

Race and Oral History Project, UC San Diego

Narrator: Jennifer Frost Moreno

Interviewer: Kyleen Martin

Transcribed by: Kyleen Martin

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Kyleen Martin- KM

Jennifer Frost Moreno- JFM

[] = narrator notes not spoken in audio

KM: Alright. So, hi my name is Kyleen Martin and I am a student in the Oral and Race and History class. And today, I will be interviewing Jennifer [Frost] Moreno and, uh, Jennifer if you could give a brief introduction of who you are. Umm, you know, if you want to choose any identifiers that you wish to share, or, and also your roles within the community and within your relationships.

JFM: Yeah, thank you for having me and you may call me Jenn and my pronouns are she and they. Ummm, I'm a queer Chicana, third generation Mexicana and Indigenous and, um, I am a volunteer organizer with Armadillos Ni Un Migrante Menos it's a search and rescue group that works, mostly out of the Sonoran Desert, the United States side. Um, but we are a national human rights organization. I also volunteer and organize with We All We Got San Diego which is mutual aid and what we focus on is a weekly food distribution where anyone can come and get food for the week. Um, I'm also an adjunct faculty at San Diego Community College District in Chicano Studies, Chicano/Chicana/Chicanx Studies, and I also teach art at Southwestern College.

01:41

KM: Wow, that's so awesome, like, it sounds like you lead, like a very, like a lot of different roles in your life.

JFM: Yes, definitely I like projects and there's a lot of great ones here in San Diego. So, yeah.

KM: Absolutely! Yeah, so, I guess, like, the first thing I would like to ask is maybe for you to give us, like, some of your background about, like, your upbringing and, you know, kind of give us like where this work was, like, grounded in.

02:17

JFM: Okay, um, well, you know, it can be a short or long story. Like, I'll keep it in the middle. But, um, so I was, I grew up in Lake Elsinore and I moved to San Diego when I was 10 years old. I went to fifth grade here.

Um, I come from a mixed race household [narrator notes: my mom is white and my dad is Mexican]. So I was actually raised with my mother, who is German and Polish descent, and, you know, I lived a very, um, middle class lifestyle and my mom was a single mother though. So I saw her go through some of those hardships, working as a nurse, you know, working these incredible shifts and just taking all that on with me and my sibling.

Um, so, you know, I grew up in San Diego and, uh, I went– I graduated from high school and then I went to Mesa Community college and all the way up until that point. I was pretty lost. I didn't really understand what my role is and in life, and you know, I was just like any other kid just, you know, trying to fit in. My school was very segregated and very classist and it was difficult navigating that because I had some internalized struggles just actually seeing myself as White, which was interesting because I grew up with my white mom. So, I thought I was just like her [laughs] and I didn't really– you know, I saw my dad and everything but... that's a long story too. You know, they're third generations, so they're assimilated and I just didn't come into really my identity as being Mexican and being proud and now being Chicana until college.

So yeah, I transferred from Mesa Community College to UCSD where I studied Art History and, yeah, I just have a curvy path, you know, into the work that I do now as like an organizer in these activist groups.

04:08

JFM: Because, you know I studied visual culture and I studied how people, like, interpret images and that led me into studying images in the immigration rights movement and that's when I really started to learn more about, um, the struggles of my people crossing back and forth for hundreds of years and learning about the struggles of my peers, who are undocumented, um, crossing and trying to live in the United States and from there.

You know I just– I met Alex Ortigoza of Armadillos and got to work with him and one of the first things he had me [us] do was go to Scott Warren's trial in Arizona. He was facing 10 years for providing shelter and food to a group of migrants who were lost in the desert. And, yeah, just kind of started – well it didn't start from there, I had gone to actually protest, you know, when they did, uh, tuition hikes at UCSD and then before that had gone to protest for marriage equality, and, because I identified as gay, when I was 17. So yeah, just kind of dabbled in protest and then kind of made it a little more formal later on.

Yeah.

