

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

Rachel (00:00):

... record. Tell me your name, who you are, your age, where you are from, where you grew up, where you live, what you do, give me who you are.

Beth (00:15):

Okay, sure. So do you want my first and last name?

Rachel (00:18):

Sure.

Beth (00:19):

Okay, I'm Beth and, and I've lived in Williamsburg, Greenpoint area for eight years now. I'm actually from Pennsylvania, Eastern Pennsylvania, about 30 miles outside of Philadelphia. And I'm a nurse by profession, so always interested in health, and wellness, and the whole wellbeing idea. I work in pharmaceutical research, it's a pretty intense job that I have, but I also am a holistic lifestyle coach and a career strategist, so I help women, especially those over 40, that mid-lifetime questioning, time to get off the hamster wheel, "What am I doing with my life?"

And I've been a member of this garden, of 61 Franklin Street Garden for three years now. And what else? Oh, the other interesting thing that I'll throw in here, when you asked me to tell my age, but it was also my birthday yesterday, so there's a lot of thinking that's been going on this weekend. So I just turned 59, and so really looking at wanting to ensure that I'm doing everything I can to ensure healthy aging, and I'm very much into being outdoors and all things natural. Try to live more of a toxin-free life, and yeah, it's a journey.

Rachel (01:42):

My mother's family's from Philadelphia, I can hear the region in your [crosstalk 00:01:47] your voice, it's great, I love it.

Beth (01:50):

It's funny, when I travel, and can I travel quite a bit in different parts of the United States, people are like, "Where are you from?" But I think unfortunately, it's also this mix now, that stuff.

Rachel (01:58):

Yeah, but there's a few signifiers, you can tell a Philly.

Beth (02:08):

Right.

Rachel (02:09):

I love it, it's great. I think it's a beautiful accent, you don't have a very strong one, but there were just some words, I was like- [crosstalk 00:02:17].

Beth (02:17):

Yeah. No, it is, it's undeniable, that's for sure.

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Rachel (02:19):

So I'm going to start, Beth, by asking you the question that I ask everybody, which is when you think about global warming or the climate crisis, what do you think about and how do you feel?

Beth (02:35):

So for me, I think there's a lot of fear and trepidation about what it's all going to mean and how it will truly impact our future, and unfortunately, the very near future, it's not a distant thought anymore. I think that we're already seeing many changes because of global warming that again, are undeniable. And I want people to wake up to it and realize that these are real issues, but also that we all can make a difference if we just change some things, make some tweaks to our lifestyles and our habits. We have an opportunity as individuals to affect change and protect the planet, and frankly, our life, right?

Rachel (03:27):

And how do you feel?

Beth (03:28):

Oh, how do I feel? So I think that there's fear in there, fear about what the future holds, fear about what it's going to look like. I have sons who are thinking now about marriage and children, so I have a lot of fears around what the world's going to look like even in 20 years. I feel very curious right now, just being open-minded to learning about what things we can do, and even just even meeting with you, right? Curiosity around, "Okay, this is an interesting project, and again, how do we get the message out? How do we start conversations about this that people can really relate to?" So I'm open-minded to opportunities.

Rachel (04:15):

Talk to me about that research. I mean, one of my biggest questions that I have for myself, one of the reasons why I started this whole project was like, "Well, what the F can I do? What can we do?" What is required of us in this moment?

Beth (04:33):

Yeah, so I think so many things, I'm really into health and wellness, as I mentioned to you before we pressed record, but for me, I consider it something that it's part of our wellbeing, right? And it's about living a healthy lifestyle... Oops, sorry.

Rachel (04:53):

That's okay.

Beth (04:53):

And I think we can start thinking of it in terms of what we can do in our everyday lives, it's not these grandiose ideas that are going to affect climate change, it's really the things that we can do in our everyday lives. So small changes can have big impact, and I think it's important for people to realize that.

Rachel (05:20):

What kinds of changes?

