

Fa-Tai, Red Hook Farms, Red Hook, Brooklyn
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Rachel (00:00):

Okay. Fa-Tai, tell me your name, who you are, where you grew up, where you live now, what you do, how old you are-ish. Give me a little Cliff Note backstory.

Fa-Tai (00:17):

All right, so my name is Fa-Tai and I live in the East Village, but I come down to the Red Hook Farm almost every Saturday during growing season. I've been involved in this farm for, pretty much since it started, 15, 16 years ago.

Rachel (00:36):

Wow, that's a really long time. [Saro 00:00:38] wasn't kidding when she said you're a longtime farmer.

Fa-Tai (00:40):

So I was a board member at one point, I chaired the board at one point, and yeah. So I am originally from Taiwan, not China, Taiwan, and I'm an immigrant. I've been here since I was about seven or eight. What I do for my full-time job, I'm a city employee, I'm a civil servant, I work for the City of New York, and I manage actually food contracting on behalf of city agencies. So my claim to fame is I feed everyone on Rikers Island, and I also work on food policy initiatives, I help prepare food for the emergency food programs around the city. So yeah. I also teach part-time, right now I'm planning a course, I'm teaching in the fall at the Food Studies Department at the New School.

Rachel (01:38):

Wow. You do very important work.

Fa-Tai (01:40):

I do a lot of food related stuff.

Rachel (01:42):

Yeah, which is so important. How did you get involved with Red Hook Farm?

Fa-Tai (01:48):

So it's a really, really long story actually. Right after I graduated from college, I came to the city and worked on, not urban farming, but a farm project north of the city with the Cornell Cooperative Extension. At the time, I was managed by one of the farmers that I feel like you should interview, because he started a lot of the urban farms in the city, John Ameroso. He was my supervisor and he was the one that started farming here, he started the farm ... He didn't start the farm, but he was the farmer who did the initial farming here 15, I don't know how many years ago, 15-plus years ago, or 13, 15, something like that. So that's how I got involved, so I've been very connected with John over the years. He doesn't come as much anymore, but he's around.

Rachel (02:44):

Cool. I just want to quickly, before we really get into it, just to make sure ... How did you get into food, what would you call it? It's not food policy, food distribution or making sure people are fed in a civic way, how'd you get into that?

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Fa-Tai (03:08):

I guess when I was in college, I just took a really strong interest in farming. So I spent a lot of time during the summers farming, food was always an important ritual, an important topic in my family. It was also one of the ways that I used to express my identity. So when I was in college, I would be very interested in food and what people ate, where food came from, because for the first time I was eating outside of my home environment, so that sparked interest in farming, nature.

It was also, to my surprise, what pushed me intellectually. So that's how I became interested in it, and exploring it in different ways, through people, through culture, through farming, through politics. It's all connected. So yeah, I've been doing it forever.

Rachel (04:13):

What did farming give you when you started?

Fa-Tai (04:15):

You mean emotionally?

Rachel (04:20):

Yeah, I guess emotionally or how it affected your sense of self or your sense of self in the world.

Fa-Tai (04:28):

God, that is such a good question. What did it give me initially? I think it just really taught me a lot about food and flavors and cooking, that's my way into it, but it also gave me a connection to nature. Which growing up, I didn't come from a family of hikers, but it brought me into nature and to observe how nature works, how you have to nurture it, you have to sustain it, you have to feed it and it feeds you in return. That was what I got from it, so it was this idea that we are fed by nature, we are part of nature, which was ultimately what I got out of it. So into this day, it's been an important thing in my life to be connected to nature, even though we live in New York City, it's still a very important component.

Rachel (05:31):

When you came here from Taiwan, you came to New York or the New York City area?

Fa-Tai (05:37):

No, no. We moved around a bit, in fact, the port of entry was Salt Lake City, Utah.

Rachel (05:45):

Oh, my god.

Fa-Tai (05:47):

We lived for, I guess maybe it was like four, six months in the Four Corners, and that was ...

