

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

Rachel (00:00):

Ameria, tell me your name, where you grew up, where you live now, how old you are, what you do. Give me some background about who you are.

Ameria (00:07):

Okay. Sure. My name is Ameria Alleyne. Would you like me to spell it?

Rachel (00:13):

No, I'll email you.

Ameria (00:16):

My name is Ameria Alleyne. I'm 35 years old. I currently reside in east New York, Brooklyn. However, I grew up in Crown Heights, Brooklyn.

Rachel (00:28):

And have you lived in New York your whole life?

Ameria (00:30):

Yeah, I have lived in New York my entire life, other than college, of course. Well, still New York and studying abroad and spending time with family in Trinidad.

Rachel (00:41):

And so you have pretty deep knowledge of the local climate and landscape here?

Ameria (00:48):

Yes.

Rachel (00:49):

Over 35 years.

Ameria (00:50):

Yeah. Yep, exactly.

Rachel (00:52):

And how long have you been a member, co-founder here at 400 Montauk?

Ameria (00:57):

I've been here since the inception of the transfer over of the garden. So this space started back in 1986, which is the year I was born. So it was a great year by the way. And my husband, he grew up on this block Montauk, so he has roots. So he was born and raised in east New York. So he already had an emotional and physical tie to this space.

So when he saw the opportunity to take over, he inquired by the owners, not necessarily owners, but the people that were coordinating the garden...

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

Kari (child) (01:37):
[inaudible 00:01:37].

Ameria (01:36):

Good. ... Coordinating the garden space for a number of years. I'm not too certain how long they were coordinating the space, but the main person, he was sick, and he was open to having someone take over this space. So my husband was looking to really, really practice and use his green thumb.

And he was like "Ameria, I want to take over this space." And I said, "Okay, whatever. I support you." And, that's how it all started. So he started working with Green Thumb to ensure that he had all of the documents proper and just understanding the space, in general.

So it was just an easy transition because of his passion and love for east New York. But then it also worked out because growing up, my father has a major green thumb and his grandfather also has a green thumb. So he used to come to this exact same space when he was a little boy. So it's powerful in terms of like the intergenerational piece to this space.

Rachel (02:39):

Wait, so your family and his family?

Ameria (02:45):

Great.

Rachel (02:47):

Both sides, your family and your husband's family were gardening here?

Ameria (02:51):

No, no. My father was gardening in his own property.

Rachel (02:55):

Oh, okay. I just misunderstood.

Ameria (02:56):

And back in Trinidad as well. So my husband and I come from immigrant households. His side of the family, they're Trinidadian and Grenadian. And my side of the family is just Trinidadian. So my father has been gardening since in Trinidad. And then when he came up here to officially live in America, he just continued that on a small scale. But now, because he has his own home, he continues to garden in the front, in the back wherever he can. And he loves it because it's tranquil. Same thing for my husband's grandfather, did the exact same thing.

Rachel (03:30):

And so is that how you learned how to garden?

Ameria (03:34):

Yeah, my father and I would have conversations about the importance of land and making it work for you, because in Trinidad, he was very much so connected to the land. And he is well known on the island

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

because he always traveled, connected, talked to people. He's also a vegetarian. And he used to go on retreats up in the mountains of Trinidad and will meditate and live off of the land. So he has a great appreciation for it.

And it naturally transcended to me because of his love of the land. And the way we would communicate was walks through the park flowers.

Kari (child) (04:15):

Mommy, look at this flower.

Ameria (04:16):

It's beautiful, baby.

So walks through the park and then he's also a man of the earth. I like to call him a man of the earth because he also sews clothing that's inspired by what he sees. He does earrings and jewelry and necklaces and scarves, a number of different things that always inspires him based on what he sees of the earth, the people, the culture, all of that good stuff.

Rachel (04:44):

Wow. What a special relationship to have with your father and with the land. So what does it mean for you to have a relationship with the land here in New York City where like so much of the land is pavement, concrete?

Ameria (04:59):

Yeah. That's true. East New York is unique in the fact that they have the most community gardens in all of New York City. And I think that's truly special. And when my husband was looking at this space to coordinate or manage the space, however you want to term the role, he wanted to continue the tradition of understanding that we rely heavily on the earth. And the earth just rely on us in terms of maintaining it.

So the fact that we live out here in east New York is a little bit easier to continue to ensure that we take care of the earth, because it has provided so much to us. So overall New York City is concrete jungle.

And I will tell you, when I was younger, it wasn't necessarily something that I constantly thought of because growing up, my father would always take us to the park, we would be barefoot, or when we're in Trinidad with my mom, the rain showers and we'll just enjoy just the open air.

And to be honest with you, we weren't necessarily thinking of like, "Oh, the changes." Only when I got older, I started noticing winters were different. Summers were different. The overall feeling of people were different.

Rachel (06:18):

What does that mean?