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Beth (05:22):

As simple as I use reusable batteries, I think driving less, when I look at what happened during the pandemic, and with less cars, and less planes, and all of that, the sky's cleared, right? The stars finally shown brighter. And so living in this environment, there's a lot more, it's a walking environment or a bicycling environment, but I think we can do things and think about less time driving that we're in vehicles, but also being in the garden, and there's fresh veggie, and herbs, and things here. And so when we can buy local, instead of having things shipped in and all the fossil fuels that go into... So I think that those are the little things that we can do, is just walk more, buy local, I don't know if that's... Answers your question.

Rachel (06:19):

It absolutely does. And then I have another question to follow up with that, which is, I struggle with that idea so much, because part... Oh, part of me... Oh, part of me feels like, "Well, gosh, that's not enough," this word that keeps bouncing around in my head is like, "Enough, is it enough?" No, it's not enough. And I don't know, I don't think I'm able to move a mountain, so it's hard for me to square that. So talk to me about the macro versus the micro when you think about change.

Beth (07:09):

So I don't know, is this just... So I work with career, corporate women who are very focused on career, so some of what you're saying just reminds me of this concept that we have with this identity, that we have to do everything, that we are responsible for everything, and we're always pushing, and we put a lot of pressure on ourselves. And I think if we are able to step back and we realize that it's not up to you to move the mountain by yourself, right? But if we all come together, there's more chance that we can dig that tunnel together through the mountain, right? Or we can stand on each other's shoulders and go over the mountain. It's not what one person does, but it's what we do as a collective.

And I believe that there's resonance in... Once we have in our mind that we can affect change, that's something that we can do, there's a cause and effect, and whether that cause and effect is even that we have more of a voice about it, more people start listening, they start getting curious or educated, and then they talk more about it, so it becomes this ripple effect. And so I think that that's how the small, little incremental changes that we as individuals can make, that truly does affect the collective as a whole.

Rachel (08:44):

Yeah, when did you first learn about climate change? When did you first hear about it?

Beth (08:54):

Interesting. Oh, gosh, is it 20, 30, 40 years ago? I don't know. I think that there were whispers about it many years ago.

Rachel (09:07):

What did those whispers sound like?

Beth (09:10):

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Just the people who were the scientists on the stage from the podium, who would be reporting on these changes that they were seeing in the atmosphere, I guess when I'm thinking about it, one thing that used to be talked about years ago was the ozone layer, right? That was the verbiage, I guess.

Rachel (09:32):

Yeah.

Beth (09:32):

The ozone layer, and that impacted in influence, oh, laying out in the sun because there was less of an ozone layer, we're going to get more sunburn. And so I remember those kinds of messaging years and years ago, but I think too, that that's when you had the... The messaging was coming from the scientists and then maybe repeated from the night on the nightly news, but no, it wasn't down at this grassroots level, because this was for the scientists to solve it, it wasn't for something that we as individuals could do anything about. But I think over the years, we as a society have become more enlightened, more awakened, and so I think that the messaging maybe is changing now. And also, I think as we're seeing it firsthand, seeing the effects of climate change firsthand, with all the droughts that are occurring, with the fires and the heat waves out West right now, I think that we're seeing and living through firsthand, and it becomes undeniable.

Rachel (10:56):

So there's really a shift between when you first learned about climate change, what it meant for you, and over the course of 30 years, how you understand it now?

Beth (11:09):

Yes.

Rachel (11:10):

And what's changed for you as you started seeing the effects of climate crisis happening in real-time, in front of our eyes?

Beth (11:20):

Yeah. Well, I'm certainly more motivated now to do my part or to look at ways that I can participate in some of these efforts. So I think that there's motivation, but I also think... And maybe motivation driven by some of that fear I was talking about earlier, right? But I also think that as I've become more enlightened, everybody wants to have a cause, and I think it's an opportunity just to feel like you're giving back, and you're serving, and you're making a difference.

Rachel (12:00):

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

Beth (12:17):

Let me think about that. So I'm not sure that I recall a moment, but I was actually thinking about having the conversation with you, I was thinking about what it was like when I was a child, what the winters were like and things like that, and I'm remembering so much more snow, because it was so much colder,

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we always went ice skating, we always went... And I'm talking 30 miles Northwest of Philadelphia, so it's not like I was up in the tundra. But it was much colder, and there were more of these outdoor winter activities, and now it's such a difference.

