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Interview with Meloney Holguin Quady

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Interviewee: Meloney Holguin Quady

Interviewers: Elizabeth Ceja and Liz Cruz

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Overseen by: Dr. Chrissy Yee Lau

Bio:

Meloney Holguin Quady identifies as Mexican and Filipina and grew up as an army brat. She graduated from University of California Santa Cruz with a Bachelors in Studio Art and then went to Vermont College and received an MFA in Fine Arts. She now lives in southern Oregon and has a vineyard and winery with her family that she has been building since 2005. She joined the Auntie Sewing Squad in April of 2020.

Abstract:

(00:00) Holguin Quady begins with her background as a military brat and how that shaped her approach to the pursuit of college. (05:00) Then she shares about her etsy shop and how she approached paying it forward as part of the payment. Afterwards, she discusses how she became involved with the Auntie Sewing Squad. (15:00) Holguin Quady shares how the Auntie Sewing Squad sustained her mental health. (20:00) She highlighted how her mother was able to help her in making masks. (25:00) Holguin Quady reflects on interacting with Aunties online versus socializing in person.

Meloney Holguin Quady Oral History Transcript

00:02

Liz Cruz (LC): And the time today is 8:06. 5-5- 2021.

Elizabeth Ceja (EC): So for introductions. Could you tell us a little bit about yourself and your background?

Meloney Holguin Quady (MHQ): Sure. My name is Meloney Quady. I am an artist. We (my family) have our own business here in southern Oregon. We have a winery and vineyard. And I joined Auntie Sewing Squad, April 24th, 2020.

EC: You mentioned you were the first to attend college. How was college for you?

MHQ: College for me was interesting because I kind of knew I wanted to go to college, but I didn't at that time understand what that meant. So I grew up with a single mom and my step dad, when he was re-married, was in the military, so we traveled a lot. And so I kind of always anticipated more traveling like every two to three we would move. And then when he finally retired, they separated. And I was back with just my mom my final year of high school. When you kind of get into this routine of kind of everything just really happening for you, like not necessarily handed to you, but kind of like this is where you're going next. This is where you're moving next. This is like your next step. You don't kind of understand that you have to make that next step now, right? You're a senior in high school, and so for me, college was kind of always the next step. But I didn't really understand what it was to get there. And I was really fortunate, looking back now that I had a counselor who kind of grabbed me and pulled me into her office and said, what have you done, like where's your applications, have you applied for financial aid? Have you done any of this stuff? And I was like, what is all of that? (laughs) And so she really kind of lit a fire under my ass. So this is the stuff you need to do and you have to do it by this time or else you're not going anywhere. And it was the first time anyone had done that because I'd just been pushed forward the whole time. And so I did it. And I got into colleges and I chose UC Santa Cruz. I started out in science, ended up graduating an art major and went on to graduate school in Vermont. I got a master's in fine arts. Married, had kids, and have a business now. A lot of it was because Miss Torres pulling me into her office saying, hey, you need to get this done. So yeah, college was interesting.

EC: So do you think it was harder because you were a first generation student?

MHQ: It was. I didn't really have... You know, my daughters now, they have my husband and I kind of telling them, you know, this is what you have to do in order to get to your next step and showing them that they have options and I just didn't understand at that time what that was. So like I said, it was for me always kind of anticipated that something else was going to happen. I just didn't know what it was. And I didn't understand that that was in my control until very much later.

EC: So, on your information, on your background, you said that you had an Etsy shop and so how was the transition to the pay it forward process for the?

