

Brian, Prospect Heights Community Farm, Prospect Heights, Brooklyn
June 29, 2021

Rachel (00:00:00):

Brian, why don't you tell me who you are, where you grew up, where you live now, what you do, your age, anything that you'd like us to know about you?

Brian L. Thompson (00:00:10):

Okay. So my name is Brian Thompson. I grew up in Upstate New York, Binghamton area. It's about three and a half hours northwest of here. I've lived in New York City now, all of Brooklyn, Brooklyn the whole time rather, since 2000 and I've lived in this neighborhood for 18 years. I was in over in Park Slope for two years. So what else? I'm a musician by trade. I started out with an environmental conservation degree, I did a Bachelor's of Ecology at Cornell for my... Those things you make when you were 16, what do you want to do? That's what I wanted to do and I did that for about 10 years but I also switched gears a bit in my early 30s back to music, which I had always played growing up but never took seriously enough to make a living out of it.

So I had these two passions that I've given myself the opportunity or the chance to pursue in my life. Neither of which are huge moneymakers but I know a lot of musicians who started out with music and then woke up to the idea that this was just way too hard and became a lawyer or a doctor or a whatever, real estate agent or something and I did the opposite. Well, not the opposite but I just never pursued anything that was primarily based on how much I might make doing it. It's always been what drives me, what I'm interested in, what is meaningful to me, so yeah.

Rachel (00:02:06):

What instruments do you play?

Brian L. Thompson (00:02:09):

So I play violin and viola and a little piano. I teach piano to kids as well, I teach all three. So yeah, I started on the violin when I was seven, it's all my mom's fault and in high school, all the violas graduated one year and the conductor's like, "Who would like to switch over to the viola section?" And I'm like, "Sure," so then I started playing viola as well. They're very similar, they're both played under the chin, I don't know if you know. But then later on, I started being more drawn to the viola, it has a little lower, mellower sound. It's the harmony that stitches together the melody and the rhythm in any ensemble, like an orchestra or a string quartet and I just loved being in the middle of all that sound. So I didn't necessarily... The violas don't always necessarily get the melody and so there's more violinists, there's more people that are drawn to the melody in life, right? But I just love being in that central place where everything comes together musically, the sounds and stuff but I play them both and I like them both.

Rachel (00:03:22):

I've never heard anyone talk about the viola like that.

Brian L. Thompson (00:03:25):

Yeah.

Rachel (00:03:26):

That's so cool.

Brian L. Thompson (00:03:27):

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Yeah, yeah.

Rachel (00:03:28):

I feel like I need to listen more to the viola. If I could actually do that, I don't think that my ear would be able to maybe pick that up.

Brian L. Thompson (00:03:37):

Well, sometimes that instrument in particular can be hard to pick up unless you have an ear for it because of what it's doing, because it's just weaving back and forth. It'll play a bit of melody and then it'll go back and it'll be on the baseline and then it'll be in the middle harmonizing with something. So when you play the part... I remember when I first started reading string quartets and I would play the viola part on its own and it's such a weird part, it doesn't seem to make any sense. Whereas you play the first violin part of a string quartet and you're like oh, I get it, here's the tune, blah, blah, blah, blah. Play the viola part on its own... Play it with the group though and suddenly it all makes sense. Oh, that's where the second comes in and then it dovetails with the... Oh, okay, I get it. But until you do that, it doesn't make any sense. But yeah, that's why I love chamber music in particular because you have this one on a voice and you're very important and I think the audience doesn't necessarily know anything that's going on, they can just hear this combination of the four voices, right? Unless you have a trained ear, you're not going to, oh, that was the second violin harmonizing with the first violin's octave there but it all just comes together, well written music anyway, so yeah.

Rachel (00:04:57):

And you mainly play chamber music?

Brian L. Thompson (00:05:00):

I play anything and everything I can do. Freelance musician in New York, coming out of a pandemic, I'll do anything but yeah. For example, I am trying to do this as a living, so I take paid gigs as often as I can and I teach and perform but I also read quartets with friends when it's not even a paid gig or it might be a tip jar type of situation but we do it for the love of it and we just love doing it. But I'm in a handful of orchestras, a bunch of different groups of all shapes and sizes, I've played on off-Broadway, I've played in theater, in opera, orchestra, classical, avant-garde, jazz, whatever. I don't have as much experience with the latter but yeah.

Rachel (00:05:55):

That sounds wonderful, that just sounds like a great way to spend your life.

Brian L. Thompson (00:06:00):

Yeah, I think so too.

Rachel (00:06:02):

Wow.

Brian L. Thompson (00:06:03):

It can be challenging, pursuing any sort of art to survive and all that but I'm fine and I'm pretty frugal and I was raised by my grandparents who survived the Depression, so they still lived as though it were the

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Depression, so I picked up some good tips on that. Sometimes I'm amazed, I will chat with people, fellow musicians and just others about living in New York and how it can be challenging and whatnot and they'll offhand divulge, "I make such and such and I still can't," blah, blah, blah. And I'm like, wow, I don't even make half that and I'm doing fine. So it's just partly how you choose to move through the city. I don't get a cup of coffee every day, it adds up. I don't go out to eat that much, I do once in a while but it can be a very expensive city, you can also be really smart about it and of course it has to do with finding the right living space and all that but yeah, it's possible but yeah.

Rachel (00:07:17):

Yeah, right. It's where you inhabit the city and what your perspective is.

Brian L. Thompson (00:07:23):

Sure.

Rachel (00:07:24):

So Brian, I'm going to start with 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?

Brian L. Thompson (00:07:38):

Well, I think about the people that are most vulnerable immediately, which isn't me really. Here I am in a big urban area, in a big city and I see some of the changes but I think of the people that are at sea level, that's changing so quickly or that are affected so directly by crops changing, weather changing. Whereas there is this buffer of wealth we have here and it's partly why we have not done anything about it for as long as we have not done anything because we can just push it aside as not really happening to us yet, right? So I guess I think of those people that have no choice but to deal with it more directly on a daily basis and our affected more directly than I am yet and like I mentioned earlier, I started out studying environmental conservation, so I felt like I already knew all this stuff from the beginning, I saw it coming. People have been talking about this since the '70s and '80s and '90s when I got my degree and that people are just waking up to it now is absurd.

So I get angry too. So I'm worried about those people and then I also get angry. I also feel responsible, even though I have to let go of that because I'm just one person in a crazy world but I feel responsible, I try to take personal responsibility for my actions but when I'm not doing at least something to try to move the needle in some way, I feel like I'm just part of the problem. So it's this hard place to be in because I feel like there's not a lot you can do as one person and it's overwhelming, the scale of it is so overwhelming. But I also feel, I don't know if spoiled is the right word but here I am, I could turn it off, I could not think about it and it would be fine and that's what most of us are doing. So I think that's part of the problem, that we can still do that. We see what we want to see but I don't know if that answered your question or not.