05:34

KM: Yeah, that sounds, yeah, I really appreciate you giving that, that background. And also explaining that sometimes it's like a curvy path to get to where you're at. Was – I, so another question would be did you grow up, like, around any sort of, like, community work or any type of activism? Like was that something that was in your life, I know you said that you were, you know, it took you a while to get to that point. So I was wondering if anyone else, like if you seen anyone else in your community while you were growing up engaging in, like, community work.

06:09

JFM: Um, you know what I I didn't really. I'll be honest with you, I didn't have a lot of examples of that. You know I, I came to realize, I was a feminist like very early and I think that was just from seeing my mom, you know, and seeing her, um, kind of like really fight for equality as a woman. And like, just, you know her interactions, like, with men and things like that.

Um, and yeah, i'll be honest and say that I didn't have any clear exact examples, and I think the absence of that definitely made me more curious about, um, about folks who, who organized. And you know, on my– on my Mexican side, yeah, you know, their third– third generation. You know very much assimilated to American culture. And so you know, there was always this sense of complacency that I didn't – that didn't sit well with me.

So then, I really gravitated towards knowledge and knowledge as freedom, when I started getting into higher education, which was where I was told I should go, higher education. And then I– I made it work for me because, you know, I just, I feel like I have a rebellious spirit. I question things a lot. And, um, you know, I think, being a young gay person too. You know that the world is not made for you, and that makes you ask a lot of questions, you know. So I guess, I guess, I would say, you know, the first like community organizers I saw were my gay friends in that community that we had together.

Yeah.

07:59

KM: Yeah. So you would say that maybe like your activism– would you say that it started with, like, the feminist and then getting more involved in, like, activism around, like, LGBTQ issues in college?

JFM: Yes, definitely. I followed the waves. Like, the first wave of feminism like, like I read Betty Friedan. And you know, I just, like, really got into that because I was studying, female artists, uh,

you know artists who are women identified. And the women that are talked about more often in our history books are white women and they're often associated with the first wave of feminism so that's really how I was introduced to that.

And, um, then from there I was like "Where are— Where are my women of color at?" And so then, you know, got to research that more. And learned the second wave and the third wave and then abolition, you know, Angela Davis, and the Black Panther Party.

And in graduate school I lived down the street, from where, um— This is kind of a little bit of a tangent. But I was really into place making I was really into understanding like, how we interact with the world around us. And I had learned that, um, where I lived in Berkeley California, I went to grad school the San Francisco Art Institute, I lived a block and a half, away from where Patty Hearst was abducted, which was a famous — I don't know if you have heard of that.

09:28

KM: Please explain.

JFM: Yeah it's this, it's kind of just like famous event, where she was abducted by this like radical leftists group called the Weather Underground [group is actually called Symbionese Liberation Army]. And she had been kidnapped, abducted and was kind of like brought into their lifestyle and eventually she had Stockholm Syndrome, it's believed, not really proven, but believed. And she ended up robbing a bank with them and there's that famous story of her with a gun in like black from head to toe and she's in the bank holding the gun robbing this place with the Weather Underground [SLA] and it's this whole just kind of like spect — spectacle because Patty Hearst is the, she's the heir of the Hearst Media Corporation. And so, it was a really interesting turn of events where she, you know, was seemingly like turning against her family.

And anyways, she ended up going to jail and everything and her sentence was commuted eventually. But, um, that really got me into thinking about, like fringe political movements. And then I started learning about the Black Panther Party, because I was living in Berkeley so I was right next to Oakland. And then from there that's when I started learning about just like, just like protest movements in general and at some point, I really shifted from learning about it from an academic standpoint to like being about it, you know.

[laughs]

Like actually getting involved. Getting involved in the work which is hard to do. It's hard to do in an authentic way, especially after you have researched it, but I knew there was a way because I was part of these communities, so I knew that. I had a place, I just had to like figure that out.

Yeah, yeah.

