

Bryn, 462 Halsey Community Farm, Bed Stuy, Brooklyn  
October 11, 2021

Bryn (00:00):

I grew up in California in the East Bay Area. And then I went to school in Santa Barbara. And then after that I moved here like four-and-a-half years ago. I'm 26, and I am a teacher at a Montessori school.

Rachel (00:20):

You've been a gardener at Halsey 462 for how long?

Bryn (00:24):

About four years. So pretty soon after I moved here.

Rachel (00:27):

And tell me about your background in gardening and growing food or growing plants.

Bryn (00:34):

I got interested in it when I was in college. I studied, agriculture is like part of my degree in environmental science. And then I worked for a season also when I was in college. And then when I moved to the neighborhood, I had walked by the space and just got involved volunteering one day. And then I was the most involved in it, the early parts of the pandemic when it was just four or five of us who were here regularly. And I spent most of my time here.

Rachel (01:19):

It seems like a nice place to spend your time during the pandemic.

Bryn (01:22):

Yes. Yeah.

Rachel (01:24):

What got you into gardening, growing, farming to begin with?

Bryn (01:32):

I took a class at UCSB from Dr. David Cleveland called Diet and Climate Change, about the environmental impact of the food system. And it's specifically how animal agriculture ties into that. So that got me really into the link between food and climate. So that's how I got interested in it, initially. And definitely my interest in it has evolved since then, but that was sort of the entry point for me.

Rachel (02:13):

How has it evolved?

Bryn (02:16):

The professor who I took that class from, he's a hardcore vegan and is big into animal agriculture is bad and the source of a lot of methane emissions. And I was sort of into that for a while. And then when I was woofing, I was on a small scale farm that had chickens and goats and sort of working on the ground within a system that uses animals, got me thinking a lot differently about that. And I guess sort of less black and white about animal products.

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Rachel (03:01):

Will you tell me more about that? Outside of the interview, I'm just curious about this.

Bryn (03:05):

Yeah, definitely.

Rachel (03:07):

Oh, no. I mean now.

Bryn (03:08):

Now?

Rachel (03:08):

Yeah.

Bryn (03:12):

Yeah.

Rachel (03:13):

Because I've been trying to eat much less animal products. I don't really eating meat anyway, but I've been trying to reduce my dairy, just because it's like, do as little harm as you can, because I think that my individual veganism would, or faux veganism would save the planet. But I'm curious about this perspective of like what's the middle ground? Or where's the gray area or what... ?

Bryn (03:39):

I think that when I was working on this farm, it was pretty small scale. We had, I think six goats and maybe 12 chickens. And it was a pretty, I guess biodynamic system and not like the manure from the goats and the chickens like we used in the compost, and then that was used in growing the vegetables. So I think going from an academic setting, learning carbon emissions per gram of meat compared to vegetable protein, it just complicated that for me, because I was like, "Well, this is a system that feels very sustainable in a really real, tangible way.

I feel like it just opened up a middle ground for me in terms of consuming animal products. Because I feel now that it's, for me personally, a better choice to continue eating animal products and source them intentionally as opposed to having a black and white thought process about veganism is the only route and maybe buying soy products or whatever, where I have less of a grasp on where they come from. So that's how I think about it now. I tried to eat vegan for a while. I know that some people can do it, but it did not work for my body.

Rachel (05:35):

Totally. I know. People who can do it are like, "Everyone can do this. I feel amazing."

Bryn (05:40):

I know. My B12 levels beg to differ.

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Rachel (05:46):

They just didn't eat enough nutritional use.

Bryn (05:52):

Yeah. [crosstalk 00:05:52]

Rachel (05:54):

So, Bryn, I'll ask you my framing question, which is a question that I start off asking everyone for this project. And it was the framing question for this project in particular gave me the in into what kinds of conversations I want to have with people. When you think about global warming or the climate crisis, what do you think about and how do you feel?

Bryn (06:18):

I feel anxious. I think I've always felt pretty anxious about it. I'm a young millennial, and I grew up in California, so conversations about climate change were happening already when I was growing up. And at that time, at least the message that I got from the adults around me was like, "This is your generation's problem." So it always has felt like a big pressure, something that we've inherited.

Rachel (06:58):

But are responsible for mitigating.

Bryn (07:00):

Yeah. Yeah. And now I work with children, which is interesting also to hear the ways that they talk about it and the messages that they get around it. I think that's something that has been... The attitude that I've been thinking about lately, that sort of alleviates my anxiety in some way is just like, I don't think that it's reversible at this point. So I see my place in it as, how can we reduce the amount of harm that's going to be done to the people around us? And I think of children specifically, because that's who I spend most of my time with. But just like, what are the small things that I can do to maybe slow down the harm or reduce the harm because it feels too big to me to think about reversing climate change or stopping it because it just doesn't really feel like that's the project anymore to me.