I look back, this winter, and we had so much rain, there was more rain than there was snow. And some of the outdoors activities, I mean, now it's warm into the beginning of December, so I think when we look at those kinds of things, I love it, yeah, I go running then I don't have to bundle up so much, but it's also, I think, a sign that the warm weather is really impinging on those cold weather months, if that makes sense.

Rachel ([13:35](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. What does it feel like to be living through such a real physical change in how you experience seasons? What that feeling? How do you make sense of it?

Beth ([13:55](#)):

So I've always lived in the Northeast, so I've always been in a climate where there is four seasons, and actually, what came to my mind is I'm thinking about the contrast of people who live in warm weather states or areas where they don't experience the change of seasons. And I like to have these four seasons, and when it's like, "Wow, there was no spring. We went from winter into summer," and what happens to all the beautiful blooming flowers? Then everything's being changed with the bloom times and things like that. So you just start to think about, or realize the impact, because little shifts like that are occurring. But I like four seasons, and so I don't always like not having those transition periods within the seasons.

Rachel ([14:57](#)):

Yeah, what's the emotional experience of that?

Beth ([15:00](#)):

The emotional experience, I think it's... For me, it's probably rooted in childhood, in childhood memories, in many ways, so I think it's a feeling of a loss, when you don't have the experiences that you can have on those during those different seasonal changes. So I feel like in some ways, it's a loss of the sentimental activities that you might do that holds just meaning.

Rachel ([15:35](#)):

What do you do with that feeling of loss? How do you grieve something like that?

Beth ([15:43](#)):

I'm not sure I know the answer to that one yet, I think I'm still in it. It's hard to tell because I think what we've just experienced with the pandemic grief has taken on this whole new... Grieving has taken on a whole new meaning than what many people thought that grieving could be, or should be, or was. There's always opportunities to create new experiences, and are there new experiences that we can start to have, I guess by... I don't know, I'm just thinking about the activism that comes with this whole idea, what we're talking about, that, "Okay. If we're going to grieve something that we've lost and we've lost it because this is what we're doing to the world, then the new experience, it becomes changing that." And maybe it's going back to basics, which nobody in the digital world is willing to slow down long enough to figure out what that looks like or could feel like.

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Rachel (16:59):

Yeah, what does back to basics mean for you?

Beth (17:01):

Yeah, so back to basics means for me, just turning off, quieting down, shutting things down, and being intentional about separating, because we're always in this fast-paced world, especially in a city environment like this, right? Everything's always going, spinning faster than the sound of light, but back to basics is just enjoying those quiet nights under the moonlit sky and starlit sky, if you can see it without the jet fuel.

Rachel (17:39):

So interesting. I mean, one of my big questions that I'm constantly seeking answered to is, we're living in this time of dissonance, we're living in this moment where we're acting like we're living on one planet, but we're actually living in another, we're acting as if we're living in the world that we used to have. It's like Bill McKibben's Eearth, E-A-A-R-T-H, he says that the Earth we have changed the Earth so much that it's no longer the same one that we used to live in.

And I talk to people who say, "If I were really to look at the climate crisis face to face, I worry that I would lose everything, that if I really were to confront this issue head on, I would not be able to live in the way that I currently live, because the way that I currently live is so out of alignment from what the world actually is, but we're so comfortable in this world." So one of the questions that I'm asking is, what tools do we need to cultivate in order to help us transition from the world we used to live in, that we like to pretend we're still in, to the world that we actually live in? What are the emotional and psychological tools that we need to cultivate? And you talking about this back to basics makes me think that that is one part of an answer, This idea of slowing down, being curious. I don't know if you've been thinking about that or if you have anything-

Beth (19:30):

Well, it came to light, I think during this past election period, right? Where the focus... and I'll go back to the idea that like, the fossil fuel, and this reliance on jobs and things like that, right? In the fossil fuel industry. And so people don't want to give up, they only see it as that's the only way there can be jobs and employment, right? But why not change our technologies into creating these other resources, the electric cars and things like that, right? More and more people are adopting that, right? So I think that there is an opportunity to just go back to technology, and the scientists, right? From before, right? But now, the scientists can help to create new resources for us so that they're more prevalent, and we can have everyday people making these shifts to be able to utilize more things that are energy efficient.

