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## Interview with Sally Nemeth

Sally Nemeth

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Interviewee: Sally Nemeth

Interviewers: Hailey Hopkins and Samantha Chevez Moscoso

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Length: 00:33:49

Overseen by: Dr. Chrissy Yee Lau

Short Bio: Sally Nemeth has a familial history of helping others through sewing. However, Nemeth's profession is actually in writing and currently teaches screenwriting, among other things at Loyola Marymount University. She has lived in many different parts of the country, loving the big city of Chicago and California the most. After being involved in activism throughout her life, Sally Nemeth joined the Auntie Sewing Squad to help underprivileged communities suffering in the midst of a global pandemic.

Thematic Outline: (00:00:16) Sally Nemeth describes her background and professions. (00:02:56) She goes on to describe her experience when first joining the Auntie Sewing Squad, and how she got involved in the first place, the Auntie Sewing Squad dynamics, along with the hard times endured during the beginning of the pandemic. (00:15:17) Sally Nemeth shifts to talking about her greatest influence, and also the past places she has lived, along with highlights of her current place of residence: Los Angeles, California. (00:22:09) She continues to talk about Los Angeles and teaching at Loyola Marymount, describing the job in general and advice she would give to college students. (00:25:49) Finally, Sally Nemeth concludes the interview by talking about her lifelong activism and hobbies, pre-pandemic.

**(00:00:00)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** Ok perfect! So, we are recording. My name is Hailey Hopkins.

**(00:00:06)**

**Sally Nemeth:** Hi Hailey.

**(00:00:08)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** My name is Samantha.

**(00:00:10)**

**Sally Nemeth:** Hi Samantha.

**(00:00:12)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** We're gonna start off with having you introduce yourself and your background, if that's okay with you.

**(00:00:17)**

**Sally Nemeth:** Sure. My name is Sally Nemeth. I am a writer. I write plays, screenplays, novels, short stories. I teach screenwriting at Loyola Marymount University and I've lived all over the country. But I've been here in California for the past twenty-six years. So, I now feel like a Californian.

**(00:00:54)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** Wow ok that's great. That's so interesting, I didn't know that you taught at Loyola Marymount.

**(00:00:59)**

**Sally Nemeth:** Yeah, yeah, I do.

**(00:01:02)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** Ok so can you tell us- Oh sorry.

**(00:01:06)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** I did have a quick like simple follow up question. Was there any reason why you got into screenwriting or screenplay writing?

**(00:01:18)**

**Sally Nemeth:** I started off as a theater major in college. I went to Northwestern University and I have plays done all over the country and in other countries as well, other English-speaking countries. But it was a really hard way to make a living and a friend, my agent at the time,

suggested that I try writing for television and I did. My first job was on the original *Law and Order*.

**(00:01:45)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** Cool.

**(00:01:46)**

**Sally Nemeth:** And after that I worked for many years and then at a certain point you age out of the business. It's not just actresses. It's screenwriters, too. So, as a kid, I just I loved to read. I always thought the best thing anyone could ever do was write a book. I finally did that. I've written four since, only one's been published so far. [Laughs]

**(00:02:21)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** [Laughs]

**(00:02:22)**

**Sally Nemeth:** And yeah, writing is kind of how I make sense of the world and I may not know, while I'm writing something, what I'm processing in terms of the world but I eventually realize it. [Laughs]

**(00:02:43)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** Wow. [Clears Throat] Could you kind of explain your experience of when you first joined the group, the Auntie Sewing Squad?