Rachel (05:54):

What a beautiful place to live.

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Fa-Tai (05:56):

Yeah, but it was such a shock. Then I mostly grew up in the DC Metro area, in the Maryland side, because that's where a lot of my dad's family was, so that's where I grew up, went to high school and all that stuff.

Rachel (05:56):

Then you came to New York after college.

Fa-Tai (06:11):

I came to New York after college, right.

Rachel (06:15):

Cool. So I want to come back to these questions, I'm also really curious about what changes you've noticed in farming over the past 15 years, but before I ask you those questions, let me ask you my framing question for this project, which is when you think about global warming or the climate crisis, what do you think about and how do you feel?

Fa-Tai (06:41):

Oh, god. I just think about crazy weather patterns, I think about resources on this planet, how it's going to change a lot, I think about farming, because it's definitely changing farming season in terms of when things can grow or cannot grow. How do I feel? Well, on one side I feel despair, but on the other side, in a very zen way, things happen. I also think a lot about overpopulation, because when I was born the population of the planet was four-million people, and now it's ... I mean four-billion people, and now it's eight-billion people, so there's just a lot more people.

But in a way, it's catastrophic and it's sad that we're destroying ourselves, but in some ways it's like, whether we're here or not, whether we blow ourselves up or not, the earth will find its way to heal itself. So I have a very zen perspective about it too. Yes, we need to be doing things, we need to adjust how we're treating the planet, using the resources on the planet, but at the end of the day, we're not really in control, Mother Earth is, Mother Nature is in control and it's going to heal itself with our without us. That's how I think about it.

Rachel (08:28):

When you think about climate change, climate crisis, do you position yourself inside of it at all?

Fa-Tai (08:37):

In what sense?

Rachel (08:38):

Well, I guess I'm asking the question, this is the first time I'm asking this actually, because you're obviously not the first person to talk about this feeling of, I wouldn't use the word acceptance, but this feeling of things happen and they're out of my control. But something that I think about is like, "Well, yes, but what about my own life?" I can go there and then when I bring it back somewhere personal, it's hard for me to have that more zen patient feeling about it. So I guess I'm asking about how you think about it and square those two perspectives?

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Fa-Tai (09:26):

It's like I have a car, so should I have a car? I don't have an electric car, should I be gassing my car? I go to the supermarket and I get a plastic bag and then I think about the way the plastic bag got there and where it's going to go after I use it. So yeah, I think there's a ... Also, through different phases of activism in my life, you edit your lifestyle to be its best, I guess. But then depending on who you talk to, everyone's got their personal ideas of what you should and should not be doing.

Rachel (10:19):

Absolutely.

Fa-Tai (10:21):

I'm a vegan, I mean I'm not a vegan, my friends are vegan, and they're very militant about it, but I don't feel the same way. I hate plastic bags and sometimes I go out with friends and they're just like, "Oh, let's just get 10 plastic bags." That drives me crazy. So I think in a lot of ways, we have to edit our own behavior, but then how ... I guess it also has to do with how your relationships with others exemplify the behavior, influence others to behave in their own ways.

Then more broadly, I think it's also, at least for me, it's important to stay politically engaged. Voting and being aware of issues and all that stuff matters. So there's the practice of everyday life that matters, there's the practice of relationship building that matters, both you, myself and whoever I interact with every day, but then I also think there's the political activism aspect that matters. So that's how I frame the way I go about things, and it's easy to get in a head space of anger, and that's a natural thing to feel, but at the end of the day there's only so much I can control. I can't make this climate change better or worse, there's only so much I can do from a day to day.

Rachel (12:12):

I love breaking down that framework of like, there's the things in your daily life, there's the relationships and there's your political engagement.

Fa-Tai (12:21):

Right, yeah.