11:29

KM: Yeah, I find that so fascinating that you're right up in Berkeley and Oakland amongst all of that, you know, different spaces of like education. Like you say, you know, education, like being in like a place. Um, so I guess, I am wondering what are your first kind of, like, your first memories of activism? Like your first, like were you involved in like different protest or was it like sit ins or was it more, you know, you said you described it as like the fringe movement. So I would be wondering, you know, what, um, like what groups were you involved with or you know how was that? Um, what were your first experiences like?

JFM: Yeah. So my first act of protest, I'm pretty sure it was, um, the marriage equality protest, en Hillcrest— in Hillcrest, advocating No on Prop 8 which was, um, to overturn marriage equality. And, um, with that I just showed up and I held a sign and I didn't really understand like what was going on, but I knew what I was fighting for. But I didn't — I didn't plan on speaking out or chanting or giving interviews or anything. I just showed up, you know, with my sign, and that was it.

Um, and then, after that I did the tuition hikes protests. That was my first protest in San Diego where we actually went to, you know, the courthouse and we like, sat down and did kind of like a sit in. And I was, I remember, I was closer to the megaphone [laughs] this time, my proximity.

And what was fascinating to me with this protest is that I just, I drove to it. I just drove to it, I parked and then I walked you know, and I don't know, maybe that's your experience, too, but that's just how it is. It's, it's not— it doesn't have to be this really overthought thing of like “do I have the right sign, the right clothes” or other intentions. Just kind of like showing up.

And then from there, when I started getting involved with Armadillos I was actually in this group called Coalition to Close the Concentration Camps. And I just so happened to get in this group, because my my wife, Karina, had known someone who was in the group.

And at the time it was the— the dialogue and in— in mainstream media was about like the children, the migrant children being kept in cages, and in these like deplorable conditions without, you know, proper hygiene and food and all that, and so the coalition to close the concentration camps was basically a collective of different groups in San Diego working towards this.

That mission of closing the detention centers and bettering the conditions of migrant children in their care and that coalition was where I was really introduced to, like, PSL, Democratic Socialists of America, the Armadillos. Um, you— you know, Union del Barrio was there. Um, like there were lawyers, there from like ACLU. Um, there was People Over Profits, like all of these like leftist/radical groups in San Diego and I haven't seen a space like that, since.

But it was pretty magical and um now that group I think morphed into this coalition called Free Them All which is a coalition or collective of like Detention Resistance and Armadillos too, but other orgs other border rights orgs.

Um, but yeah, you know I saw die-ins, die-ins, I think is what they're called where you are laying down and you're representing someone who has passed away. I saw one of those at UCSD.

There were a couple protests at UCSD I was a part of too, when they tried to close the university art gallery. There was a huge protests about that.

Um, but I think with these protests, I definitely got more bold, I started, you know, chanting. I started risk taking. Um, I have never gotten arrested because that's a personal boundary that I— I haven't taken.

Oh! Okay! I forgot one protest I went to was unplanned and definitely ignited a lot of— it definitely politicized me. Was, um, when Alfred Olango was killed in El Cajon, I don't know if you heard of that.

16:08

KM: Could you please, maybe give a brief description of that?

JFM: Yeah. It happened in, I want to say 2016. I think that was the year. But the El Cajon police had been called to do a welfare check on this woman's brother and when they arrived they, um, killed him because they felt threatened by him. He is an Immigrant from Africa, I can't remember the exact country [Uganda], but it really was unjustified. And, um, it really, um, just enlivened these like fraught relationships between the police and immigrant communities and Black people. And Black Lives Matter had just started happening as well, um, the movement.

And so with that, again, we drove, me and my wife and my best friend at the time. We drove, um, we had one just kind of crappy sign, we made.

And so with that protests, it was a little bit more

[pause] Um..

dangerous, because the police were so militarized like they quickly organized too. Yeah they, they, they, were just heavily armed and they threw tear gas and— but the organ — organ — organizing there was amazing and I — There was someone named Christina Griffin Jones who was running the Black Lives Matter chapter San Diego and she later helped me and a few other people start, We All We Got San Diego, so that was a really big event.