They may not have to think about it anymore, because everything that becomes available to us will have that branding and doesn't become something maybe that we're consciously aware of choosing, right now, we still have to make the choices. But I think with more education, more grassroots education, right? Bringing it down to the people so that they can hear the messaging, I think there's a real opportunity to have people start realizing what they can do, the small changes, again, that they can do, while on a bigger, more global level, some of the other technology changes are occurring as well.

Rachel (21:25):

And what about on an individual level? What are the emotional or psychological tools that we need to thrive in an uncertain future?

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Beth (21:38):

Yeah, I think it comes back to resilience. Resilience is the word that came to my mind there because as human beings with human brains, we have to learn how to adapt. And I think resilience and understanding that yes, our way of life might shift and change, but to make emotional decisions that are based on knowing that this is the smart thing to do, it's the right thing to do, it's the way that we can change the course of things. You can't stay stuck in doing what you always did just because it feels comfortable without looking at again, that cause and effect that it's having. So I think just a shift in our own thinking and realizing that to be as resilient as we can, that's what it is, it is about changes, and making those changes, and being accepting of change.

Rachel (22:44):

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

Beth (22:49):

No, I haven't actually. I usually just distance myself from these... I keep using the word, grassroots, but again, that's the one that comes to mind. I'm much more adept at supporting causes on this grassroots level versus within a... And when you say politics, I think of it as being much more visible stance about things, I mean, other than social media. But yeah, so no, I haven't done political things.

Rachel (23:31):

And do you think that you will be affected differently by climate crisis because of your various identities? Your racial identity, class background, sexuality, gender, education, nationality, ability?

Beth (23:49):

So ask me the question again.

Rachel (23:51):

Do you think you'll be affected by climate crisis differently or do you think you have been affected differently because of the various identities that you have?

Beth (24:04):

Well, I would say that is a positive statement. I'm a middle class white woman, and I am gainfully employed, and so I have the opportunity to live in an apartment that has central air, and I think to that extent, that that is a privilege to have that versus others who are in more impoverished situations or more diverse areas that may not have those types of... They're certainly not as comfortable maybe being in that stifling, hot, humid air. Sleep is affected, our hydration gets affected, that may change how we show up to work or what we're physically capable of doing. So I think it's... Again, there's a ripple effect to that, but definitely, I think there's class effects and things like that.

Rachel (25:13):

How does thinking about climate crisis change or affect how you plan for your future?

Beth (25:28):

So the thought that comes to mind with that question is, thinking about where to live, I think about, am I staying or leaving Brooklyn or New York? And part of me wants to move into an area that is more back

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to nature, more surrounded by vast, open spaces versus concrete, I always say it's the concrete jungle. And I think about how oftentimes hot it is, right? It always becomes the joke, you walk on the shady side of the street or the sunny side of the street, right? In the summer, you walk on the shady side, in the winter, you walk on the sunny side. But that's part of this environment of tall buildings, and concrete, and things that absorb the heat, and reflect it back at us. So when I think about the climate change, maybe it becomes you're just more magnified when you're in this city environment. So for me, my future thoughts have been around, am I staying in the city or am I going back to a more vast, wide open space?

Rachel (26:48):

That may not be as adversely affected-

Beth (26:48):

Right.

Rachel (26:51):

... by climate crisis?

Beth (26:53):

Yeah, or maybe it's just that if I don't feel it as... Having the realization as saying that, right? Is that just me going to a space now where I won't be so much as acutely aware of it, because I'll be in a different environment. So maybe being in those kinds of wide open spaces make people less aware of it.

Rachel (27:18):

And then how does climate crisis affect your day-to-day life? If it does.

Beth (27:24):

Well, I think of that in terms of energy efficiency. For instance, it's breezy, it's a little bit humid, but it's a breezy day, the air conditioning's turned off, the windows are open, not using the oven as much in the summertime, so I think about how I'm using, I don't leave lights on anymore when I leave the apartment. So I've just become more conscientious of little things like that that I can do, and obviously walking more than driving my car, I do have a car, but I try to drive it less and less. So yeah, I think those are things that I'm trying to do and be more conscientious of, the small things I can do.

