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Interview with Vibrina Coronado

Vibrina Coronado

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Interviewee: Vibrina Coronado

Interviewers: Shakyra Lopez-Valdez, Sophia Vargas

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Overseen by: Dr. Chrissy Yee Lau

Bio:

Born near Palm Springs in a small town called Banning, California, Vibrina Coronado came from a multicultural background; her father was Mexican American and her mother was American Indian. Vibrina Coronado received her Master's Degree from New York University in Performance Studies. During this pandemic she joined the Auntie Sewing Squad and made masks to help out communities in need and hospitals because they felt that the government was not providing people with the proper protection. Today Vibrina sews and designs clothing and has even sewed a wedding dress. Coronado also helps out individuals coming from recovery from substance abuse.

Thematic Outline:

(1:17) Vibrina Coronado discusses her personal background and mentions she lives in a small town called Pembroke in rural North Carolina. (13:09) Vibrina discusses how her parents faced discrimination challenges. (28:18) Vibrina talks about how she faced discrimination at a produce store when she was trying to purchase tomatoes. (35:55) Coronado mentions the traditions her and her family follow and shares a story about Easter when her family decided to have the children hide the eggs and have the adults look for them. (1:01:23) Vibrina discusses how she heard about the Auntie Sewing Squad and why she decided to join. (1:10:06) Vibrina mentions where she obtained her materials to make masks for people in need and gives us and the future generation advice.

Vibrina Coronado Oral History Transcript

Shakyra Lopez-Valdez (SLV) (0:30): My name is Shakyra and I am a sophomore majoring in business.

Sophia Vargas (SV): And my name is Sophia Vargas and I am a freshman majoring in kinesiology.

(0:40) **VC :** Oh cool!

SLV (0:46): We're so happy to have you here today. And we would like to ask you some questions about your experience and personal experience as being part of the Auntie Sewing Squad. We would also like to know more about your family as possible.

VC (0:54): OK

SV: To start off, we would like...

VC: I'm sorry?

SV (1:01): To start off, we would like you to tell us your full name, where you were born, where you live, and explain what you do for a living.

VC (1:17): OK. So my full name is Vibrina Coronado, I don't have a middle name. I live in a small town called Pembroke in rural North Carolina. It's very near the South Carolina border. I guess about 20 minutes away. Where I live is traditional territory of the ancestors of the Lumbee Indians. I'm an enrolled member of the Lumbee tribe. So let's see where I live. You want more about my family? So my mom is Lumbee and my father's Mexican American. He grew up in Southern California in a small town called Banning. So it's kind of west of Palm Springs. Anyway, that's actually where I was born and grew up. So I lived my life there till I was in high school, and then my parents decided to move back to Pembroke, where all my mother's family is. So that's what we did. So when I went to high school here in North Carolina and I'll just say a few things about...even though my dad's Mexican American and my mother's Lumbee Indian, there's a lot of common things between the two cultures. I won't go into any here, but, there is a lot of stuff that worked. And I was very fortunate to have family on both sides that were very generous and accepting of lots of different kinds of folk. So I'm happy that that's the way that is. What I do now, I do a number of things. I do custom clothing. I just finished doing a wedding dress. I also do writing workshops with local folks. I have focused on working with people in recovery.

So people who have substance use disorders. I've also done simple crafts with that population as well. Most of them are Native American, but not all of them. I've had a few Latinx folks and African American and white. But the majority are Native. And then I write plays or I'm kind of trying to write plays and do some performance work with Native folks in our community about stories like historical stories and then, I don't know, things like legends and scary stories and stuff like that. So that's probably enough.

SLV (4:41): Can you tell us a bit about your family like about what they did for work?

VC (4:52): My parents? Oh, OK. Yeah. So my mother grew up on a farm. She picked cotton, tobacco. I'm trying to think of what else she picked. Those are the main things that come to mind. She was very fortunate for the area because her family owned land. So even though they were not rich by any means, they didn't have to ever worry about having enough food. And there were a number of families at my next door neighbor right now. He grew up in a sharecropper family. So that was a little bit harder. When my mother married very young, she was 16 I think, my dad was in the service in Fort Bragg, which is about 45 minutes north of where I live. And for some reason came down here. I guess he thought, OK, Latinx, Indians, we can probably work it out. So he met my mom and they got married and then they moved to California to stay with his family. So growing up, part of the time, my mother was a homemaker. And then once we got school age, I guess I was maybe in the fourth grade she decided to go back to school. So she went to community college, got her AA. Then we moved back to North Carolina since she got her bachelors and then a masters in school psychology. So first she worked as a counselor and then she ended up working as a school psychologist in the school system. So she did things like test kids for abilities that would be both for gifted and talented. And also, if kids had some kind of situation where they had a learning disability, they called learning disability, that's not the best way to say it to me, but anyways, so she did that and really liked it, did not like writing reports, but she did like interacting with kids. So my father, growing up, he also did a lot of agricultural work. He picked things like peaches, nectarines, apricots, almonds. And then when he became, I guess, a teenager, he started producing to build swimming pools. So he did that for a while. And then I'm not sure what his motivation was, but he decided he was going to train to become a plumber. But I guess before that, he did his stint in the service for two years and then came back and became a plumber's apprentice. And that's what he did. He worked for people for a while, but most of his life.