**(00:02:56)**

**Sally Nemeth:** Yeah, like a lot of people at the beginning of the pandemic, I was going through old fabric bins finding scraps of this and that, tearing up sheets, making masks for friends and family and even, I'm a cancer patient and I was even making masks for my oncology nurses at Kaiser who didn't have them yet. And elastic was like gold, you couldn't get it, you couldn't find it, you couldn't buy it online. I was cutting up old opaque tights for ear loops and, and I was talking to a friend who knew Kristina Wong and she said I think this was around this time of year like end of April because I think I just reached my Auntie-versary, my first year with the Auntie Squad. And she said, I know where you can get elastic, and it was like the black market and she said you just have to be willing to sew for them and I'm like, I'm sewing anyway why wouldn't I sew for them? So, I joined, I started sewing for them right away and have been sewing for them ever since. [Smiles]

**(00:04:26)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** That sounds nice. I did have a, because I was reading the little description that you gave us and I was actually wondering how did you, because elastic is very

expensive, so I do understand like that it was kind of difficult to get with it running out and all the masks being homemade, how did you like, you said you used leggings and stuff like that?

**(00:04:54)**

**Sally Nemeth:** Yeah, like opaque tights like black tights and leggings and stuff like that, yeah, I was using stuff like that for ties and shoelaces if people wanted the things that tie behind their head because you couldn't find bias tape either. And it wasn't that so many people were making masks, it's that the supply chain just stopped, and stores closed and downtown, the garment district which is where you would go to get all of this anyway shut down.

**(00:05:29)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** Oh no.

**(00:05:31)**

**Sally Nemeth:** At the beginning of the pandemic, it was just like a hard shutdown. And so, you couldn't even find stuff online, you could find it, but it was like and we'll get it to you in two weeks, because it's coming from China, maybe.

**(00:05:51)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** [Light Chuckle]

**(00:05:52)**

**Sally Nemeth:** So, yeah, materials were really hard to come by and Aunties were really helpful in scrounging and cajoling and finding interesting resources and getting donations. The Super Aunties are amazing. I don't know how they do what they do but they do. [Smiles]

**(00:06:20)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** Oh sorry. Go ahead.

**(00:06:23)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** And what was the experience like when, do you have any moments that you all shared where it was kind of stressful and it kind of felt like there was nothing you could really do even though you were able to get out of that situation? And do you also have a favorite moment with the Auntie Sewing Squad?

**(00:06:45)**

**Sally Nemeth:** Oh gosh. At the beginning, and I went to one of these and it was fun, the Aunties used to have a Stitch n Bitch, where we'd all just get on Zoom and sew and bitch and that was a great outlet because all of us were and still are furious. I mean we're furious that there wasn't PPE for people in hospitals. At the beginning Aunties were making masks for Kaiser, like just

huge orders of masks for Kaiser. We were furious that the government had so bungled this and had left all citizens, but especially the most vulnerable citizens, at such risk. So a lot of the Stitch n Bitch, I mean we're highly political [Laughs] and we quickly segwayed from making things for the medical community because they were finally getting their stuff, even though states were having to outbid each other for equipment and PPE, which was another thing, but we quickly segwayed to, again, those most vulnerable communities like farm workers and First Nations and migrants, who a lot of people were overlooking and also social justice organizations and that for me has been incredibly fulfilling. I think the best time, we do these Auntie Swap Meets [smiles] occasionally and those were a ton of fun. But recently one of the Super Aunties, Laura Karlin, she runs a dance company called Invertigo, and because I'm going through some pretty intense cancer treatment right now, another Auntie – we have this thing called Auntie Care where there are Aunties that are not Sewing Aunties who just do things to take care of other Aunties like especially in the beginning when Aunties were sewing all day and all night, I wasn't one of them, I'm not fast, but they would bring them meals and stuff like that – but in this case, Laura had one of her dancers choreograph a piece for me and dance it and send it to me and it just I think that's probably... it did me in, it absolutely did me in.

**(00:10:23)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** That sounds so wonderful and so thoughtful of her to do that and wow. You mentioned a couple times the term “Super Auntie”. Could you kind of explain what that is?