Rachel (28:17):

[inaudible 00:28:17]. Ooh, this is one I haven't asked people in a while, and I'll ask you.

Beth (28:24):

Oh, great.

Rachel (28:27):

I'm still figuring out the best way to frame the question, but I'll just ask you what I have, is it more important to you to live a comfortable life or to respond to climate crisis? And how are these goals related?

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Beth (28:48):

Yeah, so a comfortable life, so depends what that definition of what a comfortable life is, right? Because if a comfortable life is defined as going back to the idea of living in a space where you have central air and you can control very easily with the push of a button, right? Whether you're going to sweat or not sweat. But if you're living in an environmentally conscientious lifestyle, then it's hard to deny those things, right? So I think... Yeah, I'm having trouble deciding, I guess, what I think a comfortable life means.

I'm trying to be more aware of it and maybe giving myself some inconveniences, but being tolerable of those inconveniences, because I understand that there can be an impact. Now you walk around with four bags in your bag because you don't want to have the plastic from the grocery store kind of idea, right? So is it more comfortable just to be able to conveniently take a bag from a grocery store? But when it's plastic, that has effect, so loading up my bag with other reusable bags is something that might be not as convenient, but it's worthwhile.

Rachel (30:23):

What kinds of conversations are you having with your family, your friends, your community, about the climate crisis? And I'm particularly interested in what kinds of conversations you're having with your sons about it.

Beth (30:36):

So my sons are more in tune, they both live in the city, so they're more in tune. I would say when you mentioned family, this is where it comes down to my 82-year-old parents who wouldn't necessarily be as maybe in tune to some of the effects of climate change or as open potentially to changing their lifestyle, because of, "Well, what can I do about it?" Right? I see that in my family in particular, as probably something that's present. I think younger people though, are more aware, they're paying attention and they're making more efforts to take control of some of the things that they can do to affect change, or at least awareness of climate change. I think for me, I'm in a lot of women forums, and women networking, and things like that, so I think that when you bring people together again as a collective, there's more awareness, there's more discussion that is going on.

Rachel (32:08):

What kinds of conversations are you having in those communities?

Beth (32:12):

So one that's coming to mind, a recent group that I'm involved with is... We're talking about healthy eating, and so this whole idea of shifting to a plant-based diet, right? And not consuming meat products, and a lot of that has to do with all of the resources that are used within the meat industry, right? So there's education, so it's like, "Okay, yes, we want to be on this plant-based diet," and that's what's being recommended, but there's also the impact and not only on our physical health of thinking that we're eating plant-based, but it's also environmental health when we're consuming products that are plant-based and not outside of the farming industry, or meat industry, I should say.

Rachel (33:15):

What do you fear for, for the future?

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Beth (33:23):

I fear for the death of the honeybees, I think that... I'm watching the bees here, right? To me, when I think of something that really signifies the crisis at hand, I do think of the bee population and how it's something that's right in front of us, it's something that's being talked about quite a bit. I think there's a lot in the news, or at least the news I consume, that talks about bees and the effect on plants, an effect on them with the climate change and things like that. So I think when we start to look at things that are apparently obvious, right in front of us, there are things that are there, it's not a grandiose idea of what climate change is doing, we can see it right in front of us.

Rachel (34:21):

Do you have a spiritual belief system, or an ethics, or value-based system that helps you navigate this moment of transition? That helps you contextualize it, or understand it, or move through it?

Beth (34:43):

I haven't ever thought of it in terms like that. I think for me, I was raised as a Christian woman, so I have a belief in God, but I don't necessarily put this one into that category. I think for me, the definition of spirituality in this sense just becomes becoming more aware of our place in the universe and the role that we have in that space. And again, so then it just comes right back to what can we do to make a difference?

Rachel (35:25):

So how would you contextualize this moment? How did we get here and where are we right now?

Beth (35:43):

Well, what comes to mind isn't necessarily a very pretty answer, because I think we've gotten here to this moment through... There's been a lot of greed and overconsumption that has gotten us here, this take, keep taking, but not giving back mentality. So that's what comes to mind as you ask that question.

