

Austin, 61 Franklin Street Community Garden, Greenpoint, Brooklyn
July 11, 2021

Rachel:

I'm going to press record. All right. Tell me your name, your age, where you're from, where you grew up, where you live, what you do. Give me the who, what, where, when.

Austin:

So my name's Austin Kindred. I am 28 years old. I've been in Brooklyn for two years now originally. Well, my dad was in the army, so I've lived all over the country, but I guess where I say I'm from is North Carolina. I was there for almost 10 years, probably. I originally started out, after high school, I went to UNC Asheville for environmental studies and economics next double major, but changed halfway through and switched over to mechanical engineering. So, that's kind of my background now is in engineering side of stuff. And right now I'm working with Verizon on all their fiber optic internet lines. I guess that's kind of my little blurb about me.

Rachel:

So, Austin, when you think about global warming or climate, sorry, I got distracted by your amazing knitting. When you think about climate change, global warming climate crisis, what do you think about and how do you feel?

Austin:

For me, climate change, I feel like we're kind of past the point of no return. So I feel like a sense of dread that there's not too much that we as an individual can do anymore because it's not on an individual level to fix climate change. It's more political corporations and the greed that they have for money and not the idea that they should be doing what's best for everybody else. So it's really just a sense of dread that what I do isn't really going to affect the environment in a positive, well, what I do is good because I'm not, I'm not part of the problem, but I also don't think I'm part of the solution. If that makes sense.

Rachel:

What does it feel like?

Austin:

It's honestly just, I want to say regret, but it's not regret because I'm doing the right thing. It's sadness and...

Rachel:

Oh, my goodness.

Austin:

It's sadness and it's, I don't want to say dread, but it, it is. I don't know.

Rachel:

What are you dreading?

Austin:

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I think what I dread the most is the fact that we're past the tipping point or at the tipping point, and we're looking more towards the future of what's wrong instead of what can we do to fix it.

Rachel:

So what do you fear then? What do you sort of see in the future?

Austin:

What I fear and what I see are kind of the same thing and it's that we're going to keep going down the same path that we're going now, politically, money wise, corporation wise, that just keep making more and more and more and not, "Hey, us as a company," just any big company, Toyota or Ford or not even cars, but any company, "we're going to keep trying to make the most money that we can. We're not trying to make the earth a better place." As an individual, I feel like individuals trying to help climate change is great but I feel like that maybe is 5% of climate change where the other 95%, pollution and stuff, that's all big business. You don't see a person walk through and pour a can of gasoline into a river, but corporations can dump all their excess oil and everything else into rivers or into oceans. We're drilling all this oil out of the ocean and it's like the Gulf of Mexico last week was on fire because, I don't know what caused it, but it's like that is the biggest part and reason for climate change is the greed and want for money.

It's not so much the little person that's the issue. Politically and economically, we are pushed to think that we are the solution to climate change when I feel like as the solution, we are maybe 5%. It's like two weeks ago we had, or a week ago, I don't remember any more, time runs together now, we had a big heat wave passed through the city and de Blasio asked us to all turn down our thermostats, a degree to help with electricity and saving electricity, to help make sure that everybody's keeping their air conditioners on. But as a city, the city itself didn't do anything. All the lights were still on at Times Square, and it's like, why are we pushing everything onto the individual instead of onto bigger pictures, we're looking too small scale at what can be done.

Rachel:

What does it mean for you, an individual living through time in this world to be living in this moment where you kind of see destruction all around you and you don't see it improving, what does it mean to be living for you in this moment? Where does that position you in your life? How do you see it?

Austin:

It's sad because I know I'm doing what I can to not hurt the earth and try to leave it a better place than I can. I grew up and I was in boy scouts my entire childhood, so the motto there is leave no trace. I'm not going to be somebody that's going to hurt anything, but I forgot the question.

Rachel:

It was a poorly worded question, but what does it mean for you and your life being a person in the middle of a climate crisis?

Austin:

For me as a person, I feel like as an individual, I'm going to do everything I can to make sure myself is doing what is necessary, but it's also just sadness that others aren't doing everything that they can.

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Rachel:

And others being like corporations power.

Austin:

Yes. But also other individuals. I take my reusable water bottle when I go somewhere, I don't, and fill it up at a water fountain. I try to use reusable containers every everywhere we go. But then you go for a walk in one of our parks and all you see is trash cans overflowing with pizza containers or whatever other garbage everybody generates. And it's not so much that it's like, I know I'm doing my part and other people say they're doing their part, but then when you watch the actions of others, they're really, they don't care. They talk the talk, but they don't walk the walk. And I feel like it is my generation, as well, that is part of the problem, unfortunately. On a grand scheme of things, maybe 10% of my generation is looking the right way and the other 90% is like, "eh, somebody else will take care of it." And they're just going about living their best life instead of actually thinking about where we're going in the future.