Rachel (00:10:09):

Yeah, it absolutely does.

Brian L. Thompson (00:10:09):

Okay.

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Rachel (00:10:10):

Yeah, it's interesting. We see what we want to see and you and I are talking in the middle of a nationwide heat wave, totally unprecedented, dangerous, dangerous heat wave.

Brian L. Thompson (00:10:23):

Yeah and I'm doing the triathlon in two weekends.

Rachel (00:10:25):

Oh my God.

Brian L. Thompson (00:10:25):

And they canceled it two years... I signed up in 2019 and it was canceled because it was 102 I think, with a heat index of 110 to 12 and it was actually the first time they had done that because this event has historically been in the middle of July, it's always been in the middle of July, which is crazy. And I think the past couple years before '19, '17 and '18, there was some people that either... A lot of people got really sick or someone died or something, not that it needs to take that but people that are a little slower, which could be myself, I don't know, this is still my first time doing it, even though you start early, if you're still doing the race by mid afternoon and it's starting to climb into the 100s-

Rachel (00:11:15):

Really dangerous.

Brian L. Thompson (00:11:15):

And if it's a high humidity day or whatever and it's a mile swim, 25 mile bike and a six mile run, yeah, it's crazy. But hopefully I'm just praying that... I'll take 80s, it'd be nice if it weren't in the 90s two weekends from now.

Rachel (00:11:35):

Yeah. Yeah, I hope it cools off for you.

Brian L. Thompson (00:11:36):

This week, it's supposed to be 96 today and 98 tomorrow.

Rachel (00:11:41):

Yeah.

Brian L. Thompson (00:11:41):

And it's really humid, so it makes it feel-

Rachel (00:11:44):

Like it's in the 100s.

Brian L. Thompson (00:11:44):

Much more oppressive, yeah.

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Rachel (00:11:47):

Yeah, there's this weird thing of... Yes, we're not experiencing the dramatic changes that the Global South and other parts of even the country are experiencing with wildfires but we're still moving through our days with these really weird weather events and the disassociation that you have to do of living inside of the day and living in your body inside of this day and going about your day within the construct of modernity that we live in, which is way out of alignment with what's happening with the planet. It's really weird, it's like, you can't quite wrap your head around it.

Brian L. Thompson (00:12:42):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rachel (00:12:45):

So I'm curious about how climate change affects your day-to-day and when you're conscious of it and when you're not, you talked about trying to move the needle in small ways, what are those ways that you're trying to move the needle?

Brian L. Thompson (00:13:04):

Well, my participation in this garden has been a part of it. I try to make just everyday life decisions about how I move or travel, what I eat, what I do with regard to how it impacts climate and how we're all connected. The reality is, I can go to this building over on Vanderbilt and all the food in the world that I could want is just there, perfectly organized and pretty and stuff and it's like, we've been raised with this idea that that's where food comes from and unless you really look into it more, you might not ever need to know that it starts somewhere else. There's a lot of labor involved, there's a lot of energy involved, there's a lot of everything involved to get it to you and then...

I figured at some point I'm going to talk about the accomplished project that I've been doing here, which is a big part of why, one answer to your question but food waste and... It's not working within the natural systems that we're all a part of. I feel like humans, we're very easily convinced that we are somehow separate or above or we don't have to do that, buffered from... But we are a part of everything and we still have basic needs that we depend on from the earth, it's just so much is done for us that we don't have to think about and trying to start thinking about it more. So food waste is one thing, statistics you've probably heard, I think it's somewhere between 30 and 50% of food is thrown away every day in this country.

Rachel (00:15:20):

80% of food?

Brian L. Thompson (00:15:21):

30 to 50%, something like that.

Rachel (00:15:23):

Oh, I was like, are we even eating?

Brian L. Thompson (00:15:25):

No. Yeah.

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Rachel (00:15:26):

But still, that's an enormous number.

Brian L. Thompson (00:15:28):

It's roughly half maybe. I could have the numbers a little off but it's something like that and so just to rewind, back when COVID started and the city shut down all of the composting operations... Which were minimal at best anyway, it was a pilot program that stalled for 10 years and only a handful of neighborhoods. And Sanitation in the city was seemingly never really behind it, it seemed like it just never took off or whatever. They weren't motivated to make it work, I feel like it could and will but then there was suddenly nowhere to go. We were a resource, we have our own four bin system in the back, which you may have seen when you came in. So I was spoiled that I've been composting for years, ever since I joined the garden, so 13 years of not throwing food waste into the garbage and between that and recycling, I probably put out a small thank you for shopping here day bag, maybe once every three to four months. I'm one person, so I know it's... But if you apply that to say, everyone, if everyone were just to make a little step towards that, suddenly the amount of resources we're using and or disposing of could be shifted.

So when the city shut down the composting operation, I proposed to the garden... And this was albeit during the beginning of COVID and people were all a little, understandably, worried about... What is going on? How serious is this? And there was some pushback at first because the idea was to collect food scraps at the front gate from people from the community who had nowhere else to go because we used to have Grand Army Plaza Farmers' Market and the top of the steps of the 7th Avenue B/Q stop was another every Wednesday. Fort Greene Park and a couple other gardens had... So there were plenty of composting for people who were interested in doing it, largely, people don't do it. But it was starting to grow, it was starting to take shape with this pilot program and Park Slope has the brown pails. I don't know if you've seen those brown pails.

Rachel (00:17:57):

I had a brown pail, yeah.

Brian L. Thompson (00:17:58):

Yeah. This neighborhood doesn't have it. It's spotty, I'll be biking around, I'm like, oh, this neighborhood has them. Oh, this neighborhood doesn't have them. This doesn't seem to make any sense. So we started a thing and we started with... The first weekend, people didn't know about it yet, there was maybe 20 people that came by and we collected 40 pounds. The very next weekend, I think we had 75 people and collected 400 pounds and now, we're collecting 2000 pounds.

Rachel (00:18:30):

Holy shit.

Brian L. Thompson (00:18:31):

That's our limit, every Sunday.

Rachel (00:18:34):

That's so much.

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Brian L. Thompson (00:18:36):

So a ton, literally a ton of food scraps every Sunday at the front gate from community members and it's usually around 250 to 275 people every Sunday that are coming by. Every shape, color, size, type of person, kids, with their dogs, strollers. And it's giving people a chance to live their values in a way and it's also very practical, it's less garbage, it's less smelly stuff in their house but I see parents using it as an educational moment for kids. Kids, they like to do the chopping because we chop stuff up into small pieces, right? So it breaks down quicker. So they let the kids get into that and we have a barrel of the finished compost sitting out to show them the before and the after. This big barrel of rotting vegetables and the banana you didn't eat and the bread that went moldy turns into this, this beautiful dirt that smells great. So yeah, it's been a real success.