Rachel (12:23):

Because I do talk to a lot of people who are really, really mired in the daily life stuff, and also feel the powerlessness of their political engagement, and don't engage politically. For me, my constant angst is like, "Shouldn't I be out there ..." I keep saying this, but I've been getting emails from Rising Tide North America being like, "We need you in Minnesota to help with the water defenders, stand with water defenders to stop ..."

Fa-Tai (13:04):

Right, exactly.

Rachel (13:05):

They're like, "Come to this training, we'll show you how to do it. Come to Minnesota."

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Fa-Tai ([13:09](#)):

I'm like, "I've got to go."

Rachel ([13:12](#)):

Yeah, but I'm also like, "I'm not going to Minnesota." But I'm like, "What's more important than going to Minnesota?" Right? Someone described it as the inertia of your daily life, and we're in this moment that feels like we're so stuck in there, even though we know where we should be.

Fa-Tai ([13:32](#)):

Right, yeah.

Rachel ([13:34](#)):

Is "should" a useful word? Who knows?

Fa-Tai ([13:40](#)):

For every minute you're doing one thing, there's 10 other things you could or should be doing.

Rachel ([13:44](#)):

Right, right.

Fa-Tai ([13:48](#)):

So there's so many ideas of how you can go about addressing these issues.

Rachel ([13:57](#)):

Right, and doing your part to making the world ...

Fa-Tai ([14:01](#)):

Right, exactly. Exactly. So yeah, it's a lot, it's a lot and we're in it and we are feeling the impact of it. The whole flooding happening in Europe the past three days, it's crazy. The wildfires in California. I was in California last year and hiking and got smoked out and had to evacuate, because it was raining ashes on us. So it's real, it's very real and it's sad.

Rachel ([14:40](#)):

It's been a particularly stressful summer I think, being confronted with these changes.

Fa-Tai ([14:46](#)):

Exactly. In linking it back to farming, California is the bread basket of the country and something is going to happen, because they're drying up and what does that mean for us in terms of stuff we get at the supermarket? What does that do to the food system? It's going to be interesting, it's going to be interesting.

Rachel ([15:09](#)):

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What does that feel like for you when you think about it, as somebody who has all of this knowledge of food growing and supply chains?

Fa-Tai (15:20):

I honestly believe, which is sad that at least here in America we're more reactive than we are proactive, and maybe it's just human nature in general, but I think when ... First of all, I think things are going to get a lot more expensive, food is going to get a lot more expensive if our supply chains get disrupted significantly. Secondly, we're going to be in this place where we have to, not we have to find, we are forced to find alternative ways of eating, whatever that may look like.

I worry about that because, well, maybe not so much in America, but I guess globally, how many more humans can this planet accommodate, before we start eating each other or something? How many more? But maybe in America, where we don't have such a high growth rate, we'll find different ways of farming, we'll find different ways of eating. Technology will play a role, in fact I think it will play a significant role, but I don't know if that is going to solve the need of the masses. It's to be seen. We're living in real time.

Rachel (16:53):

We are living in real time.

Fa-Tai (16:56):

If we survive COVID.

Rachel (16:59):

So talk to me about here, locally, over your 15 years of farming in New York City, talk to me about the changes that you've noticed and when you started noticing them.

Fa-Tai (17:12):

Yeah. So the farm here right now, the Red Hook Farm that we are at right now, there was nothing around us when it first started. IKEA wasn't there, the school wasn't there.

Rachel (17:24):

That horrible monstrosity.

Fa-Tai (17:26):

Amazon Fulfillment Center wasn't there, nothing was around us. I don't even think the ferries were coming here.

Rachel (17:33):

Wow.

Fa-Tai (17:35):

It was really a food desert in the most pure sense of its definition. So one thing, so one obvious notice is the gentrification of the neighborhood, so that's been a very strong presence in this neighborhood. But what's also important to note is we're still surrounded by Section-8 housing, so there is this income gap

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that's growing in the neighborhood. Initially, the farm was built and the main participants, the main visitors, the predominant people who came to participate in the farm were Black and Brown people who lived in the neighborhood.