**(00:10:38)**

**Sally Nemeth:** Okay so there's Kristina, the overlord.

**(00:10:41)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** [Chuckles]

**(00:10:43)**

**Sally Nemeth:** And then Super Aunties are Aunties who are in charge of various campaigns or they run hubs. So a hub is like a place where their house has been given over to being a materials stash. So they've got fabric, they've got elastic, they've got thread, they've got nose wires, they've got everything you need. And you just need to go to the hub and get it. The other Super Aunties are the ones who field requests because we get requests all the time for masks, and they field requests and it's like say two thousand for farm workers in uh the San Joaquin Valley and various different agencies will be distributing them, and they want various sizes, and they want them with ties. So the Super Aunties will post that request, Aunties will then say I pledge twenty masks adult medium, I pledge fifty masks adult large, and when the request is full then the Aunties direct message the Super Auntie, get the address, send it off, and the Super Aunties keep these amazing spreadsheets. So they are the engine. They run the day to day like unbelievably.

It's so interesting because it's the most incredibly well-run horizontal organization I've ever seen. [Nods Head] Even though we have an overlord. [smiles]

**(00:12:56)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** [Chuckles] So you also mentioned your mom's history with helping others like during the war through sewing and knitting, so was she a major contribution in basically your motivation of sewing and did she teach you to sew?

**(00:13:14)**

**Sally Nemeth:** No, my mother hates to sew. [Smiles]

**(00:13:19)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** [Laughs]

**(00:13:20)**

**Sally Nemeth:** This is my grandmother's machine. This is a 1951 Singer. I'll tilt down so you can see the whole thing. [Tilts Camera Down]

**(00:13:27)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** It's so pretty. [Smiles]

**(00:13:29)**

**Sally Nemeth:** Thank you. It's a 1951 Singer Featherweight and my Grammy sewed on it. And she did not teach me how to sew either. [Laughs]

**(00:13:39)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso & Hailey Hopkins:** [Laughs]

**(00:13:41)**

**Sally Nemeth:** I don't know if you'll hear this a lot but I learned in Home Ec.

**(00:13:47)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** Oh. [Chuckles]

**(00:13:49)**

**Sally Nemeth:** Yeah, when I was a kid, you had to take Home Economics in junior high and back then, girls had to take cooking and sewing, and boys got to take wood and metal shop. And girls couldn't take wood and metal shop and boys couldn't take cooking and sewing. So I learned to sew in Home Ec and then after that when my Grammy died and I inherited this machine, it's come with me everywhere I've moved. And I've always sewn, I sewed baby quilts for friends

and family who have babies. I have always sewn my own curtains, pillowcases, things like that. But I wouldn't call myself an avid sewer. [Chuckles] There are people who love to do it, my friend Sanae who is an Auntie loves to sew, it's her happy place. I like to sew and I'm not bad at it but it's something I do when I have to and I felt that in this time, I had to. And I wanted to, it was a way for me to channel my own anxiety and rage. [Nods Head]

**(00:15:17)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** As a follow up to that, who would you say has majorly influenced you to become the person that you have transformed yourself into?

**(00:15:33)**

**Sally Nemeth:** Oh god.

**(00:15:35)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** [Laughs] I'm sorry.

**(00:15:37)**

**Sally Nemeth:** [Laughs] It's-... [Pause] I mean obviously my own family but I had a theater professor in college who taught a yearlong course called the Development of Dramatic Art and she also taught the playwriting class that I took and started to write and she was also very very into social justice. Her name is Linda Jenkins, she's still around, I still talk to her. We're great friends. And I think she was just an enormous influence and she always encouraged me and supported me in the work that I do, other than my family which is bedrock. [Smiles]

**(00:17:00)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** [Chuckles]

**(00:17:01)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** Okay, so transitioning away from the Auntie Sewing Squad, I did see in your background that you live in Los Angeles, and you did mention that earlier. What's your favorite place that you've lived, and then what is your favorite thing about Southern California?