And the part of me that is the environmentalist from my bachelor's degree is still like, it's a drop in the bucket, it's not enough, it'll never be enough because I think to myself, okay, 300 people every Sunday, 2000 pounds, prospect Heights has 30,000 people in it, that's 1% are participating. What if we got that up to 10% or 50? Or what if everyone just did this? It's not that hard. That would be amazing. The shift in resources and waste and there's so much potential to somehow re-equitably distribute everything but we're just entirely too selfish. And we want everything to be at our convenience, which it always has been for the most part. So yeah, I think we've lived so disconnected from nature, we don't realize what is actually involved with getting the food to our table and to the stores and everything else. Yeah. I'm also vegan, I went vegan 10 years ago. I was raised vegetarian by my mom, also all her vault, violin and being vegetarian.

Rachel (00:21:06):

She really ruined you.

Brian L. Thompson (00:21:07):

Yeah, it was terrible. She planted these seeds of thinking about others and a connection to everything and I don't even know to what level she was realizing she was doing that but she was and my dad but to a lesser extent. And yeah and that's also part of striking that balance for me at least. But it's complicated, everything's always complicated. We make it more complicated than it needs to be but I guess trying to live a little more simply, not needing as much. How much do we really need to have things and stuff? Everyone realizes it when you have to move, right? Do I really need all this stuff? So yeah.

Rachel (00:22:09):

And the other thing that I'm hearing from you is the tension between a drop in the bucket and doing what you can and doing what you are able to with your community.

Brian L. Thompson (00:22:27):

Yeah.

Rachel (00:22:28):

Which is actually, I think different than just doing what you can. I talk to people and most people who I'm talking to, of course this is a self-selected group of people who are talking to me, they talk about doing what they can but a lot of people don't necessarily have a relationship to a larger community where they can do other things outside of their own consumption habits that help to move the needle.

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But you at the garden, you can do a community composting that enables people to do what they can and brings this community together, so it feels like you're not just one person living in your apartment, agonizing over the recycling, you're one person with a group of people working together to create something new.

Brian L. Thompson (00:23:36):

Yeah. And I don't even know if I realized the power of it when we started it.

Rachel (00:23:40):

Of the composting?

Brian L. Thompson (00:23:42):

Yeah because I just wanted to give people a chance to... I wanted to be able to compost but I also wanted to give people a chance that had already created this habit. It's hard to create habits but once we get them going... I'm thinking all these people that started composting now had to suddenly throw it all away again because the city pulled the funding for this service and it's like, we're just starting... I'm thinking to myself, we're just starting to make headway in creating good habits and it's going to be set back and I'm like no, we're not going to do this, we started doing this. And what makes me smile so much is when I see kids, their eyes wide open, they're seeing what we're doing and they're getting into it and they're going to have that connection to their food and their impact on the world and their connection to everyone else planted really early. I don't even know that I knew that at that time. I wasn't composting as a kid, my mom was a gardener, so we did do some of that but recycling wasn't even a thing when I was growing up, not until I was maybe a teenager, it started coming to my town where I grew up.

Rachel (00:25:04):

So what do you think are the impacts of that, of people and kids learning about composting and learning about where food comes from and just getting more connected to the natural systems that feed us?

Brian L. Thompson (00:25:24):

Yeah. I think it's just really good to be honest with kids or just to be honest with ourselves about how everything is connected. I think it's easy to live in whatever little alternate realities we choose to because there's plenty, to escape into, our phones, our computers, our movies, our whatever, that convince us otherwise, that reality, it's not that bad, right? But if kids start to put together, oh wow, all this stuff that we're not eating turns into soil which doesn't get put in a landfill, it's that much less garbage I'm taking out... No one's saying all those things but I'm hoping that it will start to prompt.. These connections can be made and that good habits can just be put in place early and then it won't be a... Humans are just famous for doing what we're doing because we've always done it that way, it's become a tradition. Well, what if the tradition gets turned around and we're like oh, we don't throw that all away, we compost that. And it's not even ethical or philosophical, no, it's what we do.

Rachel (00:27:03):

Right.

Brian L. Thompson (00:27:03):

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It just becomes part of our value system, our culture. And I hear about this in other countries that are way ahead of us or even other cities in the States that are way ahead of us, I'm like, why can't we do that? It's not such a crazy idea, it actually makes a lot of sense. I think change is just so hard for people but change is also, ironically, one of the only constants there is.

Rachel (00:27:33):

Right.

Brian L. Thompson (00:27:34):

Right now, we're talking about climate change, right? We're changing the climate, the climate is changing. I think whatever's causing it almost doesn't matter anymore. It's happening, we will have to adapt and the funny thing is, nature will probably adapt, we may not adapt so well. Some of us won't be able to but yeah, nature always finds a way but nature, it's a different... And I say that almost separate from us and I got back in my reference earlier because we're not separate from it but that's how much we think we are.

Rachel (00:28:27):

What kinds of changes have you noticed locally over the past... How long have you been here, 13, 15, 18 years?

Brian L. Thompson (00:28:35):

I've been on that block over there, right around the corner, 18 years and I've been in New York City for 21.

Rachel (00:28:41):

So talk to me about changes you've noticed in weather, seasons and also changes you've noticed at the garden.

Brian L. Thompson (00:28:50):

Yeah. Well, so shortly after I moved into my place, New York City was giving trees away. New York City Million Trees project up at the farmers' market and a neighbor and I went and grabbed a couple. There was a cheery tree and a black locust tree and we planted them in the backyard of my building, which at the time, was in rough shape, it needed some TLC. And fast-forward five or so years, it starts to make it up on the second floor, it starts to make it up to my floor and when it blooms, my entire bedroom is pink because it's a cherry tree.

Rachel (00:29:38):

Oh my God, oh my God.

Brian L. Thompson (00:29:38):

It's amazing and I don't even know if I consciously thought, oh, I'm going to put it here so that it does that. It just seemed like the best place to put it. So I would take pictures of it every spring, right? And I noticed over time that when I first started taking pictures of it, it was early March, March 8, 9, 10. Fast-forward 10 years, it blooms in mid to late April now. No sorry, it's the other way around. It used to

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bloom in April, that's right and now, it's early March that it's blooming. Then I scroll through my photos from last year and the year before and it's always a few days earlier, earlier, earlier.

Rachel (00:30:33):

That's a lot of change in a short amount of time.

Brian L. Thompson (00:30:35):

Yeah, so in 10 years-

Rachel (00:30:35):

That's very striking.

Brian L. Thompson (00:30:37):

About a month.

Rachel (00:30:39):

That's an enormous amount of change.

Brian L. Thompson (00:30:41):

Yeah and 10 years is nothing in the scale of time.

Rachel (00:30:44):

Right.