Ameria (06:18):

And when I say that, well, of course you're familiar with SAD, when it gets dark earlier, people tend to be in a more depressive state. That was also occurring. And I know we're talking about New York City, but in Trinidad itself, growing up and going there for the entire summer or spending Christmas there, or

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

carnival season there, which usually takes place in February and Trinidad is warm year round. I grew up seeing butterflies to now in my adulthood, not seeing as many butterflies because they're continuing to build on the land. Very similar to like New York City in terms of the smells, the feeling, the connection to like being outside. Of course, technology plays a heavy role in that as well.

Rachel (07:05):

You say with all of your devices here.

Ameria (07:08):

Yeah.

Rachel (07:09):

Four devices.

Ameria (07:10):

Yeah. My hotspot-

Rachel (07:12):

Stacked on-

Ameria (07:13):

My work phone-

Rachel (07:13):

...Up on your lap right now.

Ameria (07:14):

My personal phone, my laptop.

Yeah. But technology plays a role, a heavy role in that. So just being able to have access to such a space is really good. I remember the first year of us being here, and we're vegetarian by the way, I only cooked whatever was grown in the garden.

Rachel (07:39):

Oh my gosh.

Ameria (07:40):

That's it.

Rachel (07:40):

Wow.

Ameria (07:41):

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

Other than flour, I had to buy flour and certain things, but everything was from the garden. My son's first taste of a fruit and vegetable was from the garden. First taste of carrots here, much sweeter, completely different when you buy in the store, naturally. Strawberry also. It's exciting when I'm able to share something like that.

Rachel (08:05):

That sounds amazing. So I'll ask you my framing question for this whole project, which I ask everybody to start off the conversation, which is when you think about global warming or the climate crisis, what do you think and how do you feel?

Ameria (08:26):

In terms of climate change, which, growing up in New York City, going to public school, it was always about the ozone layer and how it's being depleted. And what does that mean for the land? And from a young age, we just understood that the earth is warming up faster than it should be because we're continuing to pollute, and destroy, certain levels of the atmosphere. At least that's in the basic form in terms of what I learned as a little kid.

As I got older, now it went from "Don't destroy the ozone layer" to the climate change crisis. And of course I become, not of course to you, but I became much more immersed into it as an educator. And that was a curriculum that we developed in terms of the climate change crisis and how can we slow it down and be more cognizant of how we share the earth, because I say share a lot, because we're sharing it with plants, animals, insects and all of that.

So it's a little nerve racking because I have a five year old and I want him to have space to enjoy. And even when he gets older and if he decides to have a family, I want generations to come to have the space. So there's always this constant anxiety around what will 10 years look like from now? Or 20 years from now.

Last year we had milder winters. And year before milder, I really don't like the cold. But it's just milder. It's different now. And on top of that, there's an extension in terms of like the colder months, you notice that. Think about, Super Storm Sandy and how it even affected out here in east New York. And my husband brought that to light because he's out here. I wasn't living in east New York then. So there's so many different things, but fear and anxiety. It's the most in front your face emotion that goes on, because I think about not only myself but others.

Rachel (10:44):

Oh, what a beautiful flower. What kinds of changes have you noticed? So you talked a little bit about milder winters, longer winters, but what have you noticed over the course of the 35 years? And, when did you start noticing?

Ameria (11:07):

I became hypersensitive when I did climate change education for another nonprofit organization.

Rachel (11:13):

So you entered into that curriculum already?

Ameria (11:17):

Yeah. So this was in the past. I don't do that now. Yes. It's beautiful, baby.

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

Kari (child) (11:23):

And I have nectar.

Ameria (11:24):

Yes. It does have nectar.

Kari (child) (11:26):

It's for the bees.

Ameria (11:27):

Yes. For the bees.

Kari (child) (11:28):

I sneak into the bees.

Ameria (11:31):

You sneaked, you didn't want to disturb them, right? Okay.

Kari (child) (11:34):

But for one of the bees, the bees want nectar.

Ameria (11:40):

Yes, they're pollinators too. Okay. Are you finished? I think you should pick some more peppers.

Kari (child) (11:50):

The mommy...

Rachel (11:51):

I saw a lot of peppers.

Ameria (11:52):

There's a lot of peppers.

Kari (child) (11:54):

What [inaudible 00:11:55]?

Ameria (11:54):

Tomato. Ooh. It looks like a creature picked at it. It's okay. You could put it in.

Kari (child) (12:02):

[inaudible 00:12:02] On the train.

Ameria (12:02):

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

Yeah. Okay. Mommy's doing an interview. Okay. I lost my train of thought interaction.

Rachel (12:11):

You were talking about how you entered, how you worked for this nonprofit.

Ameria (12:15):

Yes. Yes. So I work for another nonprofit, because I'm still in nonprofit, and we did climate change curriculum, where we did a deeper dive into looking at the world and how it has affected the world. From rising sea levels to melting snow caps, to animals migrating from one place to another, because the lay of the land is completely different.

So I became hypersensitive because I'm teaching young people, but at the same time, I'm also learning even more and like, "Oh wow, this is really happening." And then now that we have this space, I pay attention to the crops. When we first, five years ago, only five years ago... And a really good tool is also the Farmer's Almanac, that predicts or lets us know what the growing season will look like, but five years ago, we started to plant in March.