Rachel:

Have you taken political action around the issue of climate crisis?

Austin:

When I was originally going to school, that was kind of where I wanted to go. Cause I was environmental studies and economics, and I wanted to get into the EPA and the Green Party and all that kind of stuff. If you're not part of, and that's the problem with our country right now is if you're not Democrat or Republican, you're not going to get anything passed.

Rachel:

So if you are this thing instead of.

Austin:

If you're Green Party or whatever other little parties there are politically, you're not the big two Democrat/Republican so you're not going to get any say in where we're going politically. And unfortunately, until I know I'm going back to it again, until we get the corporations out of politics pockets, it's not going to matter what the Green Party says because ExxonMobil has millions of dollars in all the senators pockets or house. Everybody that's in politics gets bought by businesses. It's like you watch a NASCAR race, and they have their sponsors on their fire suits and everything, but politicians just wear a suit and hide who pays them. And it's like, all this money is getting fed into them and they're like, "okay, I know I'm for the people, but really Exxon wants me to make sure that this gets passed. So I'm going to do that. And I'm not really for the people I'm for the businesses that are bringing in the money and keeping America running."

Rachel:

Tell me more about this transition then, the transition that you made in college from having ambitions, political ambitions to shifting your focus.

Austin:

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So as a kid, I've always been green. I've always loved playing outside, being in nature, that kind of stuff. But then I've also loved tinkering and taking stuff apart, putting stuff together, building stuff. So when I lost hope in politics and in getting into the government, that's when I switched over to engineering with hopes of getting into some kind of business or startup or something that is trying to find a solution and trying to be more solution than... So I switched from being big picture to little picture and wanting to be a part of a bigger solution that's not, okay, maybe middle picture, because it's like, I want to help, maybe be in a business that is environmentally thinking and trying to come up with solutions and then maybe eventually politics will go the other way and be like, "okay, we're past the point of no return. What can we do to slow it down and try to help." And then they'll start to look at these smaller or businesses and startups and what they're doing and trying to globally, or not globally, even nationally spread these products and ideas and that kind of stuff.

Rachel:

Did you feel like you've been able to get involved in that kind of work?

Austin:

Not yet. I've been out of college for two years, so unfortunately right when I, after I got here was when the pandemic hit. So now that everything's starting to open back up, I've I started looking for other opportunities to get into that field and move about where I can get into the field. During the pandemic I just stayed where I was, because I needed the income and everything. And it's been a good job to me so it's like just kind of stay here where I can. Now that things are opening and businesses are starting to take back off, it's like, "okay, now let me find where I want to be for the next 30 years."

Rachel:

So you've lived all over the place, you haven't lived in North Carolina for the majority of your life?

Austin:

Yeah. So North Carolina is where I was for 10 years, but as a kid, we moved eight times. Oh wow. Yeah. So I was born actually in upstate New York and then I've lived in Texas, Memphis, Tennessee, Arkansas, Nashville, Tennessee, Charlotte, North Carolina, Asheville, North Carolina, and then back to Charlotte. And now I'm in Brooklyn.

Rachel:

When you were in North Carolina over those 10 years, did you see any changes, weather seasons? Did you notice any changes?

Austin:

Not so much like weather changes in where I lived, but globally, yes. The hurricanes are getting stronger and more frequent. Earthquakes are getting stronger, more frequent, more volcanic activity, the rainy season is coming later and ending sooner in the rainforest, and then in deserts, deserts are expanding. So it's more globally that weather is changing than localized to where I grew up. Where I grew up, we still had all four seasons. Whereas it's like we had our spring, summer, fall, winter. You could differentiate those four things, but the extremes, they don't, I don't know, all four seasons have them, but each part of the season is getting, the peaks are getting higher with where the weather's going. The summers were hotter, the winters were colder. The spring and summer were short or spring and fall

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were shorter than being three months, three months, three months. It's like maybe a month and a half spring and fall then four or five months, summer, winter weather wise. Yeah.

Rachel:

When did you first learn about global warming?

Austin:

For me, I'd say probably I learned what global warming is, I'd say it's been a thing as long as I can remember. And I mean, I remember before 9/11 being in third grade and everything. That's where most of my memories, I remember being a kid younger than that, but bulk of my memories have started from there. And it's always been a thing. You always hear about, "oh, this is bad for the environment. Now don't do this. Try to make sure you're using." We were paper bags in grocery stores then we were plastic bags, now we're reusable bags. Oh no. Now we're we want paper bags again. It's like, we're always changing what the right thing to do is.

