncles, the Cousins have chosen to spend their time sewing masks for people that are never going to know their names is really a beautiful thing. And the fact that it has ripple effects if you let it like, there is going to be a book, that Kristina did a show, that we are talking and now connected, like I'm invested in your journeys now, like in what you are doing as students and as this like generation walking through fire together and like coming into the world in this moment like I'm so interested to see what everyone does out of this. How are you taking these lessons of humanitarianism and collective action and activism? I am genuinely curious of what each of you are doing with that.

CB: For me I was like, sorry Lindsey you go.

LC: Before the pandemic and we had to quarantine I was pretty selfish with the way I lived. And I didn't think a lot about what I had and I took a lot of stuff for granted but coming out after quarantine, like a year later I have tried to give back to my communities around me. I am involved with my church that's nearby and I love my family a lot more than I did before just cause I am centered in myself and I think a lot more about that type of stuff. So yeah I think as much bad as there was I have definitely grown from this experience.

CB: Yeah I would say same here, like I think about if COVID never happened, we would be on campus at college and I had a lot of time that I spent with my family and my brother that I probably wouldn't have gotten if we did move away and things like that and just like I really learned how much I appreciate my family and everything that they do for me and all that they sacrifice and I think I was blinded about that before because I wasn't spending as much time with my family as I was forced to with COVID. I just have learned a lot more about the world and just how much like progress we have made but just how much there still is needed to be made and I just have become a lot more interested in activism and social movements that I was interested in before but I really have like dived into it a lot more and just started to really want to care about people and care about the problems that people face that maybe I don't face.

53:11

LK: It sounds like both of you have really activated empathic connections which is really special and beautiful. That's awesome. Corinn, do you have a specific area in activism that you feel like is calling you at the moment or are you kinda in that like what shall I, the world is awful, people are awful, everything is awful where even to begin? Which is a stage that I am familiar with.

53:43

CB: Yeah that's definitely how I felt at first like right when George Floyd was killed it was kinda like, I knew that this was happening but it was, I feel like an awakening within a lot of people like this is such a big problem, Black Lives Matter and like Stop Asian Hate were things that were really drawn to me because like I live in a town where it's pretty racist and people are very outspoken about how they do not care about people. We just had the Proud Boys here recently, like it's pretty bad. And just seeing..

LK: Wow.

CB: Yeah, just seeing how much hatred there is within people and just living in this town and just seeing how much people hate people for the color of their skin and just like my ex-boyfriend he was Hispanic and just how much people would be racist to him because he was Hispanic and just assume things about him, it really woke something in me to be like I don't understand how people can just hate someone for the color of their skin, like they are a person at the end of the day, it doesn't matter what they look like or anything about that. That really just woke something up in me and was like this isn't okay. I want to do everything in my power to show that I know this isn't okay. I don't want to follow the people in my town that is just racist, I want to be an ally and speak out against these things. So I attended my first protest this year and that was just like, it almost brought me to tears because I am doing something rather than just hiding behind a screen I am actually doing something for a community that I care about. So that was really awakening. I am an Environmental Studies major, so just like all about how we can be environmentally friendly in a COVID world. You can't bring your reusable cups anywhere and there is so much waste that is being built up this year and it's just like trying to figure out and navigate throughout that.

LK: Yeah the disposable culture has made a real resurgence.

CB: Yeah

56:02

LK: And yes to watching that awakening in many people this past year, and the rearticulation and the reclarification. There's so much within that and such a capacity for, especially people who have various, we're all at various intersections of oppression and privilege, and that privilege is not a dirty word, that there is a lot to be said for sacrificing it or leveraging it or questioning it and using, especially for white people there is a lot of space to help to dismantle these systems as long as we begin to be part of dismantling the systems, as long as we're looking to people outside of our own experience to lead the way. There's a lot to do, and that's awesome that you're doing any of it.

CB: Yeah

LK: I hear, I think I hear a tiny person.

57:25

LC: Well I think that wraps it up for our questions but if there's anything else you want to add.

57:32

LK: Have either of you had to sew a mask for Chrissy yet?

LC: Not yet.

LK: Okay.

CB: No, not yet but I'd love to.

LK: Do either of you sew, do you make your masks?

LC: I don't, I just know how to hand sew.

CB: I know how to sew.

LK: Do you?

CB: Yeah, I have a machine.

57:56

LK: Nice, I still don't know how to use a machine, I mean I do but its not great guys. Well that was my only question was have you guys sew masks yet or did you get to sew masks. It was really lovely to meet you, thank you very very much for taking this time, and being graceful for my lateness and your thoughtfulness and for all of the things you are going to do in the world its really awesome.

58:35

CB: Of course it was really wonderful meeting you and speaking to you and just learning more about what you do within this Auntie Sewing Squad.

LK: Hold on one second, Junnie you coming in? Junnie? Junnie you want to come in, come say hi to some people. What have you been doing, oh we have gotten sidetracked. Come here baby. Who is this who are these people. Hi. Say hi Juniper. This is my assistant. Okay you tell. Well it was lovely to meet you both and thank you.

59:36

LC: Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with us.