Rachel (13:18):

As you usually do?

Ameria (13:19):

Yes, typically. But it just seems to get later and later, because we're trying to avoid any kind of frost, because if you have a frost of the seeds, it will, it will not germinate. And it will not have an opportunity grow the way it will normally grow, because the expectation is that we're warming up. The winter shouldn't be so long.

So in the five years from then to now, it's just completely different. Even down to this Mulberry tree here. I notice the colors. I want to say year before, it just took a longer time for it to completely fruit and drop. And when they drop they litter and stain the sidewalk. And it's very nostalgic too, because that's what I expect to see. Instead, it was just white or green for an extended period of time. And they were not fruiting as they used to.

Kari (child) (14:18):

Mommy, [inaudible 00:14:20].

Ameria (14:19):

A pepper, I think.

Kari (child) (14:21):

It looked like a strawberry.

Rachel (14:24):

Oh, I know what you're talking about. I saw that and I thought it was a strawberry, but it is a pepper. I know exactly [crosstalk 00:14:31] "Is that a long strawberry?"

Ameria (14:32):

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

[crosstalk 00:14:32] strawberry?

Rachel (14:32):

But it's like a jalapeno pepper.

Ameria (14:35):

Yeah. I we're growing like four different kinds of peppers. So probably jalapenos.

Rachel (14:39):

But it's like red and it has sort of like brown crackles on it.

Ameria (14:44):

Yeah, yeah.

Rachel (14:45):

[inaudible 00:14:45] strawberry.

Ameria (14:45):

I got you. But I think that's it in a nutshell.

Kari (child) (14:49):

Mommy, [inaudible 00:14:50].

Ameria (14:49):

So we just... Oh, beautiful. Eggplant. Yes. Okay.

So just paying attention to the way the crops grow as well. I think this season, it wasn't as fruitful as we would have liked it to be. And in talking to other gardeners, they express the same or similar sentiments. Like their gardening season, it's just different. When we pay attention to the earth you notice those changes, especially since we have this space, so I pay attention a little bit more to how the weather and the changeover affects our growing season.

Rachel (15:32):

How do you navigate those changes? How do you, especially growing food where you have an expectation for some predictability? How do you navigate the not knowing?

Ameria (15:46):

That's a really good question.

I don't have an answer, we just do it. What we have done is make sure we harvest the seeds and we make sure and dry it out. And we replant it next year in hopes that it will be better and stronger.

Rachel (16:08):

It's already lived through this.

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

Ameria (16:09):

Yes, exactly.

Rachel (16:10):

Maybe they'll have some knowledge.

Ameria (16:11):

Exactly, exactly. And that's what we did with the sunflowers over here. Those are mammoth sunflowers and we'll cut the head, dry it, dry it in the shed or dry at home, and then take out the seeds and replant it. And they grow stronger. They know the land a little bit more. I mean, plants and animals and insects are very intuitive as well. But sometimes, the plants and the harvest, they may lose the battle and not be able to fruit as much as they would typically be able to fruit.

Rachel (16:50):

Now the Farmer's Almanac, you're the second person to mention the Farmer's Almanac. And I've been curious about the Farmer's Almanac in relation to global warming, because how accurate is it every year? Do you look at it every year as a resource and have [crosstalk 00:17:05]?

Ameria (17:04):

Yeah, I don't look at it every year, but it is a very good resource. Growing up, funny enough, my mom used to buy me the Farmer's Almanac as the kid.

Rachel (17:14):

Like just to read?

Ameria (17:16):

And I'm trying to think about why she used to do that. And I think it had a lot to do with the fact that I always liked sitting outside. And even in Trinidad, as well as here in the States and just enjoying being outside and looking at the stars and asking my mom questions about the stars, plants, and that was her gift to me.

I also grew up liking certain vegetables and my mom will bring it to me. And this was her gift to me because her mom used to have a garden at our house in Trinidad. And my grandmother will grow tomatoes, okra, spinach, what we call bird pepper, which is like little pimento peppers that's not hot, cucumber. And I'm trying to think of what else. But I distinctly remember my grandmother used to, and she passed away when I was 11 months old, but of course she lives on because of my mom's stories.

And my parents are great storytellers by the way. So it's so vivid. I feel like I was a part and saw her planting in her little garden. And she used to grow tomatoes and she would give it to my mom as a gift and say, "Lulu," my mom's name is [Luanda 00:18:38]. And she would say, "Lulu, I brought something for you." And my mom will be so excited just for this tomato.

Rachel (18:46):

Wow.

Ameria (18:46):

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

So another thing too, I grow tomatoes with my mom in mind because I want to give it to her like her mom gave to her.

Rachel (18:53):

So you have all these generational relationships around growing.

Ameria (18:58):

Yeah, exactly.

Rachel (19:00):

Is there a way that climate crisis affects you on a daily basis?