**(00:17:24)**

**Sally Nemeth:** [Smiles] Favorite place I've lived. When I was little little, we lived just outside of Chicago in the Indiana Dunes, so it was a beach community, and you know my dad worked at the steel mill nearby, so he was home a lot, and it was kind of idyllic to be able to leave your house and walk down some windy streets and then be at the beach in Lake Michigan. And I've lived in a lot of places, I've lived in the city of Chicago, I've lived in Delaware, my family moved to Alabama when I was in the middle of high school. Never move a kid in the middle of high school. And New York City, I lived in New York City. And when I moved here, somebody gave



me the best bit of advice. Don't look for Chicago. I love Chicago, it's where I was born, it's where I call home. I like city cities and a friend of mine said don't look for that here. Find Los Angeles. I think the indoor-outdoor aspect of Los Angeles I just love. I love how in a normal year how Los Angeles just has free concerts everywhere and all kinds of music, and all kinds of art, and all kinds of people, and all kinds of food. And that's true in any city, but it just sort of feels like Los Angeles drills down on it. I also sort of feel like, and a lot of people feel this too, California is the most forward thinking. And when I stop and think well, where else would I live? Other than places I've already lived, like Chicago and whatever, I can't think of any where else. I love how in California, in two to three hours you can be in the mountains, the desert, the snow, you can be on the coast, you can be in Mexico. I love that, I love that. I look forward to that again.

**(00:20:31)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** You also mentioned that you write your books and things like that. What's your favorite job that you had, and were there any past jobs that you didn't mention?

**(00:20:53)**

**Sally Nemeth:** [Laughs] Oh I've had some shitty jobs.

**(00:20:57)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** [Laughs]

**(00:20:58)**

**Sally Nemeth:** You know I've waitressed, I've bartended, I've watered plants in office buildings. I've had crappy jobs, I really actually, and when I first started doing it, I wasn't sure how I would feel about it, but I've really actually enjoyed teaching. Other than writing, which is my job job and I love, I have really enjoyed teaching and I have really enjoyed seeing students make that turn where they all of a sudden go \*click\* I get it. It's different for every student [Sighs], and finding how to make each student get that \*click\* is really challenging but rewarding when it happens.

**(00:22:09)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** It's really cool to hear things from your perspective, like from a professor's perspective because we only see the students' side. How long have you been teaching at Loyola, and have you taught anywhere else?

**(00:22:24)**

**Sally Nemeth:** I've been teaching at Loyola for six years, no wait, yes, six years. I am unfortunately having to take a medical leave of absence in the fall, but I'll be back! I've never really taught anywhere else except for workshops at various book festivals or theater companies

when I'm there to be an artist of residence. Other than that, I've never really taught before. Luckily, because there is a curriculum at LMU as to how various courses progress and in the film department, I'm sure in all the departments, my fellow professors were very generous with their syllabi and with just talking me through my first semester and after that they were like okay, you get it now, make it your own! And since then, I've taught a number of different courses within the department and it's always interesting taking on a new one. Always interesting.

**(00:23:50)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** On the topic of teaching and being a college professor, what piece of advice would you give to your students, or that you already give to your students, to help them get through their classes or the coursework.

**(00:24:07)**

**Sally Nemeth:** Meet your deadlines. I mean honestly, meet your deadlines because honestly if you don't, if you don't manage your time well, panic ensues. And panic is never good. So, I always always tell them, I lay it out really really clearly: this is how much time you have to do this, it's enough, don't wait till the last second and please manage your time well. Because panic is not inspirational. Because they're doing creative work, it's not like they're writing a paper on cell division or something and even that you want to manage your time. I also tell them every major tends to get a little insular, especially towards the end, you're only taking classes in that, I encourage them to look outside a little bit. Look outside the film world, look outside the television world, live a little. Go places, do things because you never know where you might find inspiration.

**(00:25:49)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** And a little bit off the topic question, in our class we are learning about the different eras of progression in women's rights and activism basically, so do you have an opinion on the era that was most influenced in activism or fight for racial justice?