Brian L. Thompson (00:30:48):

I remember I was going to go on a trip around Easter 10 years ago and it was blooming at the time and because of that, this was mid-April, it made me think about what time it was and it just was cemented in my brain. And now this year, I think it bloomed March 18 or 19, 20. I'm like, wow, that's about a month now. Because the first few years, I didn't notice because it'd be a few days and then it was a week and then a couple weeks, so I've noticed that. I grew up in Binghamton, which is four hours northwest of here and almost always when my mom and I are on the phone, she'll be like... Weather comes up at some point, right? So, "Well, how is it there? How cold is it there?" And they're almost always 10 degrees cooler than us because they're four hours north and now, they're the same temperature almost all the time as us. Sometimes even hotter. This week, they were in the mid 90s when we were in the mid 80s, earlier, I guess last week. This is Tuesday, so a few a days ago. But now it's consistent. I thought oh, these are little aberrations but now, they're almost always right with us and they're a rural area, they don't have the asphalt aspect.

When we get hot, we stay hotter longer and so I've noticed that. My mom's definitely noticed, she's like, "It's just so hot," and the winters have been pretty mild. They'll still have cold days for sure but I remember when I grew up, there'd be a good solid month of subzero weather and it was just normal, it was just like oh, well, that's just the way it was. I loved it, I'd put on my snowsuit and roll around in the snow. Now, it's not like that, it's strange. And I remember my mom being concerned because she started noticing some birds weren't migrating anymore, they're just hanging around, what are the robins doing here? Why are they still here? They're supposed to leave. Some of them stay now, it's weird. And whenever we travel in and around the New York State area, we notice, depending on

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how big the mountain or hill is, there's a line of altitude where evergreens start taking over because they generally like higher and that's been shifting too or it's getting smaller and smaller. I'm not seeing as many evergreen trees anymore because they like colder climates. So those are some things I've noticed I guess.

Rachel (00:34:02):

What does that feel like, to notice that change? Especially maybe when you noticed the cherry blossoms.

Brian L. Thompson (00:34:12):

Yeah, it was just like... Again, it didn't really affect me personally, I was like, oh but then the more I thought about it and because I do have some basic knowledge about these things, I'm like, oh, this is actually serious because if you extrapolate that and shift everything, everything is so... From the migrations of birds and insects, to the pollination of everything, to how weather moves around the world, to ocean temperatures, it's just all... And a shift like that, even though I don't know exactly because I'm not studying that science, that hard science, has to have huge consequences somewhere. And whatever's causing it, whether it was us directly or still is us or whatever it is, we have to address it in some way. How do we just keep going along with the status quo?

Rachel (00:35:23):

So what did that feel like when you...

Brian L. Thompson (00:35:29):

It's startling but there's a little bit of frustration and anger because like I said, I studied this in college. I was already given, I felt like a heads-up, like, hey, this is probably going to happen. And back then, people were like, "No, that's ridiculous," but people started talking about global warming in the '70s and people were like, "Oh no, that's..." And I'm like, yeah, here it is.

Rachel (00:36:04):

What you had learned would happen in the future began to become the present.

Brian L. Thompson (00:36:13):

Yeah. Yeah.

Rachel (00:36:13):

That's spooky.

Brian L. Thompson (00:36:15):

Yeah, it is and frustrating and it adds to the angst that you feel because so often, humans do this, where we know something but we just don't do anything about it because let's just see... I don't know, I'm really comfortable right here and I don't want to change, so it'll be fine, don't make a big deal about such and such. But it's not about making a big deal about it, it's just about responding appropriately to a reality because inevitably, things will just change and we'll have to adapt, why not make it easier on ourselves and start to do that now or start to make small changes that we can? But no, we want everything the way we want it when we want it and it's very hard to unlearn that.

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Rachel (00:37:20):

I have a question that feels too on the nose for this conversation because my question is, was there a moment when you feel like climate change showed up in your own backyard?

Brian L. Thompson (00:37:30):

Yeah.

Rachel (00:37:30):

But I guess you could argue, literally it did.

Brian L. Thompson (00:37:35):

Yeah.

Rachel (00:37:35):

Was there another moment for you though, where you really felt the impact of climate change affecting you personally in a way that you hadn't previously?

Brian L. Thompson (00:37:54):

I guess not personally because like I was saying earlier on, I feel privileged and sheltered in a space where I don't have to act and I'll be okay but I am aware and I do see what's going on. And when I read about communities at sea level, which is changing rapidly and will soon and I see and read things about the changes in the oceans, again, none of these things are really affecting me personally on a day-to-day basis but because I'm a thoughtful, caring, aware person, they do affect me. So it's not like it doesn't.

Rachel (00:38:56):

How do they affect you then?

Brian L. Thompson (00:38:58):

Well, they make me feel like I want to do something, like I want to wake people up, take them and go, "Hey." And coming out of the last four years of just intense political upheaval in this country and craziness, it felt like it was just enough to get through the day of not reading a Tweet from what's his name, let alone actually make progress in any particularly direction. So yeah, it's frustrating but I also... I don't know, I think there's got to be a balance to it all too. I've gone in and out of being super activist when it comes to various things and sometimes I have to pull back from that just to take care of myself, my own sanity because the scale of this, like I said earlier, is so big and overwhelming that you feel like the way to really do something about it, it isn't me, it has to involve everyone or at least a lot more people than it does now. and it's only through that community, through that work that these have a chance of maybe shifting something. So that takes the pressure off the individual but then what? It still has to... I guess I wouldn't sleep at night if I really thought about a lot of things.

Rachel (00:40:58):

What do you mean?

Brian L. Thompson (00:41:00):

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Well, there's so much going on in the world that is disturbing, from environmental stuff, environmental justice, social justice, you name it, that I feel like on some level, we have to find a way to act but also detach enough to just be able to survive and live your life. It's a really hard thing to balance honestly but at the end of the day, for me, it always comes down to what I feel like I can be personally responsible for and I just keep adding little, little steps as often as I can, instead of feeling like I have to take a big one. Like every Sunday, I get to convince people to chop up their stuff, their food and to feel good about that but actually, in the grander scheme of things, is it doing anything? I don't know but if all of us did little things like that, hopefully yes, maybe. Yeah.

Rachel (00:42:30):

How does thinking about climate crisis impact how you plan for your future?

Brian L. Thompson (00:42:38):

Well, I try to just live in the moment the best I can. It's something that I'm getting better at the last few years. It's funny because I recently had a job interview for another teaching position, teaching Suzuki violin and I'm thinking about the interview, I'm like, oh, they're going to ask that question, "Where are you going to be in five years?" Or, "Where do you want to be in..." Because it's such a typical interview question, right? And then here, you're asking me this question, sort of. But I guess I think about it from time to time but not really that seriously because everything is always changing and you have to respond in time to it as it's happening. But to imagine something five years out or 10 years out or something and then... It's fine to have a goal but to be too married to that is also a recipe for frustration and anxiety and disaster, right? But I do have a dream of having a small piece of land somewhere, a little house, living very simply, being a little bit more in tune with natural rhythms and systems. And I'm not sure where that will be but I'm hoping there'll be a place for that to be some day.