04:50

MHQ: For the masks? Yeah, so about March like 14th, 18th of last year, we kind of realized that it was going to get really crazy. I mean, like we were already hearing from our local hospital here that they didn't have any masks and they didn't have any PPE. And my friends who were in the health industry, they just didn't know what to do. They were being asked to basically reuse their masks. And so I started making larger masks that would fit over their existing N-95. So that way they could clean the fabric and not have to throw away. They would be at least a little bit cleaner, protect them a little bit more. And so I started out doing that for clinics and for the local hospital. And I was doing that on my own. I made a handful for family. And we had already had masks and this idea of wearing masks because we have smoke season up here, prior season comes and the smoke is terrible. So we had fabric masks that we had not gotten used to wearing but had already worn in the past. So we had those. And then there was a local group that I caught wind of that was doing kind of more for shelters and for different groups here. So I joined them and I worked with them for a while and right about the time, I guess I joined the Aunties, they were kind of dwindling down, like the hospitals were getting some PPE. It didn't seem like the need was so dire as it was, believe it or not, like they somehow managed to get things going, at least here in southern Oregon. And so people were able to purchase masks. And I was still making masks for smaller groups here, but people were getting really kind of burnt out on making so many. And I saw the Auntie Page and I saw how there were really still a lot of groups out there outside of my area that needed help and particularly the First Nations and farmworkers. And so I offered to start sewing for them. And then with every offer or request that came out, I would send some and send some and send some. And then it just became like, OK, I was only sewing for Aunties. And so the Etsy page, the way that happened was that in the beginning when I was making them for our local area, I had to have friends in different areas around the country who needed masks and who knew of other people who needed masks. And I knew how to make a mask, I didn't know how to get it to the person that needed the mask. And so I didn't want to

charge anybody for anything. But I also couldn't afford to pay for shipping for everybody who wanted one. And so what I did was I had a pay it forward um to pay it forward program where I changed my link on my Etsy page to have a pay it forward link where it would only charge shipping, and it charged the 20 cents for because Etsy required you to have like a price for it, so everything was 20 cents. And I took that off the shipping, basically. And so they would be able to click on it, order it and the idea was that they would honor-system (laughs) they would do something to pay it forward the mask, basically, the free mask. And it became big and it became overwhelming, not just with how many people were requesting them, but with the stories that were coming back. And it was emotionally heavy. I was making like at that time, I think I was making between 20 and 40 like a week just to send off to strangers and having to make them and then package them and then send them off. And it was just me doing it at that time. So that's kind of how the pay it forward thing worked. And I ended up stopping it a little bit later in the year when every once in a while I would put up like 20, I would list 20 available and then I would do it. But then once people started to be able to buy masks at Wal-Mart or Target or anything like that, they stopped asking for them. And so just click the link after that. And then I sold exclusively for the Aunties and for their requests.

10:03

LC: If you don't mind me asking you for the stories that you talked about, would you be comfortable telling us some of your favorite stories that you remember?

MHQ: A lot of them were really sad. A lot of them were, please make me a mask, my family doesn't have anything right now. We don't have a job. You know my mom is high risk. She has to go to the doctors and I can't go with her. They were hard to read because it's just a reminder of how broken so many systems are. And the pay it forwards were, I bought somebody's milk today or I'm asking for these masks because I'm going to hand them out. One lady asked for 20 masks. I was like one mask, I just can't give you 20 masks. Why are you requesting 20? And she's like, well, I'm gonna go and hand them out to all the bus drivers in our town because they're not given any. At that point, the bus drivers weren't issued any masks from the transit authority. And just because I don't know they didn't realize that they needed them or maybe they didn't want to take the cost of them or what. In early March, April, it was kind of nuts. Like just hand them a mask (laughs) 20 cent mask, give them a mask and employers weren't doing it. And so a lot of the health service workers, at least here, I don't know where you guys are, but here it was kind of like it took them a while, took a couple weeks, it took a month or so for people to kind of say, OK, we need as employers have to help protect our employees. And so they were a lot like that. They were heavy. I kept them all.

EC: So for your family motto, you mentioned that it was we all have our weaknesses that's why we have each other. What does that mean to you with the Auntie Sewing Squad?