Ameria (19:08):

Not offhand. I can't think of anything off hand, but we have indoor plants and I look at my indoor plants and when they start changing, I also emotionally start changing. Of course, it's natural, seasons come and go. But they seem to like feel and know things, and I look at them and they start getting, I say sad. They start drying out, just like the change in colors of the trees. And they go through that same process.

And I had a conversation with one of my friends, who is now getting into growing and just understanding plants and all of that. And she just texted me. This was last month. And she's like, "Yep. Fall is here. My plants just told me." And I said, "Yeah, you're right. My plants just told me too,"

Rachel (20:05):

Oh my God, you picked so many.

Ameria (20:07):

Oh, this is kind of young, but yeah. Nice job, baby. But that's the only way I can think of it.

Rachel (20:16):

Yeah. Oh, how interesting. I have house plants too, but I feel when they go brown, it's just because I haven't been taken care of them at all. I have a bird of paradise that's been like slowly dying for a while.

Ameria (20:32):

Beautiful.

Rachel (20:33):

This is recording equipment. Do you want to introduce yourself for the...

Ameria (20:33):

You want to say hi.

Rachel (20:39):

...microphone, say hi.

Ameria (20:41):

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

Say hi.

Kari (child) (20:41):

Hi.

Rachel (20:43):

So you want to tell us your name and how old you are?

Ameria (20:44):

Say your name right here, right here.

Kari (child) (20:47):

[Kari 00:20:47].

Ameria (20:47):

Say your full name. What's your first and last name, you can talk into the mic.

Rachel (20:53):

What's your name?

Kari (child) (20:53):

Kari.

Rachel (20:55):

Say it loud.

Kari (child) (20:56):

Kari.

Ameria (20:57):

Yeah.

Rachel (20:57):

And how old are you, Kari?

Kari (child) (20:59):

Five.

Rachel (21:00):

And are you in school?

Kari (child) (21:07):

Yes.

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

Rachel (21:07):

What grade are you in?

Kari (child) (21:07):

I don't know.

Ameria (21:07):

You're in kindergarten.

Kari (child) (21:07):

Kindergarten.

Rachel (21:07):

What do you like best about kindergarten?

Kari (child) (21:07):

We did so much.

Ameria (21:07):

We do so much. Okay. Do you like the garden?

Kari (child) (21:09):

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Ameria (21:12):

Yeah.

Rachel (21:20):

What's your favorite vegetable that you grow in this garden?

Kari (child) (21:20):

Eggplant.

Ameria (21:27):

Yeah, eggplant.

Rachel (21:27):

Good one.

Kari (child) (21:28):

And strawberry is in the back.

Rachel (21:32):

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

Is there something that you don't like, that's icky in the garden? Everything is good in the garden. Everything's tasty.

Kari (child) (21:39):

Me saw strawberry in the back.

Ameria (21:44):

What did you see in the back?

Kari (child) (21:44):

Huh?

Ameria (21:47):

You going to show, watch your step. Oh, okay.

Rachel (21:53):

Is there a way that climate crisis and thinking about it impacts how you plan for your future?

Ameria (22:00):

Yes. I want to move to another place. I don't know. And even if you move to another place or if we decide to move someplace else, I mean, it's not to say we're going to escape it because it's affecting and impacting the globe. But I think about the space in which we occupy and longevity and being able to continue to plant and grow our own food. Certain spaces, I think, will thrive a little bit better and we could probably revitalize. Of course, we continue to revitalize this space. But that's what I think of.

Rachel (22:42):

Why do you feel like where you are now feels precarious and where would you go that feels safer?

Ameria (22:50):

Yeah. Now in terms of where we would go, that would feel safer. I have no idea. My husband had went, a few years ago, to Ghana. I've never been to Ghana, but he loves it. And he was like, "Maybe we should move there and have our own farm out there."

And I've met a number of other people that have farms or some sort of connection to various parts.

Oh, okay, baby. Those are blossoms. You can actually cook those. You shouldn't pick them because they may need each other to continue to produce the pumpkins.

Kari (child) (23:35):

Pumpkins.

Ameria (23:36):

Yeah.

Kari (child) (23:36):

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

You still like the pumpkins?

Ameria (23:38):

Yes. Yeah. They can turn into it. Lost my train of thought again.

Rachel (23:46):

You were saying that you've talked to a few friends who...

Ameria (23:50):

Yes. And they have property or farmland in other parts of Africa. So I've thought about that. I've only been to North Africa. But I've thought about it and sometimes you just move to a place.

Kari (child) (24:04):

And I picked this one.

Ameria (24:05):

Because you just have a feeling that it will work out because you could definitely grow.

Kari (child) (24:09):

I didn't pick this one.

Ameria (24:10):

Okay, baby. Just be careful. It's not a toy.

And the first part of your question, can you remind me what it was?

Rachel (24:20):

Why does being here feel precarious?

Ameria (24:27):

It doesn't necessarily... Maybe climate change. Yeah. Because I was talking about like the behaviors and my response and reaction to the land and just the overall feeling. And of course technology plays a factor into all of that.

Rachel (24:42):

How does technology play a factor?

Ameria (24:45):

People are more in inward rather than outdoors.