As far as my existing current situation as a musician in New York City, I've been freelancing as music teaching, performing for the last 13 years. So obviously it's time for a new career. Since I had my last one for 10, time to change things up again. No, I'm kidding, I don't plan to but sometimes I'm like... I have a couple parallel dreams, I want to either open an animal sanctuary somewhere or try to collect a bunch of land and set up easements on them, just to set them to protection in perpetuity, another small way of trying to contribute to slowing down everything else we're doing everywhere else. One of the things that I learned when I worked for The Nature Conservancy for several years was how those connections are very important for natural systems. You can't just have a park over here and then everything else is city, that's not how nature is, the park needs to be connected. Even if it's a small corridor with green space to another park, to another, to another and across a much bigger geography, there has to be all these connections based on latitude and longitude and climate and water and everything. Whereas humans just want to... Here's Nevada, let's make a triangular... You know all of the states that started out? They were cut by rivers but then somewhere in mid frontier times, they just made squares.

Rachel (00:46:24):

Right, right.

Brian L. Thompson (00:46:26):

Nothing is like that.

Rachel (00:46:28):

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Right.

Brian L. Thompson (00:46:29):

So that line that New Mexico has cuts across a mountain range or a river or whatever and it makes no sense. Of course, that's not what they were thinking when they were just drawing that boundary but those connections have to be made, I think for us too. I think where does all our stuff come from? Again, we think it all comes from the store, which is right around the corner, so that's convenient for me.

Rachel (00:46:57):

Right.

Brian L. Thompson (00:46:58):

But of course it doesn't and we've been... One of the other programs we're doing, which I'm sure Tracy will tell you about is the Victory Garden effort.

Rachel (00:47:07):

Yeah, she was mentioning that to me.

Brian L. Thompson (00:47:09):

Yeah. So she'll tell you more about that but we have 30 some raised beds in the back of the garden that people grow fruits and vegetables for themselves in. They're four by nine plots, so it's not like you're going to live off your bed but it certainly can supplement. But during COVID, there's this idea of whatever was grown will be donated to people that are in need. So they should tell you more about that but yeah, that's another way that you can see how connected we are. Hi. Yeah.

Rachel (00:47:54):

How do you contextualize this moment within the broader scope of human history, the broader scope of the earth? How do you make sense of this moment of change?

Brian L. Thompson (00:48:10):

Well, it is helpful to do that and it's interesting you raise that because when you do look back over geological time, which doesn't include us, we're pretty recent, there've been huge changes on this earth, right? Ice ages and all sorts of things that just seem so far away, they don't even seem possible almost, incomprehensible. So on some level, in the grander scheme of things, that's why I said earlier, nature will evolve, will adapt. Whether we're a part of that... Because species will definitely die out, they won't be able to adapt to... But that doesn't mean nature, as the bigger organism, the bigger interconnected web of life, is going to go on, assuming there's something completely catastrophic. But as far as climate change, it just will be a shift in a different direction, so it's almost like, "Hey humans, it isn't personal but this is going to change, this is going to change." So the reality is, a lot of people are going to suffer because of it but a lot of people have suffered a lot always because of how we behave as a species. We don't necessarily take care of our own so well. Or we define our own in such a small little compartment that it's almost like we don't. So yeah, in the greater context of things, this is a blip, right? Maybe, who knows?

Rachel (00:50:21):

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You talked a little bit about this but do you have a spiritual practice or a set of values or ethical beliefs that help you live in this moment, understand this moment, guide you through this moment?

Brian L. Thompson (00:50:39):

Yeah, I do. I feel grateful to have been exposed to a handful of things growing up, as confusing as that might've been. So my mom was raised with just a WASPy Christian upbringing but it wasn't very serious and it wasn't very strict and my grandfather was an atheist but my grandmother was not. And she was raised with this... I think she had a spirituality that she passed along to me but we weren't super on a particular path and she meets my dad and he becomes a Hare Krishna early on and it ends up breaking them up as a couple because of how different that culture was. And he just totally got into it, my mom was like, not so much. A lot of cultural baggage, a lot of women in the back of the temple, men in the front, all this stuff that was hard to swallow. But my mom still, to her credit, picked and chose things from that philosophy that she did like and raised me with but there were times where we went to a Catholic church for a while because her best friend was a Catholic and then we're like, no, it's not for us either.

We tried a bunch of things, we shopped around because I was an only child, single mom. So coming out of it, I remember thinking, well, this is all confusing but then I also started to see oh, well, that's actually similar to this over here and this. So they have some threads in common, a lot of religions, right? And then in the last five to 10 years, I started getting interested in meditation. At first from a just mental health standpoint but then got drawn into Zen Buddhism and Buddhism and that's been part of what has given me the chance to have a different relationship to my world, my immediate world of maybe relationships and people but also the bigger world, community. And I'm somewhat early into that exploration, so it's not like I'm an expert or anything but any good Zen Buddhist would say even if they've practiced for 100 years, today is the very first day of their practice because every day is a new moment ripe with opportunity. So beginner's mind is one of those ideas that comes out of Buddhism. Instead of seeing, oh, New York is just always, blah, blah, blah. Nope, New York is brand new today, I've never seen it before or I've never seen my neighbor before, I'm meeting him for the very first time today. Just helps you shift things about... Because sometimes we get stuck, it's easy to get stuck-

Rachel (00:53:59):

It's very easy to get stuck.

Brian L. Thompson (00:54:00):

In a lot of things.

Rachel (00:54:01):

Yeah.

Brian L. Thompson (00:54:03):

So yeah. So that's definitely helped inform how I move through the world for sure and it's given me a lot more space to deal with the more traumatic sides of modern life. Just being able to not get too upset about all the really disturbing things that happen in the world. Not to say that they're okay but just to find space to breathe in the midst of it all and be like, okay, this is okay too and this is just the moment that's happening now. Yeah. There's a famous Chinese Buddhist monk who was teaching during the time of a civil war in China where two out of three people lost their lives. It was such a horrific civil war that

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two thirds of the population died by the time it was over, it's unheard of. We freak out when we have a disease that comes through and takes 1% of our population. 67%.

Rachel ([00:55:16](#)):

Wow.

Brian L. Thompson ([00:55:17](#)):

And it really informed how he taught and basically the complete entire landscape was changed, not only geographically but socially, everything. And this was... I forget the exact dates but maybe between 800 and 1000 or whatever, it was a long time ago and I'm thinking gosh, if you could live through that, you could live through anything.

Rachel ([00:55:50](#)):

Yeah, if you're lucky to have lived through that. If you survived it.

Brian L. Thompson ([00:55:54](#)):

This guy happened to survive it, maybe because he was a Zen monk but yeah.

Rachel ([00:56:04](#)):

So if you've got the energy I have, three more questions for you.

Brian L. Thompson ([00:56:09](#)):

Sure.

Rachel ([00:56:11](#)):

So the first is about loss, in the context of this conversation or outside of it if you want to share other things but what do you feel like you have lost or what are you worried that you will lose?