MHQ: It is, I think, the epitome of ASS, like how I was telling you that I can make a mask, I don't know how to get it out to somebody. There are so many. I'm still learning this today. I don't know what everybody does out in the real world. And so each each day I realize that, oh, this person does this and this person does that. And I know how they function within the group. But it takes that core where like, you can't do everything and you definitely have your own weaknesses, but you have a whole group of others around you who can pick that up and help. And I see that almost every time I log in and check the page. It's like somebody is stepping up. Somebody is coming in. Somebody is saying, I can't do that, which is a huge thing to say (laughs). It's like I can't do something. And someones like, it's ok, I got it. I can't do what you can do, but I can do this. And it's one of the reasons I love the group so much. It's that kind of mentality of being able to say, I can't do this and someone else saying, that's cool, well, I can do it.

EC: What was it like being a part of the Auntie Sewing Squad?

MHQ: It's fun, I think it's also sad, it's a ride. I've never been part of an organized group. It's just not really kind of my thing. I grew up an only child in the military, so I'm used to being alone. And I'm comfortable with that. And I never really sought out groups. I played soccer. I was a goalie. So even then, you're isolated (laughs). So I joined because I felt like it was an obligation. I had something that I could do to help other people. And they were facilitating getting it out. And so if I could send it to somebody, then it was great. That's why I originally joined. I stay because they're caring and funny as hell. And it's just this community that I never really thought I would enjoy having. And I enjoy them a lot.

(15:50)

LC: Do you think the Auntie Sewing Squad helped you cope with mental illness that you had mentioned in your little survey to us?

MHQ: Yes, I do. And that's a new thing talking about it. But, yeah, it's something I've always kind of had. And definitely I think last year would have been like way harder to handle. And I think I've heard it from a lot of other aunties. Like I said, I am really comfortable kind of being on my own. But last year was so different, I mean, for everybody. It was like it's not just being alone. It's watching the rest of the world choose to do things that aren't right, that are just horrible choices and watching the world fall apart in a way and become so divided and so selfish. And so you know people are selfish, right? And you know that people feel that's a quality in humanity.

But then to really kind of see that live it out in real time, in harsh choices that people made. I was not ready for that, and then both my girls came home. One stayed in college, but my youngest, I think it was CNN or one of the news channels, she watched the George Floyd thing. She watched the whole and I didn't know until later. And going through all of that was hard. And the Aunties gathered and were there and we sent masks and I know that was just like the littlest tiniest thing you could do, but it felt good sending masks for those protests because on one hand, it's so trivial, right? It's like, what can you send somebody who's lost so much? And then at the other hand, this is what I'm sending you, this love, I'm sending this piece to protect you, to help you. It's a beautiful piece that I've made and I've spent a lot of time on and this is the intent. So those were the little things that helped get through last year. And I think it just would have been so much harder without them.

LC: You had just mentioned the Auntie Sewing Squad had sent masks out to protests and such.

(19:25)

MHQ: Not protests, I guess marches. We actively sent masks. So there were asks for marches that were even for getting out the vote. I mean, we sent masks. So it depended on the way the masks are distributed. There are Super Aunties to have these larger asks for big groups. And then there are on Aunties that can also ask for them up to a certain amount of masks for their own individual cause. And so you can choose which ones you want to send to.

LC: OK. Thank you for elaborating on that. Did you get people outside of the ASS to help you make masks?

MHQ: I did. My mom helped me about midway through, so about summertime, around this time last year. She started doing all of my cutting. So I showed her how you can rip fabric in order to get it to the correct size. And she was like, this feels so good. So she started doing all of the cutting and ripping for my masks. And she's been doing that since then. And she does the little ear loops. Some of the ear loops are elastic and some are ties she does all of those. And then I do all the sewing now. So that was great for us to be able to work together.

LC: What was one of your favorite memories while being part of the Auntie Sewing Squad?

MHQ: I would say that one really is like a good one for me. My mom and I worked together in our family business here. My mom, husband and I run the vineyard management company and the winery. But having her in the studio with me doing things has been really good bringing us

together. And then watching her, she does not have Facebook or any socials. And so watching her go “ooh what did they say today?” Or I’d take a picture of her and she was like, what did they say about that today or this? Or tell them this, tell them that. And so it's been inclusive. It's been fun.