But the landscape and geography of the people who are coming here now has shifted. This farm is recognized across the US, we have people coming to visit this farm as an urban planning case study from even universities in Europe. They'll come here and do stuff here, as a case study of urban farming in New York City. So it's become well known in a lot of ways, so socially it's changed a lot. I think it's for the better, it's different, but there's always the hard conversation of like, "So what does it mean for the community to change? How the farm is utilized, who's coming to the farm? What is the dynamic of the public space? How is it changing as the neighborhood gentrifies?"

So there's this interesting urban planning, urban development aspect that's happening here, but also on the farming aspect, it's gotten better over the years. Hurricane Sandy wiped this entire farm out. We had to rebuild this entire farm.

Rachel (19:54):

Oh, my god.

Fa-Tai (19:55):

Oh, yeah. All the concrete blocks you see, that's new.

Rachel (19:59):

Was it all underwater?

Fa-Tai (20:01):

It was flooded, the soil was salty, we have partnerships with the Department of Sanitation who came and cleared this entire thing out and rebuilt this entire site. Sandy was a real, real turning point for this farm. The soil that was placed here at the beginning wasn't that great, we had to work at making it better and better over the years. I think the pH was too high, so we had to work with Farmer John to make the soil better. But the rebuild was also good, because they built the solar panels, they rebuilt the whole compost side of things, so that was really cool. The farming is good, it's good. We kept the farming the same in the sense that it's soil farming.

Rachel (20:54):

As opposed to ...

Fa-Tai (20:55):

As opposed to a hydroponic indoor greenhouse farm.

Rachel (20:59):

Oh, I see.

Fa-Tai (21:02):

As opposed to a year-round greenhouse that pumps out micro-greens, as opposed to, I don't know, a chicken farm, or as opposed to a ... There's very many different models of urban farming, but we kept it

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on the ground soil farming. That's important, because as a nonprofit, I can get into the different philosophies of urban farming.

Rachel ([21:02](#)):

I'm interested in that actually.

Fa-Tai ([21:34](#)):

But in terms of ... The question is, you can grow this stuff on cheaper real estate outside of the city, so why are we doing it here? So the mission is really to, for me at least, go back to the original things that I gain from farming, which is connection to nature, seeing how food grows, that you have to water it, that there's bugs, that you have to weed it, that you have to do composting. It's like learning about the natural cycles of farming that was important to us.

Because if this was an indoor hydroponic farm, the lessons from that is more about technology and science. But what you gain from soil farming is more about nature, cycles, and also it's therapeutic too because it's also about horticulture therapy and what that does for people who come from low income environments that need to heal emotionally. So the soil farming also provides that. Sorry, I'm totally going off on a tangent.

Rachel ([22:55](#)):

This is fascinating, I'm interested in this actually. Yeah.

Fa-Tai ([23:01](#)):

But yeah, no, it's changed. We have chickens now, that's pretty cool.

Rachel ([23:05](#)):

I had some of those chicken eggs.

Fa-Tai ([23:07](#)):

Those eggs are pretty awesome.

Rachel ([23:08](#)):

They were the best eggs I've ever had, they were so good.

Fa-Tai ([23:13](#)):

They were pretty awesome. So yeah, we kept it, the bread and butter is organic soil farming, we kept that. What has changed though, going back to climate change, is the weather. It's bananas. 20 years ago, when I was farming, frost always came right around Thanksgiving. In previous years, we didn't get the first frost until end of December or January. It's crazy.

Rachel ([23:45](#)):

How does that affect the growing?

Fa-Tai ([23:52](#)):

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It does weird things. I don't have scientific, anything to explain, but for example, because you're extending, because the first frost doesn't come earlier, you notice in the subsequent year the bug population is heavier, because in the year before, they're able to live until December and produce more eggs or whatnot. So you're seeing the insect population is becoming different or heavier. So that's one aspect of it, and another aspect is not only that, but then we get weird heatwaves in March and that ...