Brian L. Thompson ([00:56:32](#)):

With regards to climate?

Rachel ([00:56:35](#)):

Yeah.

Brian L. Thompson ([00:56:35](#)):

Yeah.

Rachel ([00:56:36](#)):

In the context of that, broadly.

Brian L. Thompson ([00:56:37](#)):

Right, sure. My hearing maybe.

Rachel ([00:56:43](#)):

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Yeah.

Brian L. Thompson (00:56:49):

It's funny because whenever I'm walking with another musician, we're the only people when a siren goes by that plug our ears. Most people are just like...

Rachel (00:56:58):

I do, I feel like it hurts my ears.

Brian L. Thompson (00:57:01):

Yeah, it does.

Rachel (00:57:01):

Yeah.

Brian L. Thompson (00:57:09):

It does. Gosh. Loss, yeah. The part that scares me the most is that we will have lost things that we don't even realize until they're gone. I think one of the things that struck me when I was a kid was learning about extinction and species that had gone extinct and looking at pictures of them and oh my God, that existed and it will never exist again. This is an amazing thing. So yeah, loss in that sense of a future that we think we could have or might want to have. I don't know, that's a hard thing to answer. Again because I feel like it's not going to affect me as much as it's going to affect others but we are all connected, so it will come around but yeah, I feel like there's always a group. It's usually the disenfranchised, the of less wealth or whatever place in the world who take the brunt of everything, whether it's climate or political strife or war, natural disaster. So yeah, I'm not sure if that answered your question or not.

Rachel (00:59:04):

Yeah, it did.

Brian L. Thompson (00:59:04):

Okay.

Rachel (00:59:07):

What do you feel hopeful for?

Brian L. Thompson (00:59:08):

That's a good question, I don't know. I don't like that word anymore.

Rachel (00:59:17):

Why?

Brian L. Thompson (00:59:18):

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Okay, I don't mean I don't like it but it doesn't work. I'm waking up to the idea of what it really... It feels like to me, hope is wanting something to be different than it is but it is. So part of how I'm choosing to live now is to just be with what is, not to say that I don't want to take actions towards changing things that I think need to happen but also be with that as it's happening. Hope just feels... If it's married with action, then that's great but like, "Oh, I hope it works out," what does that mean? Are you going to do something about it?

Rachel (01:00:20):

And you don't see enough action?

Brian L. Thompson (01:00:26):

Yeah. I feel like we have to start responding appropriately to the world as it unfolds in front of us and what part of it we are having, instead of just sit back and find comfort in hoping that something will... Oh, no, it's all going to work out. Well, yeah, maybe because some people are working really hard to try to do something about it and it probably will work out for you because you're in a different position in the world or something but I don't know. I'm sure there's other ways to look at that word and not be so negative but I feel like it doesn't quite capture what's needed at the moment. And I think back of when Obama was running, it was hope, right? Wasn't that the little...

Rachel (01:01:30):

Yeah, hope and change.

Brian L. Thompson (01:01:31):

Hope and change and at the time, I was like, yeah, hope because we were just coming out of Bush Jr.-

Rachel (01:01:39):

And it was 2008, it feels like we were so young back then.

Brian L. Thompson (01:01:44):

Yeah.

Rachel (01:01:45):

So much has changed.

Brian L. Thompson (01:01:46):

It's 13 years ago.

Rachel (01:01:48):

And that's an existential 13 years of inaction.

Brian L. Thompson (01:01:52):

Yep. And it was also such ridiculously good marketing too. Anyone who read that could put whatever their hopes were into that word.

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Rachel (01:01:52):

Yeah.

Brian L. Thompson (01:02:07):

And he didn't necessarily... Who knows if they did line up? But that was used for a purpose obviously, very well but in general, hope, I just feel like it's useless if it isn't married with action and intent and commitment to do something.

Rachel (01:02:31):

And you don't see that happening?

Brian L. Thompson (01:02:33):

Well, a little bit more but not on the scale that it needs to be. Yeah, it doesn't seem to matter what party or who or anything, we seem bound to a particular trajectory, which comes back to our own self-interest time and time again.

Rachel (01:03:07):

And you think that's the root of our inaction?

Brian L. Thompson (01:03:13):

There's other factors, of course but yeah.

Rachel (01:03:19):

Yeah. Well, I have a million questions but we can't talk all day. My last question is-

Brian L. Thompson (01:03:28):

So you didn't need your list at all.

Rachel (01:03:29):

I didn't. My last question is, is there a question that I didn't ask you that you wish I had asked you?

Brian L. Thompson (01:03:51):

Not really. Maybe I was expecting you to ask something like, "What will your great grandchild think of you looking back on today?"

Rachel (01:04:13):

Good question.

Brian L. Thompson (01:04:13):

That sort of question.

Rachel (01:04:19):

What do you think?

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Brian L. Thompson (01:04:19):

Well, I hope that they would understand but also be equally as... Hopefully they're in a better place than where we are now as it were but I don't know, I think that that generation will rightfully dealing with things that they never would have had to if we had done things differently.

Rachel (01:04:54):

What do you think-

Brian L. Thompson (01:04:54):

So then I'd be pissed off, angry, whatever.

Rachel (01:04:58):

At you specifically?

Brian L. Thompson (01:05:00):

Yeah, I don't know about that because I'm a good guy. But it's easy to look back and go, "Oh, that generation," as if it were a single entity or something.

Rachel (01:05:12):

Right, it's how I feel about my parents' generation.

Brian L. Thompson (01:05:16):

Right.

Rachel (01:05:16):

Yeah.

Brian L. Thompson (01:05:16):

As if we can just put them all in a group and label them. No more can we do that as... I know what that's like now because I'm trying to get my generation to do something and how hard is it? So yeah.

Rachel (01:05:30):

It feels really hard. The other thing is, I talk to people a lot about feelings of helplessness and feelings of futility and doing what you can. Some people are involved in political activism but most people are not and then I think part of that is just, our generation was not taught the habits of political and civic engagement really. It's not as much a part of our culture but I think there's also something about climate activism that feels particularly abstract and overwhelming to engage with, as opposed to all of the other urgent issues of our time. I think that racial justice feels more tangible to engage with on a level of activism than climate justice does. And there's also the sense of inertia with people, I'm in my life, I'm living inside my life, I barely have time to do the things that make up my life already and to really face the climate crisis means to drop everything and lose my whole life. There's really a sense of people that if I were to look at this head-on, I would lose my entire life.

And it makes me think about this relationship between continuity and discontinuity that climate crisis is really all about and the dissonance that we're living in because we are, for most of us, still living

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in a world as if there is continuity but we're actually living in a violently discontinuous world than we thought we were living in. But we're still living in this old world, it's like Bill McKibben's Eearth and I think that really traps people or creates this sense of inertia for people that disables action. And the question that I'm still asking is, what am I supposed to do? What is my responsibility? And working within my own personal responsibility doesn't feel like enough. And I think for myself too, I have this horrible belief that I need to work on, that I'm actively trying to do, which is, I don't know, does political action really... Is that really meaningful, does that really do enough? Does my contribution to political movements actually move any needle? I think I have a deep belief in my own powerlessness that prevents me from stepping up to this moment in an appropriate way and at the same time, I don't know what that looks like. Or maybe I don't want to know what that looks like.