Rachel (36:08):

And where are we? What is the here? How would you describe [crosstalk 00:36:11] the here?

Beth (36:11):

Oh, what is the here?

Rachel (36:12):

Yeah.

Beth (36:14):

Well, you're going deep here. Those are hard questions to answer right off the top. Where is the here? I think this is a moment of... The right word isn't coming to my mind, but I think now is a moment where we have an opportunity to... It's like the fork in the road, because things are getting to the point where we've got to do something about this, and so I think it's a fork in the road, where we can circumvent some of the more severe effects if we choose the right path, and if we don't, I think it's going to become a much more desperate situation. So I think we're at a crossroads, maybe that's the word, crossroads.

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Rachel (37:17):

Where do you think we'll go?

Beth (37:18):

I think we'll go to where do I hope we'll go.

Rachel (37:20):

Where do you think?

Beth (37:33):

Unfortunately, I think that it's going to take a lot more to wake people up, I think there's a lot of ignorance in the world. And maybe it's selfishness, they don't want to see, people don't want to see.

Rachel (37:45):

So where does that take us?

Beth (37:50):

More severe climate changes, the glaciers will keep shrinking, the forest fires will keep happening, the droughts will keep occurring, and more and more severe situations. I think those are the things, unfortunately, that make people listen for at least a nanosecond. But yeah, unfortunately, I'm not as optimistic as I wish I could be.

Rachel (38:22):

Well, what do you hope for?

Beth (38:24):

What do I hope for? Oh, gosh. Well, there we go. So I hope that people will start paying attention, I hope that there's more effort to bring these conversations down to the people and not just in the scientists level, so that people have an opportunity to recognize how it truly does impact their everyday life, and how what they do and what they choose to do can impact their everyday life going forward. I want a future where this planet that we live on is thriving.

Rachel (39:03):

And then what is hope? Because I asked you the question, where do you think we're going? And you said, "Where do I think or where do I hope?" So what's hope? What is that? How does that-

Beth (39:17):

Hope is that more people start individually doing things that they can do.

Rachel (39:24):

But what is the relationship between what you hope for the future and what you think will happen in the future? If that question makes sense, I'm trying to... What's the role of hope? If you have a way that you think that things will go, then what's the role of hope?

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Beth (39:49):

Hope is the motivating factor, hope is what gets you out there and spreading the word, or taking those political opportunities to share the messaging. So I guess that's where the hope comes, to motivate and inspire you to try to change what I think is going to be happening, and maybe there's an opportunity to change the course.

Rachel (40:19):

Well, Beth, I have one more question, which is just, were there any questions that I didn't ask you that you thought I was going to, or that you wish that I had asked you?

Beth (40:32):

No, I think what I expected was more discussions on specific things that are happening in the world, but you've taken me down into this deeper, really made me start to think, so no, I don't have any questions though, back for you, I don't think at this moment, have to think about our conversation, digest it a bit.

Rachel (40:58):

Cool. Yeah, it's taken me a long time to figure out how to have this conversation. We so often have a conversation about what's happening in the world, and the politics, and the problems, but for so many years, I had been craving and really needing some conversation that connects us emotionally to this moment.

Beth (40:58):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rachel (41:27):

But it took me a really long time to figure out what that conversation would look like, because I don't think it's a conversation that we're having... It was not a conversation I was having with people, but I was desperate to have it.

Beth (41:41):

I think it's interesting, I mean, yeah, this is going to give me quite a bit of reflection, because I think what's... Again, you can think it in terms of being very pragmatic, and I'm in the healthcare industry and the science industry, and so it's very easy to remain very objective and see things through that lens, versus opening up to the emotions behind all of it.

Rachel (42:18):

Yeah.

Beth (42:18):

Interesting.

Rachel (42:19):

Well, thank you, Beth. I loved this conversation. I'm so... Feel so grateful that you came and talked with me.

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Beth (42:24):

No, I think this is fabulous. I can't wait to follow your journey on this whole project.

Rachel (42:28):

Cool.

Beth (42:28):

This is wonderful.

Rachel (42:29):

Thank you.