(*Technical Difficulties 8:41-11:01***)**

VC (11:01): I don't remember what I was talking about.

SLV (11:05): You were talking about how your father was going to school to be a plumber.

VC (11:11): Oh, yeah. And then when he didn't graduate from high school, maybe he went to the ninth grade, that's kind of what he figured. But both my parents were very well read. They read things all the time. My dad would sit down and I mean, they bought us encyclopedias when we were little and he would sit and read it himself. I think they were pretty well educated, even if it was self education. And also very, very handy. Both of them, I guess when you grow up on a farm, and have to figure things out and when you do any kind of agriculture work, you always have to be flexible because you have to go pick stuff when it's ready. You can't say, oh, well, you know, I don't feel like working today. And my mother, I remember her talking about picking cotton. And it was just like you just wanted to get it done. So you were in there and you just work, work, work fast. And I'm sure my dad felt that way, too. And I'll just say, I have never heard them complain - my dad passed away, my mom is still alive, but has dementia - about their childhood growing up or anything. The one thing my dad ever said is he didn't like the fuzz from peaches like things getting on him because it itched. But as far as actual picking and things, yeah, he never said anything bad about that whole process. So I think that's cool.

SV (12:59): It's really surprising.

SLV (13:05): Now before your mom became a psychologist and your dad became a plumber, did they face any challenges?

VC (13:09): Well, yeah, so, it's funny. My mother was more talkative about racism and things like that. She dealt with as a child and young adult than my dad. So some of the things: when she was growing up in Robeson County, where I live, so I live in a small town and it's mainly Lumbee. But other people, African Americans live here. White people live here. And then more and more, we have more Latinx people as well, which would be Mexican Americans and then folks from Central America also. Anyway, so things like if you went to some stores, you couldn't go in the front door. Front door was for white people. Everybody else had to use the back door. There was a movie theater in the county seat, which is about 20 minutes away. So they have three sections there so white people can sit on the ground floor. And they had two sections upstairs in the balcony for African Americans and Indians. And let me just say here, the Indians here really wanted to keep a separate identity from African Americans. I'm sure there was some racism involved in that. But it was also just like we're not African-American. We're Indian. So that's what prompted these three sections. And then there was a movie theater. There's no more here in Pembroke. And the same kind of thing: it was segregated by ethnic groups. And the schools were as well. So with the schools of the white folks were like, OK, the Indians, you can just go to the black schools. The Indians were like, no, no, we're not going to do that. So they petitioned the state to get funding to build their own schools and also to create a teachers college, which they used to call a Normal School, which is a school that trains teachers. So they created a Normal

School to train teachers to teach in the Indian schools. And they did that in Pembroke and Robeson County and actually in other tribal areas across North Carolina. So now that school has developed and into a small university here. So back to, there were places you could not eat, they might let you go in and buy the food, but you could not sit and eat there. And you probably had to go through the back door to buy the food. My mother told me one time she wanted to get her hair done and so she decided to pass because my mother was fair skinned, even though she had fairly dark hair. And I mean, if she got in the sun, she got really brown. But I guess she was fair. So she went to a beauty salon and had her hair done, and she just it was just such a bad experience. She didn't really say why, but she said, I will never do that again. My dad would talk more about things that he dealt with like in the present rather than stuff he...he didn't really talk about racism or barriers when he was young so much, except when he went to school. So Spanish was his first language, they would not allow the kids to speak Spanish and they would beat them if they spoke Spanish. So it was really horrible, horrible. I can't even imagine what that would be like. So both my parents, I think the result of racism, actually did their best to get rid of any kind of accent. My father spoke English. There were a few words he kind of said, like not in your standard English accent, but he did not have a Spanish accent when he spoke English. And my mother got rid of her Southern accent. So I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing. I certainly think they did it to be able to lessen (I need some water) any kind of prejudice they might face. It's just like, OK, I've already got all this other baggage to let me get rid of some of this stuff that might be my problem. So my father being a plumber and a builder, he would often go to places like a building supply place where you buy parts to fix plumbing. And one instance I remember somebody came up to him, and my father was a very pretty dark, this white guy came up to him and said, oh, I bet you can't even speak English or you need to speak English or something like that. So my father, who spoke English really well and also spoke Spanish and was learning German and French, said, "oh, I'm sure I speak English better than you and I know other languages." So those kinds of microaggressions, kind of just random people coming up to you and saying some B.S. that was not that unusual here in North Carolina. In California, I don't remember my dad ever talking about that. I'm sure it happened. I honestly think my dad decided to work for himself so we would have a lot of freedom in that regard. He would not have to deal with that. Oh, God, that reminds me of another job here in North Carolina where he was working with this white guy, but he was a subcontractor, so there's a contractor and then they hire, you all may be aware of this, that they will hire the subcontractors to do certain parts of the building. So my dad was hired as a subcontractor and he had other Indian folks working with him. And I think there might have been some African Americans on the job as well. And this white guy was really talking bad to him and my dad just got sick of it. And he goes, I'm just not going to stay here and listen to you talk to people this way. So he left the job and the guy called him up and begged him to come back. Which my dad eventually did and kind of left on the same terms. I will say about my parents. They kind of were like, I'm just not going to put up with being treated poorly. I'm just not going to do it. So I'm going to find a way to make my living some other way if I have to. And again, I think that's why my dad worked for himself. And then my mother worked through various jobs