Certain things we plant the winter before, and we haven't noticed a noticeable effect, but it will for example cause certain weeds to start growing earlier. So yeah, so there's the farming chart of what growing zone you're in, and it's all totally shifted.

Rachel (25:00):

When did that happen?

Fa-Tai (25:03):

I would say it started happening 10 years ago.

Rachel (25:06):

Did you notice those changes 10 years ago?

Fa-Tai (25:08):

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Just gradually, it's like, "Wait, why are we having this weird heat day?" Then the afterwards we're getting two heat days, the year afterwards we're getting three, a week of 80-degree weather in April or something like that. Oh, yeah. It's been noticeable for sure.

Rachel (25:26):

What was the experience of that change, of witnessing that change?

Fa-Tai (25:32):

I think it hasn't, I wouldn't necessarily say it's necessarily had a detriment, I think we just had to shift our timeframe of when planting, harvesting happens. So maybe even change the composition of what we plant and grow. So I think to date, I don't think anything terrible has happened or nothing that would prevent the farm from growing food, I think we just had to alter the strategy of when things happened.

Rachel (26:08):

What was the personal experience of witnessing that change? As you say, we're witnessing it in real time.

Fa-Tai (26:16):

Honestly, I'm just like, "This is weird. This is weird." When I talk to the people here, everyone's like, "This is weird."

Rachel (26:31):

What does weird mean?

Fa-Tai (26:32):

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Just it shouldn't be this hot, it shouldn't be this cold, it shouldn't be snowing right now, it shouldn't be 80 degrees right now. There should still be, frost isn't here yet, so things are getting pushed further back into the season. I think it's just strange, but I think also what ... I guess what will affect it dramatically is when we have super storm events, Hurricane Sandy was a very good example. We put up these blocks to ameliorate flooding when it comes, but is it going to work? I don't know. What happens if another hurricane comes through and floods the entire Red Hook? I don't know what's going to happen to this farm.

Rachel ([27:28](#)):

Right.

Fa-Tai ([27:30](#)):

So that, I think super storm events will for sure impact the farm, and it wouldn't surprise me if it happens again.

Rachel ([27:39](#)):

But these slow changes I see, I'm hearing you say you can clock them, but you adjust practically.

Fa-Tai ([27:48](#)):

Right, right.

Rachel ([27:49](#)):

And you approach it in a practical, from a practical perspective.

Fa-Tai ([27:55](#)):

I guess it's like putting a frog in cold water and start to heat up the water, you're just like, "Oh, it's warmer, it's warmer, it's warmer."

Rachel ([28:03](#)):

Your baseline keeps shifting.

Fa-Tai ([28:04](#)):

Right, exactly. Exactly, yeah.

Rachel ([28:09](#)):

Has it changed the way you experience time at all? Or you experience your body in time?

Fa-Tai ([28:21](#)):

Wow, I don't know. Has it changed? Not for me personally, but I would be curious if people who live in the neighborhood have. Yeah. No, not necessarily. I still come down and get produce all the time and I come and pull weeds, I help manage the farm when I'm needed. No, I would say the body experience, it's like the frog in the water, the temperature keeps rising.

Rachel ([29:06](#)):

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Right.

Fa-Tai (29:07):

Yeah.

Rachel (29:08):

You're just there in the water.

Fa-Tai (29:08):

Right, exactly.

Rachel (29:12):

Less comfortable than you were the year before.

Fa-Tai (29:14):

Exactly, exactly.

Rachel (29:17):

I'm going to go back to my questions. We talked about this, but I'll ask it anyway, are there other ways that the climate crisis affects your day to day life?

Fa-Tai (29:39):

Well, I am always in California hiking in the back country, and I can't do that anymore because there's all these fires. So rather than monitoring mosquito season, I'm monitoring fire season of when I can go out and hike. Which doesn't seem like it can happen, usually I go out in August, that's when it's a good time to go out, so I can't do that this year because I don't want to be smoked out again like I was last year.