Rachel:

Do you feel like there's been a change for you and how you understood global warming when you first learned about it to how you understand it now? Or has there been a change as sort of in what we all know about? Yeah. Like what's the change been? If there has been any.

Austin:

For sure. As a kid, it was the ozone layers getting thinner and the hole and the ozone layer is getting bigger because we're putting too many aerosols into the air or we're putting off too much CO2 from manufacturing. And that was kind of all that you knew as a kid, where now it's like, and it's not, I don't even think it's just because I'm an adult now and I can do my own research. I think it's also shown more in the media, everything that is going on because with the internet, we're a global society now. We're not just America. Like last week when Haiti's president got assassinated, it's like we in the United States, even though they're just down in south America, we wouldn't have heard about that for probably three weeks if we ever heard about it.

So I think the media has also turned to show globally what is going on. They can talk about the Gulf of Mexico being on fire. They can talk about the bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef. They can talk about the volcanoes everywhere, because we can get all of this news in an instant now, instead of in a week when somebody writes you a letter and you get it from whatever country and getting it written, you can get video of everything that's going on as it's happening. So we're living in an instant where we don't have to wait for news to come to us. We can get it as it's happening.

Rachel:

Do you feel like there was a moment when you were confronted with climate crisis when it showed up in your own backyard, so to speak?

Austin:

So for me, I'd say when it really hit me was probably my senior year of high school. The power plant that supplied electricity to our town burns coal to get the power to spin the turbines, all that kind of stuff. And one of the levies broke that they stored the coal ash in, the byproduct from burning the coal and that coal ash was going into our lake.

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Rachel:

Oh my God.

Austin:

And killing all the fish and everything else in the lake. Even still to this day, they're like, "you can fish and the fish might be fine," but they're like, "we wouldn't recommend you eat the fish out of the lake if they're near to where the power plant was because there's still coal ash in the lake."

Rachel:

Oh my God.

Austin:

So I think even though that's not really climate change, it is because we need to get away from the fossil fuels. We need to be looking at renewable energies. We need to stop destroying mountains. The biggest way of getting the coal in North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, those areas, is not to dig a hole, go in into a mine and get it out, it's to destroy a mountain, they call it mountaintop removal.

Rachel:

I've heard of that.

Austin:

You blow up the mountain, push the mountain into the valley, flatten it out, and then you take the coal off the top. So now you have, instead of the rolling mountains, you have just a big flat expanse because the mountain is gone. There's no mountain and valley, it's flat now. And so we need to, by we I mean everybody, globally, politically, economically, we need to be pushing for renewables. Solar. Let's get the water turbines off our coasts and use wave power, get some wind turbines up, get solar panels on roofs. We could be, or we don't need to have any, if enough places use renewable energies, we wouldn't need coal and natural gas, fossil fuels. I believe I just saw last week, like Canada is said by 20, either 2025 or 2035, but I think 35 that you cannot purchase a car in Canada that runs on gasoline. They're going to be fully electric. And so it's like, that's a step in the right direction.

Rachel:

Do you feel like you will, you or your family will be affected differently by climate crisis because of the multiple identities, you have race, gender, sexuality, nationality, ability?

Austin:

No. Climate change doesn't care who you are. It affects everybody. If you have money, you can pretend like climate change doesn't exist, but it does and there's no denying that it exists. And unfortunately, money likes to pretend it doesn't exist because that gets more money than acknowledging it. So as an individual, no, I don't think it's impacted me more than it's impacted somebody else.

Rachel:

How does climate crisis affect the way you plan for your future?

Austin:

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I don't want to repeat what my partner said.

Rachel:

That's okay. It's a different interview.

Austin:

Yeah. I don't plan on having children.

Rachel:

Would you have had children in a vacuum?

Austin:

I don't know. I don't want to bring a child into this world that is worse off than when I started. If the world was becoming better and better, maybe, but that's not something I've ever really thought about because that's not the path we're going down.

Rachel:

Does that decision feel like a sacrifice for you?

Austin:

No. I love kids. We have our niece. I love her, but I also don't want, I've never really wanted the responsibility of having to take care of somebody else. I'd never, growing up, my sister is, she's the same age so I never really had to take care of a younger sibling, but I also never really wanted to be like, "Hey." I guess I'm kind of selfish, whereas it's like if I want to go to Disney World, I can go to Disney World next week because I don't have to worry about the kid being in school or I can leave our cat with my sister. It's like, and I guess it's kind of selfish because it's like, I want to think about more of like what I want to do then have to think, "Hey, I want to do this, but I have to make the sacrifice because my kid is in school and they can't get out of school till the summer or whatever." Maybe it's selfish, but I also think it's selfish to bring another life into the world where their life won't be as good as mine.

Rachel:

What kinds of conversations are you having with your friends, family, community about this issue, climate crisis?