and she was just very outspoken about stuff. Some things were around bigotry or prejudice, but a lot of times it was just somebody who just wanted to do things a certain way that was not ethical. And my mother was just not going to do it. So what I really admire about my mom is she was always able to be very diplomatic. Somebody told her, well, you know, you need to change the score on this test for this kid. And she's like, no, I can't do that. I could lose my license, which is true. You know, you can't just up and change scores. I think graduate school was very hard for my mother because there was not a community there. She was used to being in a community of people so it was difficult for her, but she got through it. And as far as other kinds of issues that might have been hard, sometimes it was hard financially, but my parents always seem to be able to deal with that. I don't ever remember a time where it's like we don't have nothing to eat and we're not going to ever, and we don't know when we're going to have anything to eat or anything like that. We might be like, oh, we need socks. And my mom's like, yeah, we'll just have to wait till your dad gets paid. But it was not a huge problem. And I guess I should say from there, when I grew up in California, we were middle class. We had a big home. We had a swimming pool. We went on trips a lot. Although both my parents were pretty thrifty. So, you know, they decided we're going to spend money on trips and we're not going to spend money on other things. When we moved to California from North Carolina, it was a big cultural thing because people around here, they want to get to know you before they hire you. It's not California where it's like, well, there might be some of that, but really they just want somebody good, so it took a while for my dad to get established in his work here in North Carolina, but eventually did. I go places all the time now. People are like, oh, is your dad so and so? I guess I kind of got off track, but I can't really think of any, maybe can give more examples. I guess the only other thing off the top of my head, my dad's father was deported when he was very young for selling liquor. So my dad's father, my grandfather was Mexican American also, both he and my grandmother. So my dad's parents immigrated from Mexico to the US. So my grandfather was deported to Mexico for selling liquor to Native Americans because at the time that was illegal to do. There was a law that Indians could not drink. So he did it once, they gave him a warning and he did it again and they deported him. So my father grew up in a single parent household. His mother was a domestic. So she supported them. She did not know English. She learned English from her kids' school papers and reading the newspaper and other things like that, which I think is really remarkable. So I think that was hard for my dad to not have a father around. But again, he did pretty well. They had enough to eat. They were probably doing as good as a lot of the kids around. And again, I've never heard my dad or my mom complain about any of that.

SV (28:00): That's an amazing story. So you talked about your parents' challenges. Have you yourself faced any challenges or discriminations as a child growing up, or now?

VC (28:18): Yeah, so, I mean, I kind of just had a situation this afternoon, and sometimes it's hard to know, like if it really is discrimination or not. So I live in Pembroke and Pembroke has this