22:25

LC: This one's kind of like a more heavier, thought out question. If you could go back in time, what would you do differently or would you do anything differently in your contribution to Auntie Sewing Squad?

MHQ: I don't know. I wish I would have found them earlier. But I found them pretty early on as it is. I think it was about a month in that I found them. And, of course, you wish you could make more than you can do more things. I really kind of hope that one day we're able to meet. It would be nice to meet a few of them. All of them. But I know there's a lot of us. So I don't think I'd do anything differently. I can't think of anything that I regret or anything other than not starting sooner. I would pretty much do almost anything for them.

LC: I felt completely like having that online friend barrier is so different. And the thought of meeting people in real life is crazy. Trying to think how to word this. Do you think with how social media and the online world has taken over, has it created a new type of lifestyle with doing things online, if you understand what I’m trying to say?

24:25

MHQ: You mean like being exclusively online, like as opposed to having real world tangible people?

LC: Yeah. I mean, I guess, similar to that.

MHQ: Yeah, it's different. I get it. If I had this kind of setup. Right. I'm assuming you guys are like in your early 20s. Maybe?

LC: Yeah, it's close.

MHQ: If I had this kind of setup when I was your guys’ age, I probably would never have left my room. I mean, that would have been hands down the easiest thing for me to do because it is

different. I don't Zoom a lot or like facetime a lot with people, but I chat a lot and it's a different feeling than when you're sitting next to somebody and you feel that energy, feel the other person's energy. And for me personally, people's energy can be draining. And it has nothing to do with them as a person and that makes it even more difficult because you don't necessarily understand that. And so then they feel kind of self-conscious about like, well, why don't you want to spend time with me? Just the energy that I feel from you is draining and it has nothing to do with like with you as being a great person that I love. It's just who I am. And that's like something that I have to have. So for me going out with people, say it was not pandemic. We have a winery. So we are constantly with people normally, tastings and things and working. It's difficult. It's like the physical part of life is difficult for me. And so, like you said, the social interaction via whether it's Facebook or Instagram, you know, it's easier, it's much easier. And I have to constantly remind myself that you can't just only have that. You need tangible things as well. You need your tangible person. But it's been a balance last year trying to figure out. And then with the pandemic. Before this last year, I was not on social media this much like just not. But I just found a way that I could still interact with people. It's kind of nice not being drained if that makes sense. I don't know if that makes sense to you guys or not.

LC: Yes. That makes complete sense, I promise you. Most of my friends are online. I live in a different state from the school. So I met all my classmates online. I met them all that way. So I completely get it.

27:37

MHQ: Yeah. Yeah, it's not bad, it's just it's sometimes really nice to also be able to unplug and be with somebody. But it makes it more difficult this year.

LC: I don't know if Elizabeth has any more questions, but I know I'm personally all good.

EC: Pretty much answered all our questions.

MHQ: Okay

LC: I also think so.

EC: Do you still keep in contact with-

MHQ: What was that?

EC: Do you still keep in contact with the Auntie Sewing Squad?

MHQ: Oh, yeah, yeah. I'm still active there. I just sent off masks yesterday. So, yeah, just still very active with them.

LC: That's really cool with the pandemic "coming slowly to an end." We all know it's probably not. That's really cool that you guys are still sending out masks actively. I will say...

MHQ: Yeah. Ya know. There are some that are called open asks. Like if you have masks, there are like a handful of places that will continually keep taking them, especially like the farming communities. We haven't sent any to First Nations for a long while because thankfully they're doing so much better having vaccines and just getting more supplies. But the farm workers groups and then a lot of the youth groups and the unsheltered groups are still continually taking more masks. And so we will send to them. Right now, I just finished a batch for the Aunties. And then I also finished a batch for my youngest daughter's school, cause our state reopened in-class learning. And she goes to a really small little farm community school. So I've been making them some. They're getting back in the class. Definitely the Squad is still active.

LC: I think we're all good here. Thank you for coming in and spending your time with us for the last about 30 minutes and answering our questions.

MHQ: You're very welcome.