Yeah then number, because it was— it was— it was pretty dangerous. They're all— they're all, they all have their dangerous elements but, um, there was a lot of desperation. A lot of like fear.

A lot of anger. And we were there, and we were being tested, you know, to back up Black folks and to, you know, help, um, support them. So yeah.

KM: Yeah, what was that, besides some of the connections that you made, what was maybe some of the big takeaways from that experience that, like, stayed with you? Or that made the experience stay with you?

18:31

JFM: Something that stayed with me in, in that protest was the organization. The people at the front were very organized. They, um, it's not that they had planned the protest, but they knew how to respond to police violence. They, they knew how to respond to this type of event because it had happened before, you know.

Um, so they— there was one or two or three speakers who were really trying to control the crowd and they were Black women mostly. And that was just so powerful. Um, they asked everyone to sit down in front of the cops and just had this really like symbolic moment of just like peaceful resistance.

Um, with that I learned how important it is to like look after each other, because I remember her saying, if you have a record, if you're undocumented, if you can't afford to get arrested right now, like you need to go to the back because that is a risk you're taking if you're at the front.

Um, and what else stuck with me is, is just really how violent the police are. Maybe aggressive. How aggressive they are.

And I just, I think what stuck with me was like this sense of community. I think that sense of community is something that I search for all the time now, after that.

KM: Yeah absolutely, no, I thank you for sharing that experience. I think that's something that, yeah, it can be a very big, you know, takeaway for a lot of people is like, how do you deal with, you know, all of these moving parts that can happen, um, within that space.

JFM: yeah and being prepared for those scenarios. Since then, I've been involved in security teams for protests and we spend a lot of time, like, we do our research and we plan, you know, for different events, different, um, you know, scenarios to take place. And I just really value that in a community, you know.

Um, who has like the foresight to like take care of each other in such a meaningful way.

KM: Absolutely. I, yeah, I'm interested to know too, um, how you got involved in security and then also how you got involved in your other roles, like in the Armadillos Search and Rescue, We All We Got, Detention Resistance. What was sort of like— because I know you said that you were— that you met, was it Alex in Armadillos first?

21:21

JFM: Yeah, we, my wife and I, had just sat behind him at the meetings at the coalition to stop, to help the concentration camp meetings to close them.

Um, and I was like I know them, you know I know this group they search for migrants, like in the desert like. I can't believe we're sitting behind them right now, because this is just an incredible group. They do amazing work and he was wearing one of his jackets, it was very impressive, you know, very striking.

And my wife was just like "that is awesome like we should do that." My wife is very much a go-getter [chuckles] They very much like put themselves, um, in, into this work, you know, physically. And so they were like "let's talk to him," you know. And so we did, and they really kicked it off. They're very much kindred spirits.

Um, and that's just how we got to know Alex and his twin brother Caesar Ortigoza.

And from there Alex is so good at recruiting people. He just, you know, asked us to do things. Asked us to get involved, like, oh, he asked us to show up at this next, you know, event and we were like okay we'll do that and and yeah.

I forgot the other parts here to your question. Oh security. Did you want me to answer that now?

22:50

KM: Yeah I would be interested to know how you got involved in security as well. In organizing.

JFM: I can't remember exactly when it started, but at one point we were like let's help them with security, because every process needs safety and security. We actually don't use the term security too often but it's a term that helps people understand what we do, which is like keep people in the protest safe. And so like I forgot exactly what event it was, but from that point forward we were kind of known for like putting together safety teams.

And and uh— Oh, we had, we have radios because we go hiking or we go searching in the desert, so we have nice radios. And PSL also does safety.

And so we learn that skill and we pass it on to others, like the Asian Solidarity Collective. We've helped them build safety teams and it's just been, yeah, an incredible thing because every, every protest and every collective needs these like safety measures, you know.

KM: Absolutely, and you said that term PSL. What is PSL?