Brian L. Thompson (01:08:36):

Yeah.

Rachel (01:08:37):

I keep getting emails from Rising Tide North America that's like, we need people over at Minnesota to stop Line 3 and I'm like, I can't go to Minnesota.

Brian L. Thompson (01:08:49):

Yeah, right. I know, I know.

Rachel (01:08:49):

But isn't that what's required of us?

Brian L. Thompson (01:08:51):

Yeah. There were two members of our garden, Jeff and Melissa who... I'm trying to put it into context now because the whole COVID year feels like... I'll say last year and I don't really mean last year because I mean-

Rachel (01:09:09):

Two years ago, yeah.

Brian L. Thompson (01:09:10):

Two years ago because it's like, nothing happened last year.

Rachel (01:09:12):

Right, the lost year.

Brian L. Thompson (01:09:13):

The lost year. So it was I guess two and a half years ago but they went out to... This is terrible, I'm forgetting which pipeline. What was the-

Rachel (01:09:30):

Dakota Access?

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Brian L. Thompson (01:09:31):

Dakota and then the other one. They went to one of those and then when things shifted to the kids getting separated from their parents at the border, they went and just witnessed. People were being asked to stand witness there and they went.

Rachel (01:09:53):

Wow.

Brian L. Thompson (01:09:54):

Actually, I think just the husband went at that point, Jeff and he was arrested and I think only recently did they sort out the legal stuff to keep him out of jail. But he was literally just witnessing what was happening, of course, they didn't want him to see what was happening.

Rachel (01:10:10):

Right.

Brian L. Thompson (01:10:11):

So that's why he was arrested or at least that's how I see it. So yeah, there are people that will just jump and I seriously thought about it when it came to a couple of the different pipeline calls out for... I'm like, okay, could I do this? I guess I could. As a musician, if I'm not working, I'm not making any money. It's freelance, I don't have a job job. I work many jobs but I have to show up, it's not like I can take a week off. Take a week off, I'm not being paid. So I'm like, okay, if I did this, I have to realize that I'm not being paid and I still have to pay the mortgage. Okay, I still have to... But there was a part of me that really just wanted to do that but I didn't and yeah, it's hard. I think one of the things that I'm learning from my meditation practice is to act and then let go of the result. Try your best, with good intention, to do everything you can do but then also, you have to let go of the result because you're not in charge of it, number one, completely because there isn't really a fixed you that controls very much of anything at all, if at all.

So you might send some energy this way but if I'm going to say, "Oh, well, that effort was a failure because it didn't reach my goal," well no, not necessarily. Or it was a success, what... So at the Zendō, they have this chant that they say before we do work practice, which is at the end of each sitting, we do a little bit of work, just clean up or something. It's more of an exercise and one of the admonitions is to do your work, set a goal but have no accomplishment in mind, have the work itself be accomplishment, just the fact that you're doing it. Not the actual outcome, maybe the doorknob doesn't shine the way you want it to or maybe you weren't able to fix that thing but do it anyway. And I find a little bit of comfort in that because-

Rachel (01:12:55):

That feels like a radical...

Brian L. Thompson (01:12:58):

It's a shift because it doesn't let you off the hook, you still have to act, you still have to do things but it gives you a chance to breathe around it all because otherwise, it's never enough. It's never enough, no matter how much we do, right? That's what it can feel like, especially these last, I would say traumatic four plus years. But ever since I got interested in environmental stuff, it's felt like this steady weight of

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just... Because we're not going in the right direction and we're not doing the things that we should be doing and we know better. Okay, take a deep breath, I need to do what I can do and then let go of the outcome because it's the only way I can keep doing what I'm doing. Otherwise you get burnt out and I think that's partly why people don't get involved in the first place, is they jump ahead to, well, I can't do all that, so I'm not going to do anything.

Rachel (01:12:58):

Yeah.

Brian L. Thompson (01:14:07):

And it's like no, you don't need to do all that but we need you to do a couple things regularly. Just with this compost thing, if we just think how it wasn't that hard to get 300 people to start dropping off their food that they were going to throw in the garbage and now it's 2000 pounds. It's a ton every Sunday, we've collected 30 tons of food that would have been in landfill since last May 24th when we started this dropping off at the gate project. 30 tons of food. So yeah, I think that's something. That's a little something. Yeah.

Rachel (01:14:56):

Yeah. I was talking to someone who's a professional activist, probably years ago, talking to him about this same thing and he was like, "Not everyone's an activist, not everybody is doing that work and I get paid for it, so it's easy for me to do it because it's my livelihood but everybody has a responsibility to devote a certain amount of time every week to the issue."

Brian L. Thompson (01:15:24):

Right.

Rachel (01:15:24):

And that was an interesting way of thinking about it, it's like, I just... Not just but I'm not going to do all of it but I do have a responsibility to do some of it, which I do not do. Me, Rachel, I do not do it.

Brian L. Thompson (01:15:42):

Yeah. Well, it's also choosing what to do because there's so many things.

Rachel (01:15:47):

It feels overwhelming, yeah.

Brian L. Thompson (01:15:47):

And it's like anything, I teach violin, like I mentioned and sometimes kids get overwhelmed by practice and it's like, just start though, that's almost the hardest part. Once you get momentum, momentum's a thing. $P = MV$, remember from physics class?

Rachel (01:16:05):

Yeah.

Brian L. Thompson (01:16:05):

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Once you get going, inertia, it almost doesn't matter what you start with, just start to do something.

Rachel (01:16:10):

Right.

Brian L. Thompson (01:16:11):

And then you'll be able to, oh, shift it a little bit, no, I'm going to do... And then you're going but if you don't ever take that first step, it's harder and harder to take that first step in whatever it is.

Rachel (01:16:11):

Right.

Brian L. Thompson (01:16:23):

Whether it's practicing your instrument or your lovely teacher has laid out very easy exercises for you to do but yeah, otherwise it's overwhelming just trying to keep my inbox somewhat under control.

Rachel (01:16:40):

Oh God.

Brian L. Thompson (01:16:43):

I am unsubscribing to tons of things every day and I still have lots of stuff that I'm like, oh, I should... Oh, I can't... No, I can't. Oh, I should sign that thing or I should get involved with this. I have a couple extra hours on Friday, I could do that. Okay, I also need to eat and sleep and-

Rachel (01:17:01):

Spend some time alone.

Brian L. Thompson (01:17:04):

Yeah.

Rachel (01:17:04):

Yeah.

Brian L. Thompson (01:17:06):

I think we're also in this really strange, to talk about context, time in a world where we are aware of so much more than anyone ever else has been.