Rachel (24:50):

You feel like there's less of a community.

Ameria (24:52):

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

Yes. There's less of an outdoor society.

Rachel (24:56):

Yes, because I was telling [Karan 00:25:03] too, my husband, that growing up in Brooklyn, the summers, all the kids are out. The fire hydrant is pumping and you're just playing. You're hot, you just go play in the water. Versus all the kids are inside in AC, taking up current, which also affects the earth. And everyone's on their device. I mean, I've definitely fallen into those patterns. But I do miss that a lot. I love community and I love feeling connected.

Do you feel like something fundamentally has changed about how society works?

Ameria (25:42):

Yeah. Of course.

Rachel (25:45):

Yeah. Do you feel like you might be affected differently from climate crisis because of any of the various identities that you inhabit, race, class, nationality, gender, sexuality, religion?

Kari (child) (25:59):

I saw Moses. I saw Moses.

Ameria (26:02):

Moses is his friend.

You asked about the effects of it, in terms of...

Rachel (26:10):

If you think, or like anticipate that you'll be affected differently because of?

Ameria (26:22):

I don't want to reach in any way, but in terms of access to green spaces, it's always treated differently depending on the neighborhood in which you are in. And of course I'm in Eastern New York, so I have access to a lot of community gardens and those community gardens are managed by people of color, immigrant or from here. But mostly of color. So we can easily access that.

But in other spaces it looks a little bit different, even down to the time in which you can walk through a park, is different in other communities. And as you asked me that question, I just thought of, it's not necessarily connected to me, but I have conversations with my girlfriends.

And one of my girlfriends, this was some years ago, she was walking through a park and she was stopped by a cop, and basically she was given a summons because she was trespassing. And she's like, "How am I trespassing? Through a park?" And the police officer said, "Well, it's such and such time and you're not supposed to be walking through the park." And this is in the Bronx, she's from the Bronx. And she was really upset by it.

Rachel (27:43):

Yeah, of course.

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

Ameria (27:44):

And it's also like embarrassing. It's like, why can't I walk through a park? I'm not sitting, I'm not causing any trouble. Even if I was sitting, it's not disturbing anyone.

Kari (child) (27:55):

The leaf's going to fall down. I'm going to hit all the leaves.

Ameria (27:59):

Okay, don't hit it, hit it over there. Over there, over there, be careful of this... Oh, you got to be careful.

But I just think about things like that. And my friends have shared similar stories and then I'm also cognizant of the time in which I'm walking through certain parks in certain neighborhoods because there is a cutoff.

So we're talking about access to green space and who is allowed versus who isn't allowed at certain hours and times. It's completely different in black and brown neighborhoods versus the white and more affluent neighborhoods, that's a given.

Rachel (28:44):

My next question is a question that I'm asking myself every day, which is, where, in this moment of so much crisis, where can we put our bodies and our time to enact a meaningful change and meaningful action? So what is meaningful change and meaningful action? What does that mean for you in relation to this conversation about, well, the warming, environmentalism, climate justice.

Kari (child) (29:23):

[inaudible 00:29:23] hurts.

Rachel (29:25):

What hurts? Okay. It's okay.

Kari (child) (29:32):

It's only a scrape.

Ameria (29:34):

Okay. You have to be careful. Okay. All right. Go run, run through each section, like this. Okay. And take your time as you run through and tell me what you observe. Okay. See if you could find something yellow, green, maybe even orange. All right. And as you walk, make sure you're careful. All right?

Rachel (30:02):

It's like so brilliant.

Ameria (30:06):

So my son, even his behaviors is different indoors versus outdoors. And I'm not talking about like classroom space. But if he's indoors for too long, it affects him and how he responds. He has this immediate need of like, "I need something to keep me stimulated." Outdoors, he's fine. He's usually not

scared or anything. And I think it has a lot to do with, I say DNA, because generationally speaking, and he has on both sides, his mom and father's side, where we're connected to the earth and to the land.

So since he was a baby, like months old, he was sitting on that side and people go, "Oh my gosh, he's putting stuff in his mouth." And I'm like, "It's okay." Because if he tastes it and says, it doesn't taste good, if he tastes it and puts it down, he's learning like, "Okay, this is not what you're supposed to put in your mouth."

But he's excited. And he's very connected to the earth because, of course, generationally speaking and he enjoys it. And it's a lot easier for him to be stimulated. And he's curious, and he's exploring and naturally children connect more to the land than in inside.

Of course, we condition them through technology and just be like, "You got to stay indoors and you should be quiet," because, I don't know, we're inside, I guess. But beyond being inside, we're just trying to stay away from all of the potential harm that may go on if they're outside. But my son tends to be and thrive when he's outdoors. But anyways, I digress. I was going to say something but lost my train of thought.

Rachel (32:00):

Well, it's interesting because I actually thought what you were saying was in response to my question, which is what is meaningful change? What is meaningful action? I thought this is such an interesting thing. And it's true, though.