Rachel (08:20):

So then what is the project exactly? Or what is the project for you? Where do you fit into the project?

Bryn (08:33):

I think that as an educator, I feel like I fit into the project by helping kids ask questions about the messages that they're given about sustainability. Because I think that the messages that get told a lot of the times are like these personal responsibility things like if only everybody would recycle, then we wouldn't have these issues. So I think the one and the most powerful things that I can do is just teach them how to question that narrative and understand the bigger socioeconomic aspects of the climate crisis and how it's a large systems issue. Not to say that personal responsibility isn't also important. But I especially think that when we're talking to kids about that and then it just becomes this very anxiety inducing thing of use less water and recycle things. And you're never doing a good enough job at it.

Rachel (09:50):

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So helping kids understand that its these systems rather than the anxiety of their own individual carbon footprint.

Bryn (09:59):

Yeah.

Rachel (10:00):

Very important. So Bryn, talk to me about changes that you've experienced in weather landscape seasons, maybe from the perspective of living in California or also the four years that you've been here, if you've noticed changed, but certainly you've got a longer lens in California. Talk to me about how life has changed for you in terms of weather seasons, your landscapes.

Bryn (10:29):

Yeah. I mean, California feels more pronounced to me, also just two thoughts. I lived there longer than I've lived here. The fire season has gotten much longer every year and a lot more serious. My brother is a wild-lands firefighter. My uncle is a volunteer firefighter. My uncle was on the Dixie fire earlier this season, which is the largest recorded wildfire in California history.

Rachel (11:04):

It's still going on, isn't it?

Bryn (11:06):

Yeah. And my brother was on McFarland for a while and I don't even know where he is right now because he's... The last time I talked to my mom, he was working 24 hour shifts. So he's like off the grid most of the time.

Rachel (11:18):

Wow. Does that feel scary?

Bryn (11:24):

Yeah. It's hard just not knowing where he is, but he likes what he does. So that's definitely feels very pronounced because there have always been fires in California for as long as I can remember and that's like a normal and healthy part of the ecosystem. But I think it was when I was in college when they first started feeling very prevalent. Like in Santa Barbara, my senior year, I remember just everything being covered in ash and the air quality wasn't healthy to go outside. And then-

Rachel (12:07):

And that was different than how you had experienced wildfires. [crosstalk 00:12:11]

Bryn (12:10):

Yeah. And then now that's very standard from May to November every year, is just sort of on and off, unhealthy air quality or just being really smoky. And it's also a trip here because sometimes the smoke gets sucked into the jet stream and then is covering New York City while my brother is on the fires in California. It's really strange.

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Rachel (12:46):

How do you make sense of that phenomenon? If you do.

Bryn (12:47):

I don't know if I do make sense of it. It feels overwhelming. Yeah. And kind of apocalyptic.

Rachel (12:59):

When you started to notice increased fire activity, what did that feel like? When did you kind of realize that there had been a shift and what did it feel like emotionally to experience that shift?

Bryn (13:21):

It feels confusing and it definitely feels like a grieving process because it feels like the place that I grew up in is becoming uninhabitable. I've heard that people who are trying to buy homes in Los Angeles now, they can't get homeowners insurance because the insurance companies won't cover places now because the fires are so common. So to me, at least it feels like the state is, and it feels like a hyperbole to say, but it just isn't really a viable place to live as much anymore. I think grieving is the best word that I can use for it.

Rachel (14:20):

How do you grieve?

Bryn (14:28):

I mean a lot of it, I don't know if I've fully processed. I think mostly just talking to other people who are from California, who are on similar pages as me and I've been back home a few times. I was just back last month for the first time in two years. So yeah, visiting old places and stuff.

Rachel (14:55):

What are those conversations that you're having with other folks from California?

Bryn (14:59):

I think sort of a sense of bewilderment of just like, "This is really nuts, but that's the situation." A lot of our families are still there too. And I guess a shared sense of understanding of what the situation with the fires is. I was hiking with a friend in upstate New York the other day and I was asking her if there were ever fires over here and she was like, "What? No, what are you talking about?" And I said something about fire season and she was really surprised that I said that. So it's interesting that I don't know, maybe it's just not on other people's minds as much.

Rachel (15:52):

How do you cope? I mean, I feel like what you're talking about is really big, heavy stuff around loss and a sense of your home being inalterably changed, in this both fast, but slow moving way that isn't conclusive. How do you cope with that?