Rachel (01:17:17):

Yeah.

Brian L. Thompson (01:17:17):

Constantly every day, every moment, every second, we know what happened across the world seconds later and no one's ever had to deal with that on a psychological basis, on an emotional basis. This is the

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first generation or maybe the second that's literally had that be a thing, so it's creating this disconnect. Oh, all those people died, oh, okay. You can't process it all.

Rachel (01:17:45):

No, you can't because-

Brian L. Thompson (01:17:46):

So you start turning it off.

Rachel (01:17:48):

Right.

Brian L. Thompson (01:17:48):

But then if you turn off everything-

Rachel (01:17:52):

Right.

Brian L. Thompson (01:17:52):

We're all going to lose too, so I don't know.

Rachel (01:17:56):

An interesting thing has been happening to me over the past few years, I've been doing work around climate crisis for years and years and years. I've been doing this specific project for three years, so it's something that I have been thinking about for forever but like I said, I still have this innate sense of powerlessness and paralysis, so it's not like I've been out doing things. But I've also been reading about this way that your body processes information. So you can hear information, you can hear about global warming and then not be able to process it on a physical level that actually causes you to engage with it. Just like what you were saying, we're overly stimulated and so we're not processing the important information that can guide our behavior but I have started... I've been a vegetarian, vegan off and on, I was a young white woman at one point, I guess I still am. White woman and young, so I was a vegetarian and vegan and it was wrapped up in all of the other kinds of neurotic food stuff that you can get yourself into but that is in my past but in the past few years, I've started to very much move away from eating animal products. Without wanting to make a choice about it but it just had to do with, there was something inside of me that was like, oh, this no longer feels right.

The information that I have is connecting to my body and that is affecting my choice and it seems so small but it actually feels like a radical way of understanding how real change gets made and how people really change their behaviors. Not just by being told to do it and not by knowing that they should do it but understanding on some real integrated, physical level. So I think it's interesting with people I'm talking to who work in the gardens. There's a different kind of connection to nature than other people who live in the city who are not connected. And the conversations that I'm having with people in the gardens are different than the conversations I'm having with people outside of the gardens. It's more active, not fully but there's more of an engagement rather than a gray rocking against future loss and the fear of what's here and what's coming. There's more of an openness to it.

Brian, Prospect Heights Community Farm, Prospect Heights, Brooklyn
June 29, 2021

Brian L. Thompson (01:20:51):

Well, gardens have this innate power to just show us life. We plant a seed in some soil and it just does its thing, it's amazing. It feels like a miracle every time.

Rachel (01:20:51):

It does.

Brian L. Thompson (01:21:05):

And I've been gardening ever since I was a kid and when a bean sprout comes up, I'm like, wow, that's so cool. And it's a physical act, we're getting our hands dirty. I think a lot of people will admit that they come here because it's therapeutic on some level. Not that you're trying to escape something but you can connect with some bigger energy, something that's apart from you but connected to you still, that growing your own food is a really powerful thing to do.

Rachel (01:21:44):

It's life changing.

Brian L. Thompson (01:21:46):

Yeah and it's not that hard either. There's a lot of people who are here that know a lot, so if you want to ask a question, just go for it and they'll tell you but you can also just put a seed in the ground. We have a kids box in the back and we just encourage kids, "Just put a seed in the ground, see what happens." Then they come back a few days later, nothing yet. A week, "Oh, it's starting to push up." Yeah, I think we have a chance to get connected to a few things. Connected to the earth, right? Soil, water, basic elements, natural process. Unless you're really out there, you can't hang out in a garden for very long without it slowing you down, it just slows you down. You come in, you're like... You feel softness under your feet instead of hardness, you get your hands dirty, you see how messy life is and how life grows out of messiness.

There's a Zen teaching, the lotus needs the mud and the messiness of the bottom of the pond to create this beautiful, ridiculously perfect flower but it comes from mud and yuckiness. It's not all pretty. Yeah, it's such a good... And you see kids come alive too, we just have a little dig box in the back, it's just a box with soil in it and just being able to do that versus, I don't know, interacting with a phone, an iPad. I'm not sure if that has as much of that physical primal connection you were talking about because like you were saying, our experiences find a place in our bodies. And I'm grateful that my mom and the people in my life that I've come across have steered me in a particular direction but also like you were saying, it wasn't until I started down that path but then my body started concurring. Yeah, this works for you and then I can't imagine turning around and going the other way.

But also, when I hang out with friends that haven't given even a thought to changing, say maybe their eating habits or their shopping habits, their consumption habits, I think well, they've never been introduced to the idea. I was introduced to it early on and I've had all this time to very slowly marinate it and digest it a bit, for lack of a better word. And yeah, the funny thing about going vegan for me was... And it's not a diet for me, it's a bigger picture but your tastes actually change and I was not expecting that at all. It's like oh, I'm going to crave a couple things, it's just going to be the way it is, it went away. I don't crave those things. Always necessarily get the, the melody. And so violinists are, there's more violinists. There's more people that are like drawn to the melody in life. Right. But I just love being in that sort of central place where everything comes together, musically sounds and stuff. So, but I like, I like, I play them both and I like them both.

Brian, Prospect Heights Community Farm, Prospect Heights, Brooklyn
June 29, 2021

Rachel (01:24:59):

Like cheese and dairy.

Brian L. Thompson (01:25:00):

Yeah, dairy, cheese. I wasn't raised with meat, so I never had a taste for that. My mom said the same thing, she's like, "For the first few months..." She went vegetarian when I was conceived because both she and my dad felt like it was something that they wanted to do and on the occasion of this new life coming, they were like, oh, we're just going to do this. So long story short, that's how I ended up being raised vegetarian but my mom said that for the first few months, she would always go to a barbecue and it would smell so good and then one day, it smelled like rotting flesh. It just changed on a dime.

Rachel (01:25:44):

Wow.

Brian L. Thompson (01:25:44):

And she had to leave a barbecue, she couldn't even stand it.

Rachel (01:25:49):

Wow.

Brian L. Thompson (01:25:51):

And she's like, "I don't know what happened, something shifted." Her body didn't use it anymore or need it anymore and then suddenly, it was foreign to her, it was no longer... I'm trying to make sense of it and I had the same thing with dairy and stuff because I used to eat cheese and loved pizza and all that stuff and would crave it. And now, just the smell of it makes me ill.

Rachel (01:26:18):

Wow.

Brian L. Thompson (01:26:18):

So it's strange but yeah, I don't know, that's a whole other conversation.

Rachel (01:26:25):

Yeah. Well, thanks for taking this time-

Brian L. Thompson (01:26:28):

You're welcome.

Rachel (01:26:28):

To talk.

Brian L. Thompson (01:26:28):

Thank you.

Brian, Prospect Heights Community Farm, Prospect Heights, Brooklyn
June 29, 2021

Rachel (01:26:29):

I loved this conversation, it was really interesting-