reputation of where the wild Indians live. So I have a friend who won't say she's from Pembroke. And to me, I think that's crazy. So if I go someplace, someone asks me, I'll say I'm from here so I can just watch their heads going, trying to figure out, ok, wait a minute, what does that mean about you and whatever? So I went to buy something earlier today...Oh let me go back to something that I know. Well, I don't know. It's all so vague. I used to go to this produce market cause they have really good stuff, great peaches and nectarines and other things their stuff was really good and it was on the other side of Lumberton. So it's half an hour away. So I just go, the people were friendly, they would help put stuff in my car. I didn't have any issues. And then somehow it came up that I lived in Pembroke and it was like all of a sudden they were really curt with me. And if I did something they kind of acted like...So I was like, wait a minute. Am I imagining? Or is this real or like what's going on? So then I wrote a check and it bounced because I didn't put enough money. So right away I knew it bounced so I called them and I said, I'm sorry, I'll bring the cash. I can bring it today or whenever. And I said, if your bank charges you anything for bounced checks, there's a lot of people that do. I'll bring that money as well. They just acted so weird the whole time. And then they didn't want to give me the check back and I was like, well, you have to because that's what paid for it. And I was like, do they think I'm going to take their account information off the check? I mean, what the hell? And really, I thought maybe what I should have done is just destroyed it right there. But I was so freaked out by how they treated me. And how it went like 360. I was just like, what? So I was like, here, here's all your money. And then one of them said, so it was a mother and daughter, the daughter said, well, do you want to buy anything today? And I was like, do you have some tomatoes? Because I'm still trying to figure out what's really going on here. No, no, we don't have any tomatoes. So it's like, ok, that's fine. So I'm walking out through all the produce and there's tomatoes. And it's like I don't even know, I don't even know what to say. I mean, it was so subtle, but so strange. So anyway, I just decided in my life I live in Pembroke. People can like it. They can not like it. That is part of who I am. And I guess I also do it because I'm not a wild Indian or not wild in the sense that they want to say, people that get guns and shoot and are crazy and break on people and all that. So, to me that's it. I'm not really interested in hiding who I am so that someone will think better of me. I mean, I should be enough, and if I'm not, we probably don't need to have any kind of relationship. When I was young, in California, sometimes I had two Mexican American friends who were darker than me, and if we were together, they would almost always have issues. I remember going with my friend, Yolanda Garcia, to a rock show and one of the guys to another guy, kind of whispering but loud enough so we could hear, and we were in junior high, "Watch them. They'll steal. They're Mexicans." And just like crazy, stupid stuff like that. My sister went to a birthday party. She was invited to a birthday party. She was in high school. And the parents of the person were, so this would have been in the late 60s, early 70s, the parents of the person, my sister's classmate, were members of the John Birch Society, which is a very conservative, I guess it's white supremacists. I don't know, but definitely conservative. They would not allow her in the party even though she was invited. So she just had to come home. It's not like it was every day. And there were I should like plenty of times where I didn't feel like I had that issue. But it was

there. So my mother, when when she was the homemaker, before she decided to go back to school, she was very involved in community stuff. She was a member of the Junior Women's Club. And also the PTA. And she ended up being PTA president for a while. And I told her, you know, I thought that was really cool you did that. She goes, there were women who some of white women who didn't like that I was part of the organization, but I just say ignore them because there were enough people who didn't have a problem with me. I grew up in a town in California. It was the Morongo Indian Reservation, so we had Native Americans. We had lots of Mexican Americans, Chicanos/Chicanas. We had lots of African Americans, very few Asian Americans, a few folks who were Jewish. So, it was fairly diverse. It could have been more diverse, but it was pretty good I would say.

SLV (35:36): Thank you for sharing. You said you grew up from two different cultural backgrounds. Could you tell me a bit about your family traditions and which ones you value the most?

VC (35:55): Okay so this is encompassing tradition, I think. So both my parents value family and keeping family together a lot, so that everybody's there and everybody is included in things, which I think is really a good thing. We did celebrate...you know, it's been a while since I've been with the whole family and doing things, I don't really have any traditions, right now, that's like a whole nother story. But anyway, so my mom was always involved in a church when we were young, so we usually celebrated Christian holidays, Christian Christmas and Easter and Thanksgiving. Well, I guess Thanksgiving is the quasi Christian holiday. So my father was enthusiastic, or he'd be involved, but I would not say he was ever like one of those people who was like, yay, we get to decorate. Some people really are. And my mother was more like I'm going to go buy decorations and we're going to do all this. So he would participate, but kind of only because it was happening all around him. I just remember a lot of times visiting relatives. Some of my mother's relatives from North Carolina moved to some of the L.A. suburbs. She had one cousin that lived in Whittier and then trying to think of where else. There was another cousin that lived nearby. In fact, I think those were my grandfather's side of the family, my mom's dad. So we would visit them pretty regularly. And my dad was all cool. Yeah. We'll go visit. They liked him. They got along. And then we would also visit my dad's brothers' relatives. So this would be my aunt and uncle, it would be my uncle by marriage and aunt, her family who lived in Pasadena. They were great. I loved to go there and again, they were all just like, yeah, yeah, we love you. We're glad you're here. And they were also very funny. So they were all Mexican American. Yeah, I have a lot of good...so we would go the Rose Parade as part of that. I can remember many years doing that. What other traditions? Some of my siblings had children and things. We would we might celebrate Easter and have Easter egg hunt. And I remember one year we hid all the eggs and all the children found the eggs. And then we let the kids hide the eggs and all the adults had to go find the eggs. So it was kind of fun. And the kids like that because it was

like reversal. But I would say that's kind of the way we did holidays, like, oh, ok, we'll do it the regular way, how a lot of people do it, and then maybe we'll switch it up and do something else.

SLV (40:28): It was nice the kids did the Easter hunt for you guys.

VC (40:33): Yeah, that was a fun day. And everybody all the adults were like, cool, you know, even like the grandpa and grandma. They're like, yeah, we'll go to this thing because the kids, they're not going to hide them as well necessarily as the adults. But it was still fun. Yeah. They liked it.