Ameria (32:10):

That's true. That's true. That's true. Because I was actually going to go in a different direction, but I guess naturally I started talking about my son and everything like that, because a lot of the things that my husband and I do is because we want to set him up for the rest of his life in terms of mindfulness, being very reflective, and being grateful.

As we were walking over here, I was just talking to him about gratitude. And what is he thankful for? Which is something that I tend to have conversations with him about, even when he couldn't necessarily like formulate words. But I want to make sure that it's entered into his life, because I have parents that have continuously expressed gratitude in different forms, in words, but also in action. So I want him to also do the same thing.

Like really honor the spaces in which he is able to continue to access, which includes green spaces and be able to carry it on. But I was also thinking about people being mindful and reflective of the things that they love and enjoy from childhood.

And why has it changed? Of course, adulthood, we have to work and we're consumed by the nine to five, if you are part of that traditional sector of work. But being reflective and trying to get back to that because I notice, and I'm also talking about within my friend group.

My group of girlfriends, a lot of times we become disconnected from community and we miss it. As kids, we get together, we play, create games. As teens, we continue to go outside because we want to socialize and develop. College, we're exploring and we're excited and all that. And then the nine to five and adulting and all of that tend to kind of separate us from what is innate to us.

Kari (child) (33:59):

Mom, I got lots of color.

Ameria (34:02):

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

Yes. Beautiful.

Rachel (34:05):

And an eggplant.

Ameria (34:05):

So I don't see anything yellow. Can you find something yellow.

Kari (child) (34:09):

[inaudible 00:34:09] Yellow.

Ameria (34:13):

It can even be a leaf might be yellow.

So yeah, we definitely miss that community. And what does community look like and how do we gather in various spaces? So also reflecting on that, and I think when you reflect, then you'll be a little bit more intentional about the next step you make.

I also think about as a kid growing up, it was the don't litter campaign. And Captain Planet was the inspiration.

Rachel (34:48):

Oh, I loved Captain Planet.

Ameria (34:50):

In those things, just growing up around that I was cognizant "don't litter." And even as an adult, if I see, and I feel safe enough, I'll say "You're littering. Can you please pick that up? There's the garbage right there." I think of those things, because even now to my son, I'm like, "Don't harm the planet. The planet can be sad if you throw things on the ground." And that's how he's able to conceptualize.

Oh, you found something yellow.

Rachel (35:18):

And it's so yellow.

Ameria (35:21):

Good job. You want to grab your chalk, because I don't want anyone to take it.

Rachel (35:29):

Mindfulness and community. Yeah, something that I've been thinking about a lot is like, we're really living in this transition. We're sort of pretending like we live in this one world, but we're actually living in this new world that is, that is in absolute, so much flux and...

Kari (child) (35:48):

Mommy, my shoe.

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

Ameria (35:52):

Something's in your shoe? Oh you going to take a breather? Okay. Okay. Take it off and empty it out. Take off your gloves.

Rachel (36:04):

And what are the tools that we need to build and live in this new world in alignment, in this new world? Rather than acting as if the world that we live in is stable and will continue to provide for us. And something that I think about a lot is, or I've started to think about a lot, is the importance of mindfulness, being in your community. I was riding my bike...

Ameria (36:38):

Dust it off. There you go.

Rachel (36:46):

Sort of turning away from these sort of solipsistic ideas of success that capitalism gives us and thinking about how we can get more local and localized. Tell me more about this idea of community coming together, mindfulness, what are the tools that we need in order to build a new world for ourselves that's sustainable and we can survive in?

Ameria (37:21):

I wish I had an exact formula, but...

Rachel (37:24):

Me too.

Ameria (37:26):

I'm always like... because it's the other day I was in a training and the instructor never met me before...

Come closer, baby.

They never met me before, and I was home. I did the training at home from home and the person was like, "Oh, are you an artist?" And I was like, "No." And then I said, wait, I am a creative. And we forget some of the things that we really enjoy.

And I say a lot of times, if we just tap into some of the... Watch your step, baby.

And it just seems so simple. But we have to remember and reflect just on the simple things that made us happy. I don't think it was anything ever extravagant. And a lot of times when we reflect on the things that made us happy, it has something to do with interacting with the land, the space.

I just think about my friends, my friend group, once again, and one of my son's godmothers. She wanted to really interact with my space and of Trinidad. And her coming into my space, my family, and meeting them in Trinidad. And they already knew about her from a long time ago, because I always talk about my friends. That was an opportunity for her to interact a little bit more and notice, and also reflect, because she's Dominican, reflect on the similarities of the land.

But just reflecting on the simple things, the simple joys will help us to grow. Some of the things that really got us excited and matured us and really inspired us, as well. And like I said, I don't have the exact formula, but sometimes the simple things is the answer to getting us into a better space. And

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

respecting our communities, because it starts off really small, very small. And each one teach one that type of thing.

Rachel (39:55):

Yeah, he's right there.

Ameria (39:57):

Oh, okay. That's all I have.

Rachel (40:03):

I also hear paying attention, being aware of your surroundings.