Rachel (30:15):

You anticipated this change happening? That sounds like a big change to be confronted with.

Fa-Tai (30:21):

I have, because I've been, this is just my personal hobby of going hiking.

Rachel (30:27):

It sounds great.

Fa-Tai (30:28):

But I have, because in the recent years, my conversation when I'm planning these trips have been, "We need to keep an eye out on fire season." Before that, it was more about mosquito season, but now it's like we've got to keep an eye on what's happening on fire season. So that's definitely impacted me more, on a day to day, I just notice myself using the air condition more, and I actually don't like air condition that much. I sleep with it, but during the day if I can survive with a fan, I prefer to do that.

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I'm just noticing that we're using air conditions more and more, and then we're getting all these Con Ed heatwave advisories in my inbox every other day now. That's also another thing I think about that stresses me out is how much energy we're using to deal with the crisis.

Rachel (31:26):

That feels stressful?

Fa-Tai (31:27):

Yeah, it feels very stressful. I have friends in California who had homes burn down by the fire, so that didn't affect me directly, but I know people who had their homes burn down and they had to rebuild them out in California. So yeah, maybe not me directly, but for other people for sure.

Rachel (31:52):

Yeah.

Fa-Tai (31:52):

Yeah. So my parents are in Taiwan and they've had one of the worst droughts in the past few months, to the point where they had to shut off the water every other day, so it's affecting my parents.

Rachel (32:06):

That's scary.

Fa-Tai (32:07):

Yeah. Thankfully, the rain came a little bit later. But yeah, I can think of people who have their daily lives disrupted by climate change. For me, thankfully in New York City, not so much. But when I was out West, I spent most of COVID out West in California, and there were days where I was wearing my face mask in the house because if I took it off, I would start coughing. I don't know if you saw on the news last year when the sky was glowing orange over the Bay Area, I was there for that and it felt like I was on Mars. So yeah, no. So yeah, it has affected my life. I wouldn't say day to day, but periodically.

Rachel (32:58):

Yeah, I feel like in some major ways.

Fa-Tai (33:01):

Yeah.

Rachel (33:01):

You talked about political action, talk to me about ways you've been involved in this issue politically.

Fa-Tai (33:12):

I think for me, I haven't gone to the protests, I haven't stood on the picket line with the signs and stuff like that, but I have made donations to organizations that I felt were important, support artists who are working on this, writers who write about the climate change. So I've been, I wouldn't call it political activism, but in some ways it is indirectly. Through my teaching, I find it extremely important to bring

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this topic up. Obviously, voting. We just had the primaries here and that was definitely one of the most important things that was on my mind, I wanted to make sure that candidates were able to address.

So yeah, I guess not so much direct action, at least in now, but I'm a news junkie and I think it's ... I have these hard conversations with people in my life too about what we can do about addressing climate change.

Rachel (34:33):

What do those conversations sound like? Who are you having them with?

Fa-Tai (34:39):

With my friends, there are people in my network of friends who don't believe in it.

Rachel (34:47):

Really? Who don't believe in it?

Fa-Tai (34:48):

Yeah. It's crazy.

Rachel (34:53):

That is crazy.

Fa-Tai (34:56):

It's so crazy. It's about all the fake news out there that people are paying attention to, and it's me engaging in those conversations, dispelling those ... I don't know if I change their mind or not, but just saying, "How can you not believe in that when this is happening, that is happening, that is happening?" So yeah, there's been some weird confrontational conversations I've had with people in my network of friends who, if we don't talk politics, we're good. But once we start talking politics, it's like, "Really? You don't think there's racism?"

Rachel (35:46):

I applaud you for having a diverse friend group, I think that's actually pretty rare these days.

Fa-Tai (35:52):

Yeah.

Rachel (35:53):

Like a politically diverse friend group.