Austin:

For climate crisis in general, it's trying to get everybody to do what they can to not be part of the problem. Not so much for them to be part of the solution because the solution isn't on individual level, but just not be part of the problem. Make sure they're using reusable bags or taking their water bottle. Don't be buying single-use plastic, that kind of stuff. And just trying to make sure that my friends, my family are not part of the problem because I don't know if they can be part of the solution.

Rachel:

How does change get made? I mean, you keep saying we can't be part of the solution, but how does change get made then?

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Austin:

I don't think change will come until something very bad happens, whether that be a volcano or a hurricane that takes out thousands, a million people or something like that. And then politics start to realize that we're on the wrong path. And then also that businesses realize that they can make money fixing the problem, because right now they're making too much money being part of the problem than being part of the solution. So I think it's economically, there has to be a change economically for any big change to start.

Rachel:

How did we get here? What is the here and how did we get here?

Austin:

So I'd say the here is still in a, we're still in a consumer world where everybody wants what they want and they want it when they want it. And I think we honestly got here by greed and I don't want to say media, but pushing everybody, the newest iPhone comes out and everybody wants to have the newest iPhone because they want to stay in the trend and stay up on top of where we are. And so businesses like Apple are still going to be making more iPhones because they want to be on the trend and be on top of where everybody wants to be. So they're going to keep producing. Same with manufacturing vehicles, it's like, everybody always wants the newest thing. So we're going to be manufacturing the biggest things we can. And we're not really going to worry about how we're manufacturing it and what the byproducts of that manufacturing are and how they're negatively impacting.

You can be driving down the road and see a factory and it's like, "Hey, cool. Look, they're putting out solar panels," but how are they making the solar panels for example? Or what are byproducts of the products that we're making? We need to stop being a, we need to stop wanting to take more in and be happy with what we have. And use it up. Use it up or make do without, or figure out a way to repair stuff. It's like, don't just use something and then toss it to the side and be like, "okay, well, this broke so I'm just going to go get a new one." Try to fix it. Stop buying more and more stuff.

Rachel:

Do you have a spiritual practice or a system of values or ethics that help you navigate this moment?

Austin:

I grew up Christian. Well, I guess I grew up Catholic. I believe there's something out there, but I guess now I'm more agnostic, I guess. So I agree there's probably something out there, but I don't think I'm, I don't really have a home religion, I guess. Religion, to me, is something that people will always come up with a religion because they want an answer to why are we here? And there might not be an answer. It could just be that the universe became a thing and it's just evolution. Religion is always going to be made up. Whether we, I don't know, do fish have a religion where, "oh, the person, the great, the great beyond."

Rachel:

Very busy.

Austin:

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Yeah. "Oh, my fish friend Bob is gone and we don't know where he went. He must have gotten taken by our fish God because, oh, no, he just got captured by human," but maybe we're the gods to the fish or something like that. Everything is going to make up a religion to answer the unknown. That's my belief, I guess.

Rachel:

Project yourself, like 40 years into the future, 50 years in the future, where are you going to be?

Austin:

I hope to be, in 40, 50 years, I hope to be still fighting the fight of practicing what I can, but I also hope that globally, we've all come together to realize that we are the problem and that we've shifted to being the solution instead of the problem. So hopefully I'd love to say in the next five years we acknowledge that we're the problem, but will we? I don't know.

Rachel:

So my next question was, what do you hope for?

Austin:

I hope globally that we acknowledge that we are the problem and that yes, the earth has its climate cycles. It has ice ages every thousands of years, but that we are accelerating that timeline and that we're making it worse by pushing everything too far. And that we all agree to reverse our actions and be part of the solution. That's my hope, but it's my dream. But do I think we'll get there? No, I don't. And it makes me sad because I wish and hope that we do, but realistically, I think people are greedy and there's no incentive for people to become the solution.

Rachel:

Austin, were there any questions that I didn't ask you that you expected me to ask you, or that you'd like me to ask you?

Austin:

Not really. I think the biggest thing for climate crisis and everything was, that I wanted to talk about, was about how it's not an individual's responsibility. So I think you've, you asked me questions about that and let me go off on my tangents, so no.

Rachel:

What are questions you're asking yourself right now?

Austin:

What more can I do to be solution?

Rachel:

You say that in the same breath that you just said that it's not up to individuals.

Austin:

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Right. I think individually as a solution, it's what more can I do to not be part of the problem than what can I do to change the world? It's how can I mitigate my footprint on the earth? Do I every once in a while get a takeout container from our Chinese restaurant because I forget to bring mine? Yes. How can I better decrease my footprint more so than how can I be the solution to fix the problem?

Rachel:

Cool. Thank you so much.

Austin:

You're welcome.