SV (40:53): So for the next question, I wasn't quite sure if you said you went to high school or not.

VC: Yes. I graduated high school.

SV (41:10): OK. So what were your plans after high school? Did you in college or did you want to go to college? Were you a first generation student? And if so, did you face any challenges?

VC (41:23): So I really hated high school, especially after we moved to North Carolina. So I graduated in three years and then I went back to California and lived with my grandmother for a while. And I was going to go to Mexico and travel around. But it was like a crazy idea because I wasn't fluent in Spanish, so I didn't do that. I floundered around for a little bit and then ended up moving to Chapel Hill, which is north of where I live now, about two hours where my mother was getting her master's in psychology. So I stayed with her for a while and started an undergrad. And then I got involved in doing costuming and custom clothing. And did that for a while and got a job. Just flukey flukey thing, got a job for a year as the costumer at North Carolina State University, which is in Raleigh. So I like that a lot and that prompted me to go back to college and actually get a degree, but there were a number of years where I was involved with a food co-op. I was sewing. I worked at a restaurant. I worked at a bookstore. I had graduated from high school and I had some college, but I didn't graduate. So I went back, I freelanced costume design and did other some other freelance work that's costuming, like I taught costume and make-up practicum at a small college in Raleigh and did some other work at some other places in Raleigh. So I got my bachelors as a nonresident program through a school in Virginia called Mary Baldwin College. Now I guess it's a university, but it's a small women's school. So I was on campus maybe 20 days the whole year I was doing my bachelors. I took classes like face to face in the classroom classes at NC State. I think that's it. And then I took a lot of self study or independent studies to get my bachelors. So when I finished that, I went to New York University for my masters. So I was in New York. That would have been in the early 90s. And so my Masters is in Performance Studies. So it's like theater but a lot broader, so any kind of

performance. I worked in a professional costume shops to pay my rent and stuff like that while I was in graduate school. So I got to work on Phantom of the Opera. Towards the end, I worked on some stuff for a Lion King tour. No, no, that was not Lion King, that was Aida. Ok, so I worked on stuff for Aida. I worked at the Metropolitan Opera for a little while. I worked on dance clothes for various things, I built tutus or helped build tutus for American Dance Theater at one costume shop I worked in. So I got to do a lot of stuff. I really liked menswear, which is what I did at Metropolitan Opera and craft costumes, which are costumes that do not look like clothes. I worked on Toy Story on Ice. So you have all these toys that are costumes that people wear, like one of the costumes was it a baseball mitt and they're skating around on ice. So that would be a craft costume because you have to figure out a way that the person can wear it and handle the weight and the weight is balanced and they can still skate. So I didn't do a lot of the figuring out, but I did help with a lot of construction. So I thought I would do my PhD and I was not accepted. And I will just say here, just because it might be useful information to you, at the time, I didn't realize how political it was. Like you get into a Masters program and then if you want to continue, you need to find a faculty member who will take you under their wing and be your sponsor. And I didn't realize that that's what you were supposed to do. And quite honestly, there really wasn't anybody. I mean, if I'd known that, I might have tried to cultivate a relationship, but I didn't know it at the time. So that was because at the doctoral level you're supposed to be working very closely with your adviser. So they did not accept me for the doctoral program. So I am still doing costumes, trying to figure it out and whatever and then I ended up getting into another PhD program that was another design it yourself program like my bachelors in a school called the Union Institute. So what was really cool about that program was I designed courses in Native American theater and performance, Latinx theater and performance, which both of those, at the time, it was very, very hard to find courses like that and or anybody who was a professor anywhere in the U.S. who had expertise in those areas, especially somebody who was a person of color. So my adviser, who was the white woman, real interesting, she was the person who really encouraged me to to do those and to delve really deeply. So I definitely give her a lot of credit. And she's kind of an interesting person in and of herself. And then I also focused on costumes and attire and stuff because I already brought that to the table. But I was not interested so much in how to make them. That's what I did with my work time. I was more interested in looking at theories, history and broadening what I knew about the different kinds of clothing and things people wore. So I would do things like there would be a head wrapping workshop at this. And I was living in Brooklyn, New York at the time at this little shop, African shop, I'm sorry, it might have been a Nigerian shop near where I lived. So I signed up, paid my money and went in and got to see how they did the head wrap. I think the woman was a little bit surprised, but she was fine with me. I also saw a lot of theater, saw a lot of just general theater being in New York. And I also got to see a lot of stuff that was specifically Native American or Latinx. So it was a great place to be for my graduate school for the stuff that I studied. So I feel really fortunate to have had all that come together.

SLV (51:11): Even working in those jobs that you mention? Did you witness any gender discrimination or did you face any gender inequalities?