Ameria (40:09):

Just awareness, intentional. And some of these words are very redundant, and of course, we also live in a society where mindfulness is the word but my mom has been talking about mindfulness since I was a little kid, before it was packaged and curriculum was created out of it.

Rachel (40:36):

But there is also a reason why mindfulness is the word right now. Capitalists has made it consumer, but there's a way that we are needing and desiring, that wasn't necessarily created by capitalism, that desire. Or rather it was, but in response to. I think it's really potent that that is like the word of the moment, mindfulness and anxiety.

This is like a kind of higher level question and it's intentionally vague. But when you think about kind of the long breath of history and you think about where we are now; talk to me about what you think of as the story or sort of how you see us. How we got here. How did we get here from the past? And, also what is here? What is the now? How would you define the now and how did we get here?

Ameria (41:46):

And I know you said the question is vague...

Rachel (41:54):

[crosstalk 00:41:54] It's intentionally vague.

Ameria (41:55):

Yeah. Yeah.

Rachel (41:59):

But it's kind of like what's the story that you tell about our present moment?

Ameria (42:03):

Yeah. None of this is new. Scientists have been talking about the changes of the earth for a very long time. And I feel like every single generation have a different kind of reaction to the knowledge that has been given and provided to them as children. And even if they haven't had formal education, the education of elders, passing on oral traditions and narratives and all of that.

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

I just think about nothing is new, but there's a sense of urgency because not everyone was doing what they needed to do to prevent or slow down where we are at right now. COVID is like, I think, God, mother nature has said, "You know what? I'm tired of giving you guys the tools and the means and knowledge and even down to free will, of understanding you guys have the tools, I've literally have waved the flag and directed, you're not listening. So guess what? You have to be hit with another pandemic, another serious something to really buck up."

Imagine during the start of the shutdown and how nature started to revitalize and just had a moment to actually breathe and not to be interfered with or altered because of man. A lot of things I always commodified too. And I think about even down to-

Kari (child) (42:03):

Mommy?

Ameria (44:01):

Yes, baby. Yes. I know. The broom. Yeah. We can do that tomorrow or something.

Kari (child) (44:13):

No.

Ameria (44:14):

You want to do that now? Mommy doesn't have the key for the shed. Tomorrow we can do some of that work. Promise. Be careful. You fine?

Kari (child) (44:30):

Mommy.

Ameria (44:32):

Yeah, baby.

Kari (child) (44:34):

I don't want to do it.

Ameria (44:37):

Okay.

Kari (child) (44:37):

I want to do it.

Ameria (44:38):

Listen, soon we are going to leave so we can grab some decorations to decorate the front of the house for Halloween.

Kari (child) (44:47):

But mommy need to bring the keys.

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

Ameria (44:50):

Yeah. We'll go home and get the car keys. Okay? All right? Give mommy a few more minutes. All right? I'm just finishing up with Rachel. Okay?

Of course. I lose my train of thought. I just stopped thinking of [inaudible 00:45:08] just to ensure because I don't... Yeah.

Rachel (45:12):

Well, yeah. You were talking about how like things began come back in the pandemic, when things kind of slowed down, and then you said everything gets commodified.

Ameria (45:21):

Yeah. And I was going to go some someplace in a direction about things being commodified and I completely lost my train of thought. But it'll come back to me, eventually. We all need to take a breather.

Rachel (45:38):

I love what you said about like... It so resonates with me. This is not anything new. We've had this knowledge that's been passed down, but there's an urgency because people haven't done what they needed or some people haven't done what they needed to do.

Ameria (45:38):

To do.

Rachel (45:52):

Yeah. And that's because that's why there's this urgency. We all knew this, but some people haven't done what they needed to do. And I just love that, that way that you kind of articulated that. I'll kind of ask you my last few questions.

Ameria (46:11):

Oh, I do remember what I was going to say. So in other countries, I haven't been to a whole bunch of countries, but in terms of my interaction and ability to travel, based on my experiences, there are communities that continue to grow and interact with the land and make it work based on whatever the land has to offer for.

Of course, you don't continue to grow the same crop in one space. You have to grow something else so the earth can revitalize. People know that intuitively. And in terms of like becoming a vegetarian and vegan, it's like, "Oh, everybody should consider plant based." And that's nothing new in terms of my family.

And we also think about even access and how much money you have as well, and what we consume for ourselves, and we make it work. And my parents grew up impoverished but they understood the richness of the land. My mom will give stories about, not necessarily always having a whole lot...

Kari, be careful.

Not having a [crosstalk 00:47:24], but she tells me she interacted with the land with her brothers, with her friends and they will walk and they will pick cashews from the tree and roast it. They knew how to build a fire. They made it work.

And they weren't always, and of course, some of it not by choice, but they weren't deep consumers and they did not waste because they understood the importance of food and how significant and valuable it is. And sometimes it wasn't in abundance.

So how do you ensure that you continue to nourish yourself, you interact with what the earth has to offer. And this is in Trinidad, of course, but I definitely wanted to go back to vegetarianism, veganism. My father has been a vegetarian for over 45 years. And sometimes do the vegan aspect. It depends on what, he listens as he will say... My father is very interesting.