JFM: Oh, my gosh I always forget the P. But Socialist Liberation.

Um, What is it?

(clicking on a keyboard).

It's, it's right here. Party for Socialism and Liberation.

KM: Okay, and this is a group?

JFM: Yes,

KM: Yeah, okay.

JFM: Yeah, they wear red and white, if anyone sees them out at the protests. They stand out.

KM: Yeah, I see.

24:34

KM: Yeah, no, that's very important work and i'm glad that– Yeah I don't think I know, like, for me, I haven't really thought about like, oh, you know, like security during protest, like, that it were, you know, you said that there was maybe like a better word that we can use to describe it, but yeah.

JFM: Yeah, we basically make like a perimeter and like we're not actually in the protest but we're like acting as this barrier between the folks who are, um, freely expressing themselves and in their emotions, their rage right. Their discontent and and between the police. So it's, you know, we're show, showing up in a militarized fashion that, that they are, you know, like we're not armed or anything but we're like, um, militarized in our, in our community and our community bonds. And the Brown Berets have done this historically too and the Black Panther Party so it's kind of just like carrying on that tradition and it's a really useful skill, because the police when they see that they do see that you're organized you know they see that, that this is a consorted effort to like keep everyone safe. And like and then they kind of like back off a little bit, you know, they still follow you and everything. But– [chuckles]

25:53

KM: Wow, thank you so much for doing that work. So important. And as far as your other roles, so, We All We Got, Detention Resistance, so how did you get introduced to those and, you know, also what are your roles within these groups?

JFM: Yeah, so We All We Got, that started, we started that mutual aid at the beginning of the pandemic, the original group was Candy from Asian– DJ Cotton Candy from Asian Solidarity Collective, Christina Griffin Jones from Black Lives Matter and March for Black Women also Kelsey, Kelsey Daniels from those same orgs. Karina, my wife Karina Frost Moreno from Armadillos and there were quite a few people that started it.

Um, but yeah we basically just, um, saw mutual aids kind of popping up around the county as a, as a reaction to the pandemic. And also like seeing like our own family members struggling, you know, to find food and to find their medicine. We had some folks in the group who were disabled and like we were starting to like build contingenc– contingenc– contingency plans for if they couldn't get their diabetic medicine. And just really disaster planning um, with that. And then from there, we kind of built out this resource which is the food distro which we food source for, that we raise money for, that it's a 100% grassroots effort. And, um, you know, here we are, like two and a half years later, and we still need the distro because of inflation.

The mutual aid is built off of these principles that Black Indigenous People of Color, you know, suffer. And are oppressed in a way that white people aren't and white people need to share their resources and their successes and in a mutual aid effort to support each other in solidarity, you know, instead of charity. So..

And then, um, we collaborated a little bit with Detention Resistance, started this project, where we were getting care packages together, um, to give to folks who were just released from detention centers and were being sponsored here in the United States. They had a need for building care packages that included like phones that they could talk on, hygiene products, some food that they could cook like in the hotels they were staying at. Um, and just in general, um, we have helped accumulate donations through Armadillos and We All We Got like clothing donations.

Um, and just in general, raising awareness about the cruelty of the detention centers which is what Detention Resistance primarily does is they build solidarity with the folks in detention and we actually helped organize a car caravan at the detention center in October of 2020. So we had to do a car caravan that was, that was really moving because the folks inside they heard us and you could hear them yelling at us like cheering us on while we were like honking for them, and it was moving and they were a part of that to Detention Resistance.

29:25

KM: Yeah, yeah. That sounds amazing doing this collaborative work. And also, um, like, what is your role in the Armadillos Search and Rescue as well?