VC (51:25): Personally, I think there was more...I can't think of any. I'm sure there were some. In the costume shops, most of the workers were women. Most of the drapers and the drapers are kind of - people work in small teams - so the draper is kind of like a head of the team. They make the patterns and fit garments. Then they have a first hands and second hands and they might do the cutting, cutting out things and then setting up stuff for stitchers. So that would be a team. You might have a draper one or two or three first hand and then one or two or three stitchers. And then you had machine stitchers and hands stitchers and the hands stitchers might actually work for a bunch of different people. So you work in teams and most of the teams were led by women. All of the shops, with the exception of one shop, were owned and run by women. So one shop was run by two men. They were gay. I'd say most of the men I worked with were gay. I can't really... think that that's such an interesting question. I've never really thought about it. Honestly, I feel like there were so many other issues, but that was the least of my problems. So, yeah, as far as, no, I didn't. I would say, where I saw gender discrimination might be that male costume designers would be more likely to get shows than female costume designers. So there were more male costume designers and I know that they were paid more, even though, in the whole scheme of things, costume designers don't get paid as much as some of the other people. So it's all kind of relative. That's where I would say there might be issues. And, in the general kind of way, costumes have always been, or let me say I don't know about always, but as much as I've been involved and researched the past on, it's always been thought of as a very female, feminine thing. And so I feel like part of that means well, then we don't have to pay them as much and we can expect more. And we can, if they don't do it this way, we can go, oh, it's just because they're dumb women or whatever. So I think there's a lot of unspoken, although more and more it's being spoken about, prejudice and and boxing in of just the whole profession. So from that perspective, yes. And I would say that was true just in general from working in New York. But it was so much worse when I worked because I haven't mentioned that when I when I taught and did costumes at schools. So when I was in Raleigh working at NC State, I had male students come up to me and say, well, does look like blah blah blah. Why are you putting that on stage? And so I bring out my research and say, well, you know when this show was set, they wore something more like it. But it was kind of like, okay, I accept that, but I didn't ever feel like I was just respected as somebody who came and had the expertise. And same with when I taught for three years maybe at the local college to be teaching costume classes, intro to theater, and then designing their shows, designing the costumes and building and also supervising and teaching or training students. And I was the only person of color. I was the only woman. All the rest were men. And even though it's like, well, you know, they're not bad. And I never felt like, well, actually, now I think that one of them was weird. But I mean, besides the stuff he did, I never felt like, oh, they just are just assholes.

But I did feel like I did not get the respect I should get because I'm female. So the one guy that did the weird stuff. So we have what are called production meetings and at production meetings, in the beginning, you'll sit down with the person that is the stage director for the show with the designers, so I'm doing costumes and then we have the set designer and he's also designing lines. And you'll talk about what the show's going to look like, what the director is thinking. And then you'll show your designs. Okay, this is kind of what I want to do. So the guy who is the set designer, when I was talking about my stuff, he would zone out. It would be like he wasn't even there anymore. And I was so shocked because I had never, ever been in a production meeting where someone didn't pay attention. I mean, it's a whole picture, the costumes, the sets, the lighting, everything. It's all together. How could you not kind of look at it like that? And I said something to him. David, why aren't you listening? This is part of, and he goes, I don't even remember what he said. Honestly, I don't remember. But it didn't change anything. And the director, what blew me away, who was male, didn't say anything, like really it should have been him. He should have said, we're in this, you need to listen to her because the costumes in the set. So, yeah, it was one of the strangest experiences I've ever had on a production.

SV (59:08): That's unfortunate. Could you explain your life during quarantine? Did you struggle with keeping your job or having your bills paid? Could you explain that a little bit.

VC (59:18): No, I haven't struggled with work or keeping my bills paid. Yeah, I've had to really redo how I do things. I've moved a lot of stuff online and then some things I just couldn't do. I got a grant to do some more, part of which I was able to do, but part of the grant was to travel to New York and I'm not going to do that. So luckily they're letting me just write in the grant COVID means I can't go and I'll use this money for other things. So I would say there was a lot of adjusting of how I did work. And there were some things that I wanted to do that I have not been able to do. I was going to start on an apprenticeship for folks. And I don't really want to have people in my house where I would be training folks. But as far as money, no, I've been okay. I mean that the extra money that they sent, the two whatever they call em. That was nice. It was nice to get that. That definitely helped. Yeah. But, I haven't struggled. Luckily, I'm fortunate. Yeah.

SLV (1:01:16): So during this pandemic, how did you hear about the Auntie Sewing Squad?