Rachel (48:30):

I would love to talk to your dad.

Ameria (48:32):

Very interesting, because even down to his story of why he became a vegetarian is unique and I'll give you the short version. He went on one of his retreats in the mountains in Trinidad and a chicken happened to pass by him and said, "You need to stop eating meat."

Rachel (48:47):

Oh my God.

Ameria (48:48):

It freaked him out. And, then when he was like, "Okay, I'm going to listen." And the chicken guided him to another path of more food. And that's his reason for becoming a vegetarian. My mom has heard the story, they are not together, but they have a very positive relationship. My father would be like, "Yeah, he was tripping."

Nonetheless, I find value in that. He said he started to really pay attention to the animals and insects. And that's how he was guided into doing more plant-based food and becoming a vegetarian eventually.

Rachel (49:32):

It's amazing.

Ameria (49:32):

Yeah. It's a trippy story, but-

Rachel (49:35):

It's a real trippy story. My question is like, what kind of voice did the chicken have? How did the chicken sound?

Ameria (49:42):

Yeah. My father, but I believe him in every way. I think it was just another version of him really paying attention to what was happening. This is what it was.

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

Rachel (49:42):

A hundred percent.

Kari (child) (49:54):

Okay, baby.

Rachel (49:54):

Okay.

Ameria (49:55):

I'll quickly finish up. Okay?

Rachel (49:57):

Let's just do two more questions.

Ameria (49:59):

Yes. Yes.

Rachel (49:59):

The first is what do you fear for for the future? I have two more questions for your mom, you want to count with us? Okay. Question number, what would the first question be counted? Number...

Kari (child) (50:14):

One.

Rachel (50:14):

All right. Question number one. What do you fear for for the future?

Ameria (50:26):

People not to continuing listen to the earth and making active changes to ensure that we can preserve the earth. And we're not thinking about in the moment, but preserve it in the long term for generations to come.

Rachel (50:41):

And if we don't listen, what do you worry about?

Ameria (50:46):

This concept and idea of going to Mars. It's like, we go to Mars and then what we destroy this planet?

Rachel (50:54):

It's unbelievably-

Ameria (50:54):

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

It's trippy.

Rachel (50:56):

These spaceships are-

Kari (child) (50:58):

Number two.

Rachel (51:00):

[Crosstalk 00:51:00]. Okay. Number two.

Ameria (51:06):

Yeah.

Rachel (51:06):

What do you hope for?

Kari (child) (51:09):

Number three?

Rachel (51:09):

We're only on number two.

Ameria (51:11):

For this generation to understand the impact of COVID and wear a mask, and understanding that we need to do better with just the earth. I think COVID, I'm not a conspiracy theorist per se, because even coronavirus is nothing new as well. It just mutated. And why did it mutate? I think it has a lot to do with man, their interactions with science, and also natural biology, I think plays a significant role in how it mutated and really impacted us.

But I think, my son generation, and even older than him, they're going to do better. Definitely going to do better. Especially since a lot of school curriculum really take social, emotional learning serious. Expressions of gratitude, ensuring that the young person understand that they have community, outside of the home as well, because I had community outside of the home. My family is like significant and impactful in terms of who I am today. But school and my external community also played a role in how I am today as well. So I'm hopeful for that. Yep. And just like that, mommy's done.

Rachel (52:35):

And, that's it. We got to two. We're done.

Ameria (52:38):

Hopefully this was helpful in some way.

Rachel (52:41):

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

This was wonderful conversation. I so appreciate you taking the time to talk to me. Kari, thanks for taking the time to let your mom talk to me.

Ameria (52:49):

He did really well.

Rachel (52:50):

He did really good. Really patient. Thank you.

Ameria (52:56):

Thank you.

Rachel (52:58):

It's great. It's so interesting to talk to you and like I love hearing this multi-generational perspective. It makes me feel like, okay, all right, this is a world that we live in. Nothing is new.

Ameria (53:12):

Yep.

Rachel (53:12):

We just need to-

Ameria (53:14):

Exactly.

Rachel (53:14):

We need to pay attention. We need to remember where we came from.

Ameria (53:19):

And of course my husband and I, because of our past and our connection to our elders, our parents, we're actually taking it and continuing it. We're young couple, we're in this space. We're passing it one to him.

Rachel (53:34):

Yeah. I mean, watching him in the garden, I'm seeing that. I'm seeing like...

Ameria (53:39):

And Kari loves gardening with my father who, who is his best. And their interaction together is so beautiful. Especially when they're in this space, or in Queens, gardening, my son is like, "Oh, I need to get the watering can so I can water." And my father has him walked barefoot and do grounding. Just all the things that honestly wasn't necessarily termed like that per se. But my son loves walking barefoot as well, touching the soil. So there's the hope right there. Happening. Definitely happening.

Rachel (54:22):

Ameria, 400 Montauk Avenue Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 22, 2021

Yeah. Thank you so much.

Ameria (54:25):

Thank you for having me. I really, really appreciate this. I'm always so grateful.