JFM: So with the Armadillos Search and Rescue, I am general member, and I myself and Karina go on search and rescue missions whenever we get a case. Or, you know, a family that calls us to say that their loved one is missing. What we, what we do first is Alex Ortigoza takes the call

and then there is some time spent to kind of collaborate the story, what's happening because unfortunately there's a lot of exploitation in migration and—

So, first we decide if there's enough resources and enough information to go out there. And then, so then, we load up in the van which we call the Armamo— Arma-mobile and we get all of our volunteers in the van with all of our gear to search in the desert easily for eight hours a day. Um, so i'm sorry, we drive from here San Diego to Arizona usually on Friday normally camp, the night, and then we search on Saturday, and then we drive back usually on Saturday too.

Um, and yeah our role is to, to like plan and coordinate these searches for folks who have been reported missing, because the border patrol will do that, even though they they claim to be a search and rescue operation as well. They don't put their resources towards that so we're filling that gap basically.

KM: Absolutely. So yeah, I would love to hear more about your, any of the impactful experiences that you had either with Armadillos or any of the other organizations you're involved in.

JFM: Um. Well, I can, let's see...

There's a lot.

KM: Mmm Hmm

JFM: You know everything is significant, Um I'll hone, I will hone in on, on one for you. But when you're in this work, I do feel like every interaction is significant because you are working with people and you're working with them in a time and one of the most difficult times of their lives, and you are hyper aware of like making sure that they feel seen and understood and valued and you know that takes a lot of like effort and a lot of, um, you know, just knowledge and awareness so yeah every interaction, I think, is really meaningful because of that.

But there was one case with the Armadillos where we were sent on a search that was a live search so someone was missing. Um, while they were crossing and they had called their wife. And um, the wife had heard you know that he was by a freeway and he had said that he was under a bridge. By the 8 freeway basically.

Um, so we, the idea is they called, you know, 911, they called the Sheriff, they called the border patrol, no one was willing to go out and find him because the border patrol at one point, said that he was out, located outside of their jurisdiction which he wasn't.

But, anyways, no one was responding, and so, then the family, called the Armadillos and because they have a really big network on like Facebook on social media.

So anyways I actually wasn't on this trip, my wife was, but they were on a live search, it was really desperate because he was not doing good and he didn't have his, his phone had died.

And um there are so many bridges, um, along the 8, there's like they go underground. So the 8 freeway is actually like a bridge really like once you dip down into like East county there it's, it's it's all the bridge.

So that being said, um, the team searched under dozens of bridges and they couldn't find him but, um, they did eventually find him. The border patrol had sped past the Armadillos van because they had learned that he was under this one bridge, and so they found him. Um, five minutes before the Armadillos did.

And unfortunately, he did pass away and it's hard to tell how long he had been, um, deceased for. But it was just one of those like really like heart pumping adrenaline, um, pumping, you know, situations that was just really traumatic. And, uh, I'm glad I wasn't there because, you know, just seeing the effects of this event on my friends and my wife is just, it's hard you know to see them like recall what happened.

And we keep in touch with the family, and we want to go visit them, we have to raise some money to go visit, um, his wife and his kids, um, but his kids were actually there and, um, had to go through this event, too, so that was a hard one for sure.

KM: Yeah yeah that sounds, sounds really tough and yeah it seems like in that work, you know that's like a possibility, you know you always hope that that's not but it doesn't make it any easier when that's an outcome.

JFM: And how it's preventable you know, and when you see these like, um, government, um, groups, you know government organizations that blatantly like don't help you or blatantly don't listen or don't support the families, you know, anyone would be like outraged you know.

And to me it's a little shocking because you know I didn't grow up with that critical lens or those experiences, but now I see it all the time. It's, it's some people's like everyday reality and it's so— it's maddening because you know it can be better, you know.

Yeah.

KM: Yeah absolutely because they had the option to respond before, you know, it was outside of their jurisdiction so, you know, that was the excuse. Yeah.

JFM: Yeah.

KM: Yeah, the, the, so it's the emotions of you know, like that, what do they say like love and rage right. You know, rage about the situation that's happening and —

Um..

36:53

KM: But you know, with you know experiences like that. And also you know, it not be easy and, like other organizing work. Um what are some of the things that you and your wife do to like sustain yourselves in this type of activism or you know, dealing with all of these like tough, you know situations, whether it be security or protest or other situations.