Bryn (16:24):

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I don't know, writing in my journal a lot. Like I said, I mean, I think a lot of it is stuff that I'm still processing. So I don't know if I fully have coped with it. I think I get into a head space where it feels really big and I sort of follow the catastrophizing thought pattern of what I just went down with you, of like the state is becoming uninhabitable. But I think it also helps that my brother is a first responder in the situation and that he finds a lot of joy in what he does, and he sends me pictures sometimes and having the connection to somebody who's very much on the ground there, helps me feel a little bit more grounded in that and that he's like doing something tangible. So...

Rachel (17:32):

It makes something that's kind of abstract a little more real.

Bryn (17:36):

Yeah. Yeah.

Rachel (17:37):

Interesting. I mean, we've kind of been talking about this, but I'll ask the question, how does climate crisis affect you on a day to day basis?

Bryn (17:51):

The stuff with my brother is definitely a big one. Day to day, in my work as a teacher, just kids asking questions or kids being afraid about things that they hear is probably the biggest way that it affects my daily life. Yeah.

Rachel (18:20):

How does it affect how you plan for your future?

Bryn (18:22):

I think it affects how I plan for my future and not. I feel like I can't almost in terms of thinking about where I want to live or if I want to buy property at some point, I'm just like, "Well, I have no idea what places are going to be resilient or what the city's going like in the next 50 years." So yeah, I think it affects planning for my future and that I just don't think that I can plan for my future in the same way that my parents did for theirs.

Rachel (19:10):

Does that mark a shift in that perspective or expectation or have you grown up always kind of feeling like you can't plan? Or was there a moment when you felt like your future could be laid out for you and that has shifted?

Bryn (19:28):

I get more or less as always, feel like this. Yeah. I can't really think of a time where I didn't feel like that. I remember from the time I was young, I've been like, I don't want to have children because I don't know what the earth is going to be like.

Rachel (19:52):

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Do you feel like that is a common feeling for people your age or your peers or the kinds of conversations you're having with your community?

Bryn ([20:07](#)):

Yeah, definitely. I think that's definitely on the mind of most people who I interact with. Yeah, for the most part.

Rachel ([20:22](#)):

It's so interesting. I'm 10 years older than you and I feel like there's a real shift between this 10 year gap around assumptions about a future or not, and planning for a family. I think that I'm meeting... And it could also just be like when I was 27, I was not planning on having a kid either, that was not something that I wanted to do. Not that things will change for you necessarily, but when you're young, you're not really thinking about it as much anyway, or most people aren't. But there does seem to be the shift between people who are in their mid to late twenties now than maybe the assumptions that my friends were making about our futures 10 years ago. Because things are moving so fast that we grew up in a different world than you did even with a 10 year gap, which is nothing.

Bryn ([21:23](#)):

Yeah. Yeah, definitely.

Rachel ([21:25](#)):

And it shapes away you harbor hope or have a perspective on what lies ahead. So have you taken, or do you take political action around the issue of climate crisis?

Bryn ([21:52](#)):

I mean, I'm not sure what you mean by political action.

Rachel ([22:00](#)):

I mean it broadly. My next question is, in what ways is this moment asking us to show up? I'm thinking a lot about paralysis, Malays, ways in which people feel so overwhelmed that it's hard to find a lack of imagination as to how we can make meaningful change. What is meaningful change, meaningful action? These are questions I'm asking myself and curious about where other people fit into those questions.

Bryn ([22:47](#)):

Yeah. I mean, I think that the garden, having green space and a city environment and feeding each other. Having green space is like a carbon sink, so that feels political to contribute time and labor too. That feels like soothing to me, because again, it's like a concrete, tangible thing. I think that, especially lately, I've had a harder time with the bigger, more abstract things like politics, because I also feel extremely disillusioned just with the system. And I feel pretty unconvinced right now that voting, for example, makes any sort of difference. I go back and forth on that. So the garden and conversations with children, feel like the things that I can grasp right now.

Rachel ([24:00](#)):

Yeah. Because if not politics, what does meaningful change or meaningful action look like in a collective way? I'm hearing from you that it means hyper local.

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Bryn (24:14):

Yeah. Because also, I feel like the problems that we have come from so many big things like colonial and capitalism. And so doing things that feel hyper local and connected to a media community and trying to create smaller systems where I'm not as reliant on those bigger things. That feels like what's important to me right now.

Rachel (24:53):

Yeah. Okay. So let me ask you, on a higher level question, how do you contextualize this moment? How did we get here and what is here? How do you define what this moment is and how do you understand history as it brought us here?