**(00:26:13)**

**Sally Nemeth:** Oh my god I mean in junior high I wore an ERA bracelet. Does that tell you anything? [Laughs] This is back in 1971. I was the only girl on my boys' soccer team because the coach refused to start a girls' soccer team. I've marched for reproductive rights all my life and it looks like it's not going to stop. I have always championed my LGBTQ friends, my friends who are people of color. This is America. America is more than a bunch of white European guys who came over and basically stole a bunch of land and created the greatest genocide ever. You all are being taught this stuff. I've had to pick it up because we weren't taught this, we weren't taught a lot of racial justice. I lived through the civil rights era. I was a child, but I lived through it. I remember the news, I remember seeing the Vietnam War every day on the tv, and there was something about seeing that that made me realize, how do I put this, how power is wielded

bluntly and most often for the wrong reasons. And I believe in fight the power, but I also believe in sharing the power.

**(00:28:37)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** Okay, so I'm sorry we're jumping around, I'm just excited. Do you have any other hobbies? I know you said you like sewing but you don't love it, and you love writing books but what do you do for fun?

**(00:28:54)**

**Sally Nemeth:** What do I do for fun? Well, these days, not much because there's not much to do for fun. [Laughs] My husband and I like to go to the Symphony, and we also like to go to other music concerts. We are big LAFC fans, so we're soccer fans. We have two dogs, two cats, two hens and a bunch of fish and a big garden. We live like 5 minutes from downtown, we're on a regular city lot but we've made it this sustainable oasis, so we feed ourselves largely from our backyard. I love to hang out with friends, I can't wait to do that again. I'm a swimmer, that's sort of my Zen place. I unfortunately haven't been able to swim for a while, but I'll get back to it. Just basically anything water related makes me happy. I'm a Pisces, I am an aquatic mammal and anything that has to do with the water, I'm down. Yeah, I just really miss hanging out with my friends.

**(00:30:18)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** You did say that you like water, so I think this is a quick question, have you visited El Matador Beach?

**(00:30:29)**

**Sally Nemeth:** Oh yeah! Oh yeah, it's my fav.

**(00:30:34)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** [laughs]

**(00:30:36)**

**Sally Nemeth:** We were actually going to go up to Cayucos in a couple of weeks. We've rented a house up there and are going with my nephew, his fiancé and their kid. And taking the dogs. I can't wait, a week at the beach. Yeah, oh god El Matador, the best. Except, here's the thing, recently people love to do photoshoots there so you're always having to step around these silly photoshoots there. It's crazy.

**(00:31:17)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** You also mentioned that you did swim team and your love for soccer as well, so were you a very sporty student throughout school?

**(00:31:40)**

**Sally Nemeth:** Oh year, super sporty. I know this is a reference you won't get: Sporty Spice. [Laughs] I've been an athlete all my life. Even into adult life I was swimming in the master's swim team, again because of what's going on with me medically right now, I can't quite do that yet, but I'll be back to it. I love to hike; I love to hike. I love getting up into the hills and hiking. Our last trip before the pandemic, and literally we got back the day before everything shut down, we went to Sedona and just hiked everywhere, it was so beautiful.

**(00:32:33)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** Okay, I think we'll be closing now, thank you so much for agreeing to being interviewed and just telling us about yourself. I will say that you are a very interesting person, and I really enjoyed this talk.

**(00:32:46)**

**Sally Nemeth:** [Laughs] Oh ok, good. I'm sure you'll enjoy a lot of the talks, I'm sure you'll enjoy most of them. Aunties are an interesting bunch and I think you'll really enjoy it. Question, are you also writing this up or will it just be in the archive?

**(00:33:10)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** We will be transcribing them, and we will also be sending you a copy of the transcription if you're interested. Everything will be up on the online source.

**(00:33:24)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** There will be a website where we will be uploading it.

**(00:33:29)**

**Sally Nemeth:** I don't need a transcription, that's fine, but yeah thank you for the insightful questions.

**(00:33:36)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** It was so awesome talking to you.

**(00:33:40)**

**Sally Nemeth:** Maybe someday we'll meet in real life.

**(00:33:42)**

**Hailey Hopkins:** That would be awesome, I hope you have a great day, thank you!

**(00:33:45)**

**Samantha Chevez Moscoso:** Thank you!

**(00:33:47)**

**Sally Nemeth:** Thank you, bye!