JFM: That's a good question I'm really glad you asked it because it's something we should be like consciously thinking about when you do this type of work. And I guess, I would say, like rest is a really big one, like if we're not on a search or we're not working on helping out with a protest or raising money or creating flyers to put on social media like we are definitely resting and spending a lot of time together and building relationships in our community, you know, because of course we have ourselves, which you know I feel so grateful to have Karina. We are really great team, but it also is important for us to like have strong relationships with people in our community. And I think that can be hard sometimes because there's trust involved and, um, it takes a long time, and a lot of courage to build up trust. But I feel like we do have a core group of people that it's just amazing. And also, there are some activists out there, that I don't know but I trust them like with my life that's just because of the work that I know that they do and what they what their values are, you know.

So, um, so yeah, just to sustain ourselves, you know, we rest a lot. We reach out to people if we need something you know, try to build our own network of support that is really hard but we've been working on that. And um (pause)

You know, we both like to read and watch TV and we have pets, we have four pets. (chuckles)

And, uh, we have family as well, so that helps a lot. But honestly it's sometimes I feel like it would be great to just stop and not think about this ever again, but that won't happen because the need is always going to be there until it's eliminated and I don't know if I see that happening, you know, in my lifetime. So yeah.

And like, I heard Dolores Huerta say like its the fight, you know of our lives, all of these fights.

Kyleen Martin: Mmmm, hmm, Absolutely, yes.

39:48

KM: So, I also want to ask you, um, within this organizing work, since you mentioned earlier, you have these very intersectional identities with being mixed-race, Chicanx, queer. So, how does that like affect your organizing experience?

JFM: Um, so a lot of organizations are identity based, and so, when you have an intersectional identity. It can be hard to feel like you fit into one group or another. It can feel cliquy or segregated even.

Um, so I've just really had to find groups that are open in their beliefs, especially when it comes to being queer.

And as a woman, I feel like it's difficult to just be taken seriously, sometimes in, in organizations. So I try to find orgs, I guess, where they have a really really strong mission to where it doesn't matter you know who you are, you can be involved if, if your values align with what you're, you know, working towards are fighting for. So um but you know it can be really margin– marginalizing, is that word?

Um (laughs) it can be really um (pause)

lonely sometimes when you can't find your people, and I have learned that like affinity groups are great things. So like being part of organizations is one thing, but then having friends who you identify with closely, who are also like minded is another amazing thing so just really having that backup because you can't just join an organization and they're going to accept you, each organization has its own biases its own beliefs, it's own like divisive beliefs right, potentially, so yeah yeah it can be hard.

KM: Yeah, no, I definitely feel that too. Someone who's also mixed race and yeah trying to find that with like as you put it identity based organizations which–

JFM: Yeah.

KM: Yeah it seems like, you know, organizations like We All We Got is very much like any– anyone comes, who has these values.

JFM: I will say that we are very much like organized in a way, where White people and also light skinned people who do not have the lived experience like they don't have voting power they don't have directive power in the organization. Like we follow, um, the communit– that we follow you know, the members in our Community, who are people of color who have this lived experience, who can like help us understand like what is, what are the structural like oppressions at play you know.

So, I want to mention that because I think being mixed races like and also like light skin it's like a privilege and it's like I can't ignore that how I show up to spaces is, is different and can like– It is different in the sense that, like I don't need to be leading anything necessarily like I want to be supporting. You know the folks who like who, who need the solidarity and support yeah.

KM: Absolutely. Yeah so. I guess in some of my closing questions. I want to ask about, you know, how the experience with COVID-19 has affected either like your personal life or like you're organizing life.