VC (1:01:23): Ok. So much stuff was online, which is actually kind of great for me since I live out in the boonies. And I wish I could find, in fact, I looked for it, to tell you specifically where I found the thing about Kristina. So was an interview and it was a live interview and they had, there were other people who were performance artists who were of color. So they had like a whole schedule of these interviews. Oh, she looks interesting. I'll check her out. So I was watching the interview and she was talking about some of her work because I had never heard of

her before. Not that that mean, that just means I didn't know. It has no reflection on her. It's like, oh, oh, that's cool. I think I am going to see this whole Auntie Sewing Squad thing because I can sew. And a friend had asked me pretty recently to make her some masks. So I had, after doing a lot of research myself, and I thought, oh, you know, I like to work with other people. See what they're doing and so. So after the interview, I went online and found a Facebook page and kind of just got hooked up that way. Kristina does very interesting performance art. So it was neat to see that and then because I'm Californian, it was kind of nice to have that connection, even though I, I kind of don't think of myself as a Californian anymore. I still have, I was born there, still have lots of relatives. There are lots of things I think about, like I love the desert. So that's how I found out about Kristina Wong.

SLV (1:03:40): How old were you when you started sewing?

VC: Probably about twelve, but I wasn't very good and I was also, it's funny to think about it now, I was sewing on my grandmas', so this would have been my dad's mother's treadle machine, which I was never really very good at. So I remember one of the first things I made when I was still in California was a bathing suit. It was really cute. I liked it. In fact, it could be kind of interesting to see it again, but I lined it with a lining that you use for, like, not bathing suits. So that was not the best part. I don't know if I was like, just let me do it, Mom, don't interfere or if she just...I don't know how I got that fabric to do it. But anyway I wore it a lot. I remember I did. I did a lot of things that were kind of crafty or did things over and over and over and cause I couldn't figure out why it was not doing what I wanted it to do and learned a lot that way. My mother sewed and made us clothes, but she didn't really teach us. In some ways, my mother was not a good teacher that way. My dad was, but not my mom. And back then, we had home ec in junior high so I did sewing there. And that actually may have been where I really learned come to think about it, but everybody in my family that I knew that was female sewed. So that would have been both grandmothers, my mom, I guess not aunts or anything.

SV (1:06:07): That's really cool! What challenges did you see our society face during this pandemic? How did you feel about making masks for our society in knowing that you were generating your time to a great cause while keeping people safe from exposure?

VC (1:06:20): I felt really good about it. I had no problems doing that. I was glad that I could do something and that was helpful because I've always liked making things and giving them away. So I know sometimes people make stuff and they're like, no, no, I want to keep this. That's never been me. I'm just like, yay, I'm done bye. So that part was cool. I love how Auntie Sewing Squad was so, and this is some of the reasons why I continue to be part of it. For one thing, it was really diverse. So I love that. I love that people could get upset about something and say it and nobody went here and said, shut up. They'd be like, oh, you're upset. And said, well, okay, let's talk this

out. I like that. I like that Auntie Sewing Squad was like who needs this stuff? Where is the biggest need? And let's fill that need. And I was just really impressed with that level of organization and also I was told I can imagine how the Super Aunties, just how much background stuff they had to deal with with people freaking out or I don't even know what. Or the other thing is people deciding I am going to take materials in, I'm going to make them and I'm going to sell them. So I know that there was a little bit of that in the background. So I guess I just I mean, that's not really part of making things for people, but it is part of the infrastructure to actually be able to make things for people. So I appreciate that there was this whole. Yeah, that it it really is pretty amazing. I have to give props to Kristina in the Super Aunties and everybody who just kept at it and was really very. I agree with the premise or the idea that the federal government was not doing what it should be doing on taking care of frontline workers and then essential workers and people who might not have the resources to get protection for COVID. So I think it was it filled the huge need and there were other groups that I joined or was aware of on Facebook and I didn't see any that were as organized as Auntie Sewing Squad.

SLV (1:10:06): Where did you get your materials for the mask that you made?

VC: Ok so I being someone who sews has so much fabric. In fact, before we started making masks, I had given a lot away because I was like, I will never use this. I don't want to die with this fabric. Somebody I know people in the community, because a lot of it was like Native American looking stuff and a lot of the elders which make quilt, so I gave them. So a lot of the fabric is stuff I already had. And then I did buy a few things. I bought shoestring stuff for the ear loops from this, we have a fabric sewing outlet place where things are pretty inexpensive. So I got stuff there. And a lot of the fabric that or maybe not a lot, some of the fabric I had came from thrift shops so I already had quilting fabric. Oh, yes I had this wonderful really nice, really expensive or maybe not really expensive, pima cotton shirting, like for expensive men's shirts like Brooks Brothers shirts or whatever that I had gotten. It was what they call either mill-ends or offcuts. So if they cut out a bunch of shirts and there's not enough left over to lay out a whole nother production thing because they cut hundreds out of time, they'll just get rid of the ends because it's not worth their while to deal with them. So I had found a bunch of those at the thrift shop cheap. So I used some of that. And then I had just different stuff. I had a bunch because I was on this like I gotta get rid of all this fabric. So I did send a huge box to this organization in L.A. I don't remember what it was called. They were having women who were would normally work production in factories, but since the factories were shut down, they didn't have any work. So they were having them make masks. So they're asking for donations of fabric. So I sent them a bunch of fabric and then they were selling the masks, both to pay the people and I guess whatever costs. But they were also taking donations, too. So it was kind of, anyway, yeah, most of the fabric was fabric I already had. I did not buy any fabric. I might have bought thread. I probably had most of the thread and then ear loops and beads were things I bought. And I bought the beads at Wal-Mart because that's

kind of what we have out in the boonies here.