Fa-Tai (35:58):

They're far and few in between, but especially, I guess now that I'm thinking about it, it's more about family too. I have families who are in different political spectrums. I come from an immigrant community that don't necessarily understand all the nuances of American politics. My parents don't

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read or write English very well, and they get their news from weird places. It's stressful, my parents voted for Trump and that was extremely stressful.

Rachel (36:37):

That sounds extremely stressful.

Fa-Tai (36:43):

Yeah. So anyways, there's been some hard conversations I've had to deal with, even in my own personal life, about where politics are in America today. It wasn't this fractured before Trump, but now it's like I can't believe what people are believing, even people who I consider very intelligent and what I was thought was liberal leaning. So yeah, it's crazy. It's crazy, and it stresses me out too.

Rachel (37:20):

It sounds really stressful.

Fa-Tai (37:22):

Yeah.

Rachel (37:24):

I have 15 questions, but I'll ask this one. So it's interesting when you talk about people in your life who don't believe in the climate crisis. My perspective is that more people, most people do know that this is happening, and actually the problem isn't climate deniers, the problem is the fact that most people know that this is happening and yet, we're not doing anything about it. We know that this is happening, but we continue to have paralysis around action.

Fa-Tai (38:04):

I think most people don't want to change their lives.

Rachel (38:04):

Yeah.

Fa-Tai (38:07):

I think that's just, people don't want to change.

Rachel (38:14):

That's what it is, isn't it?

Fa-Tai (38:14):

That's what it is, even the most smartest, well intentioned people, people don't like to change.

Rachel (38:26):

What does this moment ask of us then? What are we asked, how are we asked to step up?

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Fa-Tai (38:34):

So that's one of the reasons why I think what I do in city government is important, because I think this is where policy is important and getting certain legislation, rules, policies pushed through, the political process of making change in the country is I think probably the most important thing to changing people's actions. Because yeah, leave it to individual action, it's like herding cats.

Rachel (39:11):

So that's why it's important to get involved politically?

Fa-Tai (39:13):

Yeah, exactly. Exactly, and support the measures that are important. Yeah. So there's only so much we can do, going back to the relationship front, there's only so much you can do in that aspect, so that's why the political awareness and voting, political activism is important.

Rachel (39:36):

Also, I love to hear that you say that it's important for you to support artists and writers who are thinking about this.

Fa-Tai (39:43):

Oh, yeah.

Rachel (39:43):

Nobody's said that to me before. What's the importance of art and literature at this moment for you?

Fa-Tai (39:53):

You can be a political pundit, am I saying that right? And just talking in a very matter-of-fact political way, but the artists and the writers tap into the emotional aspect of the movement. I find that to be incredibly important, that you feel and that you want and that it's hopeless, but it's also hopeful. Not just that, but I feel like writers and artists also show how complex the situation is, that it's not just stereotypes, tropes, this group does that, that group does that. But that I find that writers and artists are able to express the complexity of things, complexity of situations, that it's not just this one-size-fits-all explanation.

So yeah, that's why I find it incredibly important. Being an Asian person in this country, Asian is a monolithic label, but there's so much complexities within the Asian-American community that most people wouldn't know about. But artists and writers are able to show that, and I find that incredibly important. So yeah, so that's why I think it's important to support artists, or creators, creators in this realm. Or even documentarians, filmmakers, they're able to tell a story in a way that you might not necessarily get just from listening to politicians.

Rachel (41:41):

I love that.

Fa-Tai (41:41):

Yeah.

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Rachel (41:43):

Actually, that's a followup question along those lines, something that keeps me awake at night is this idea that, increasingly less so, but we have an amazing ability towards denial as humans. We still are living in a world, we're still pretending like we live in the world we used to live in, but actually we're living in a very different world. But we're acting as if we live in the old world, like Bill McKibben's Eearth, E-A-A-R-T-H, it's a transformed place. So something that I've been thinking about recently is how do we allow ourselves to transition realities? How do we allow ourselves to transition from pretending like we're living in the world that we live in, to living in the world that we actually live in? When we do that, what are the tools, the emotional tools, the psychological tools, the skills and the physical tools and skills that we need to transition into this new world? What are those skills that allow us to move forward into this new future?