Bryn (25:17):

Let me think for a second.

I think going way back to European conquest of the rest of the world, the attitude that there is an unlimited amount of resources and they are available to be taken and used to create wealth. And then just the ways that, that continued throughout history, skimming over a lot, obviously, but that have led us to a capitalist system where sustainability isn't a factor in anything because it's always about maximizing profit and there's just no way for that to actually take what is good for the earth and good for humankind into account because it's not how the system is set up. So that led to destruction of ecosystems and polluting the air and the water. I feel like I'm having a hard time with words right now, but yeah.

Rachel (27:10):

Well, it's a big question. I've asked you to sort of plum the depths of history. So if you can't quite be as articulate as you'd like to be in this moment off the cuff, that's really understandable.

Bryn (27:25):

Yes.

Rachel (27:26):

But I ask because everybody kind of has their own... It's interesting to hear about where people sort of see things, where people begin the story. But so where are we now? How do you define here?

Bryn (27:47):

I think that where we are now is this really hellish place where now the language of sustainability has been co-opted by the system. So then there is like this term of green business, which I think is a complete oxymoron. And that is really terrifying to me because then corporations can say that they're being green or being sustainable has been turned into something that you can buy, and that's really horrifying.

Rachel (28:28):

I love your definition of the end trails of [inaudible 00:28:37] coming into any kind of environmental movement that we once had as a hellish world, a hellscape of co-optation.

Bryn (28:50):



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Yeah. Yeah. I think it's just very unsettling that environmentalism is something that is marketable now because that means more consumption and where consumption just overall needs to be a hell of a lot less and much more equitable also. And I think that green business and all of that, is just completely taking the teeth out of the movement.

Rachel (29:38):

So well, first I'll ask you this question before I ask you the next one, but do you have a spiritual religious or ethical based or value based belief system that helps you navigate this moment?

Bryn (29:56):

I'm not religious. I suppose I'm vaguely spiritual, but it's not something that I've explored a lot. So I think I have a set of personal values, but there's not a belief system necessarily that I am taking them from.

Rachel (30:21):

So what do you fear for the future?

Bryn (30:32):

I fear the distribution of resources becoming even more stratified than it is now and more suffering for people who are already suffering. Yeah.

Rachel (30:59):

Where do you put yourself when you think about the future? Where do you position yourself? Where are you? Where do you see yourself?

Bryn (31:09):

It's hard to imagine because I feel uncertain of how fast things are going to move and how quickly they're going to truly affect my day to day life in terms of extreme weather patterns or climate disaster and that kind of thing. I mean, I do live on the coast, so I feel fairly sure that it will be within my lifetime. Yeah. It's hard to imagine. I don't know if it's something I'm fully prepared to imagine my place in. It's more of a vague understanding.

Rachel (32:05):

What do you feel hopeful for?

Bryn (32:10):

I feel hopeful that the earth will be fine without us because humans are a mere blip on the timeline of earth as a planet and of the history of life as a whole. So I'm not an accelerationist or anything, but I think that extinction of our species is inevitable and we are looking it faster, but I think that the earth will recover afterwards and something else will have its turn.

Rachel (32:53):

What's an accelerationist?

Bryn (33:00):

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I don't know if I'm misdefining it, but I think that an accelerationist to somebody who is just like, "Oh, well, we're fucked. So we might as well be as hedonistic as possible",-

Rachel (33:12):

That's dumb.

Bryn (33:13):

... and that type of thing. Yeah.

Rachel (33:14):

I think you kind of answered all the questions that I either asked you or didn't ask you, but are there questions that I didn't ask you that you wish I had asked you, or you expected me to ask you and we sat down to talk?

Bryn (33:46):

I don't think so. Yeah, but sorry I was so depressing, but I'm sure you have a lot of depressing conversations.

Rachel (33:55):

It's a heavy topic.

Bryn (33:56):

Yeah.

Rachel (33:58):

Are there questions you're asking or self right now that may or may not have answers?

Bryn (34:10):

Just generally like, am I doing enough? What is it that I'm supposed to be doing? Yeah. Am I doing the right things?

Rachel (34:20):

Am asking you those questions too. Do you have any answers? I'm dying for some answers.

Bryn (34:27):

I don't. I feel like your project is a step in the right direction because I think these conversations are important. Yeah. I'll let you know if I find any answers.

Rachel (34:43):

Okay. Thanks. Yeah. Let me know, Bryn. Thank you for taking the time to talk to me and being so generous and also sitting while I re-figured out my tech-

Bryn (34:52):

Of course.

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Rachel (34:53):

... problems. I really appreciate the patience.