43:58

JFM: Well, well with COVID-19, you know, we started the mutual aid in like April 2020 so we were already like having zoom meetings and like planning around that. I think it made me more politicized. Like it made me more active in my community, which was great because you know we were at home quarantining, so we needed that like connection. And I think it helps us understand that we can push our limits like, you know, we planned car caravans, like, for the first time, and I was like I don't know what a car caravan is but let's try to plan it, you know. And do this in a safe way that's more accessible, so we started thinking more about like accessibility in our movements. At least in my experience.

Accessibility in social movements, is not a new thing, of course, but we got to learn about that aspect of movement building from DJ Cotton Candy of Asian Solidarity Collective and also from Karina and so you know it really helped out a lot.

But honestly, I think we were definitely awakened like because of COVID and with like working at the food distribution, we had to, of course, be careful and take safety precautions, making sure the Brown Building was clean and a safe place to be and luckily we've never had a COVID outbreak at the Brown Building. Which just goes to show like if everyone [laughs] you know is on the same page about what's needed when it comes to like public safety, then you can really keep a lot of people safe. So yeah.

KM: Yes, that's wonderful. I think there are a lot of people who are taking away lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and you know thinking about what does care, you know look like in a different lens.

JFM: Yeah I remember when, you know, we first heard of it happening, the next week, someone in the community, I don't know them personally but they had died they died from COVID-19. And so it was very shocking and just made you realize that like loss was going to be a normal part of, you know, our lives and in a way we've never seen and just like thinking about that future was really just, um, made us think about things in a new way you know.

But we still went on searches and everything I mean we took a little break. But yeah we pick those up in 2020 again too.

46:49

KM: Yeah, absolutely, yeah this has been, yeah definitely a hard experience for a lot of people. Like but also like you said very motivating experience like things need to like change or you know, be more politicized.

Yeah so as like a final question, um, I want to ask if there are any lessons that you want to impart, um on any, like, future organizers or anyone who is looking to get into activism.

JFM: Mm hmm, um, well they might not be the wisest of words, but I do think it's important to look at who your community is like really reflect on that word and literally Google it and think about, you know, who your people are who you align with and what do they need, you know, because every community struggles in some way if they're not you know of the privileged class in the society and thinking about, you know.

I always tell like my students, just like start to learn your situation, basically, you know. Start to learn the world around you. Why are things the way they are? Why do you struggle? Why is it hard to do this? You know? Like who, who is responsible for this? Why does this happen? And really just do your research and I feel like that's a good place to start because it's conscious building. And then, when you do go into these spaces physically like, say you volunteer at a food bank or you show up at a protest or you, um, fundraise and then you're showing up in a more authentic way versus showing up to the spaces and perhaps doing more harm than good.

And not say, you know, of course I, please put yourself out there, you know we're here to like teach and learn and we're here to like listen to each other. But, I think coming in with good intentions and with like respect is something that is really valuable you know, to show to these spaces.

But in terms of like you know how to get involved, like definitely can Google San Diego human rights organizations, grassroots organizations, grassroots is a good like keyword to, to Google. Collectives... and also, like a lot of these groups have social media presence so like you can look them up there, but it can be really daunting. So you know it's, it's important to just really go for it, if you want to show up for these causes if it's in your heart of hearts to contribute like just really go for it.

I'm a really introverted person. I rely a lot on Karina to make bold moves, but at the same time, like when I'm there I'm very like strong headed and I'm very clear on what it is that's needed so it's like, it's hard for me to get into the spaces, but once i'm there it's like okay go, you know so maybe someone else can relate to that because it's hard to really, it's hard to stick your neck out, you know sometimes.

Yeah.

KM: Absolutely.

JFM: And make time for it, too, because it can be easy to just, it can be easy to just live your life and like not adjust and like we're in a period where we need people to adjust we have so much like unfortunately that needs to be (laughs) remedied so yeah.

Kyleen Martin: Yes, thank you, those are very impactful words, and I think those were actually very wise words

[Both laugh]

and suggestions, though. Finding your community is so, so important.

Yeah, yeah. Thank you so much Jen! I am going to stop the recording now.

JFM: Thank you for having me.

KM: Absolutely.