SLV (1:13:42): How many masks that you make each week and how much time did you dedicate?

VC: Oh, gosh, I don't even know. I was not the most proficient masks - I didn't make as many as a lot of people. I see they're like thousands and maybe tens of thousands. I have not made them any. I don't even know, maybe two or three hundred. I don't know. I know I cut some and sent them to somebody, so I don't know if I can add that to my total. I really don't know. I didn't I didn't pay attention.

SLV: How long did it take you to make just one mask?

VC: Just one mask? It's so much quicker to do them, but I would say from start to finish, if I did a double mask with where you could put in a filter, because that's the way I was doing them in the beginning. Let me just think. Maybe it took me half an hour. I don't know. That's just a wild guess. You can do it so much faster if you do more, because then you can stack them and cut them and when you're sewing, you can sew a seam and you just keep sewing. You line them up and you just keep sewing and sewing in the seam and then you go back and cut them apart. And then you can sew. So you kind of get a production thing going on. And, yeah, it's a lot faster to make them that way.

SV (1:15:47): So for the last question of the day, I just wanted to ask if you could give the future generation any advice, what would it be and why?

VC: Just general thing I think it's really important to learn to be flexible and learn to problem solve and learn to forgive yourself for things that you do. I think the flexible thing is, I'm not saying people should be flexible in every situation, but sometimes you just have to say, no, I do not accept that. But, just saying things change so much. With COVID, there's so many things that I've had to do differently, or at first I was getting pissed off at people because they didn't wear masks or they get too close. Ok I need to deal with this a different way because it's making me upset to go the grocery store. And I don't want to be upset. But I do want to not get sick. So look for ways to do things that help your mental health, maybe. That's the flexible part of things. And I think that's part of problem solving as well. Well, that is a facet of problem solving. Finding different ways to do things. I was talking with my brother about this great video. I'm going to try and find it. And if I find it, I'll send it to you all as well. And I really don't know the circumstances, but there's this, looks like a Mexican guy, I don't know, he might be Guatemalan or something like that, but he's with this white guy and they're out in some desert area and they find this like funky beat up car thing that doesn't work. And the Mexican guy figures out how to

get it to work and drive away. And it looks funky but that's what they needed in that situation. And I know in Mexican culture, there is this tradition of you have these things and you take them and figured out how to do something with them, which is not to say that you have to do that all the time, but I think that's a good skill to have. Because sometimes you do want nice new things or whatever, so I would never say don't have that. But it's just really good to be able to take what is available and make it work for you in the best way possible. Then the part about just forgiving yourself, it's so easy to think, oh my God, that stupid thing I did or whatever. And you just have to let go. Well, everybody does that. Or if you're trying to do something and you do not succeed, you just have to forgive yourself for whatever deficit, it might have in the deficit in the program that, you were not able to succeed in, fine. Which is not to say that you should go, ok, then that deficit is a good thing or we want to support that. But it's more like if you forgive, then you can move on, and which is not to say forgive or let people get a pass if they're being jerks or creating problems for you. But if you forgive them, then you can just let them go and you can go on with your life so that that would be my advice.

SLV (1:20:28): Thank you for giving us this advice.

SV: Yeah. I love that. Well, that ends our interview for today. Thank you so much, Vibrina for joining us today and letting us interview you. We admire your contributions to protect those who need it most during this worldwide pandemic. And we enjoyed learning more about you. Thank you for inspiring us.

VC (1:20:51): Well, thank you. It was kind of fun to sit down and kind of talk about myself. Especially during the pandemic where you go the grocery store and I have chitchats and now I'm just like, let me stay away from you. So this was enjoyable and I was happy to take part of it. And I think it's cool that you guys are doing this. I love oral history stuff.

SLV (1:21:16): Even though we were a computer, it felt like we were together.

VC: Yeah. Yeah. This was fun. Yeah. I enjoyed it. And I thought you guys did a good job. Thank you.

SLV (1:21:25): Thank you for answering all of our questions.

VC: Oh yeah. You're welcome. Yeah. I know sometimes I got off on tangents, but I did try to get keep the kernel of it anyway. Well, the best of luck with all this and your other interviews and everything else that you're doing. I think it's great.

SV and SLV (1:21:42): Thank you, thank you, take care! Bye!