Fa-Tai (43:12):

Wow. That's a huge question.

Rachel (43:14):

I know, it's so important.

Fa-Tai (43:18):

It's also interesting, because I was born in the '70s and we grew up in a time period of fruition, we didn't experience war, we had war, but we didn't have a world war, we had so many advances in technology. Flying wasn't invented until the '20s, in the age that we lived in, we were able to travel wherever we want. So I think in a lot of ways, at least here in America, we grew up during years of relative peace, calm, growth, stability, and so we didn't really, we didn't live in a period of World War I, World War II, in a period where polio was around, smallpox was around, there were no antibiotics.

It's interesting, because sometimes I go into those little towns and I go to cemeteries and I'm just shocked at how short people's lives were before, I don't know, 1940. But we have the medical advancement, we have the technology, we have the food supply and relative peace to grow up in a cushy few decades. So I don't know, I don't know how we can transition into a world where the reality of climate change, the reality of disease, the reality that there's only, there are limitations to resource, the realities of I guess racism and all the isms that break people apart. How do we get to a ... I don't know, I don't know. I really don't know. Yeah, I don't know if there's ... I don't know.

Rachel (45:24):

I know. It's hard, I've been thinking about it for years and I still don't quite know.

Fa-Tai (45:29):

Yeah. I guess from a personal perspective, just get out of your comfort zone and make your environments diverse, make your social circles diverse, make the food that you eat diverse, make the places that you go diverse.

Rachel (45:51):

Be open to a bunch of new experiences.

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Fa-Tai (45:56):

Right. Or maybe what we need is a spiritual awakening of the masses. We need to be humble and realize that there's something bigger than us, that we're connected, that growth comes from loving others. I don't know, maybe we need a spiritual reawakening. Maybe that's what we need.

Rachel (46:27):

I think that's exactly what we need.

Fa-Tai (46:35):

So yeah, I don't know. How's that for an answer?

Rachel (46:37):

I love that answer. How much time do you have, do you have energy for a couple more questions?

Fa-Tai (46:45):

I can keep talking, I come here every weekend and just touch around the field for a few hours.

Rachel (46:52):

Okay, cool. So we actually have gone through, I have maybe three more questions for you. The first is, how does thinking about climate crisis affect how you plan for your future?

Fa-Tai (47:16):

Oh, god. So one of, when you're out backpacking in the back country, there's something all backpackers try to abide by, it's called "Leave No Trace." So I would very much like to leave no trace when I live, as I live my life. So I would really like to, for example, if I'm going to have a car, I'd get an electric vehicle. I would like to buy less stuff, I don't know. I would like to ... I don't know. There's the personal practical stuff like, "Oh, I can't go hiking in California now, so I guess I'll go to Alaska." I don't know.

But then what about the more enduring practices that I find that are important? I don't know. I do this a lot already, support local economies, eat seasonally, try to buy organic, be mindful of where my garbage goes, compost, don't use plastic. That's one of my biggest pet peeves, plastic. Recycle. Nothing, I wouldn't say there was anything big on my mind for the future that I am planning for. I guess, I don't know, that's a really good question. Maybe I need to become a doomsday prepper.

Rachel (49:13):

I don't know if that's helpful either.

Fa-Tai (49:14):

Right, exactly. Stock up on canned vegetables and fruits for a year or something. Yeah, yeah. I think that's just, I don't think I'm unique in this respect, how do you plan for it? Is there a step by step guide of how everyone should go about planning for it?

Rachel (49:44):

Right. The answer is no, right? Because we don't know, we don't know.

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Fa-Tai (49:48):

Don't have a kid, go adopt a kid instead of having a kid.

Rachel (49:51):

Right, right.

Fa-Tai (49:54):

Yeah. I don't really ... If New York City gets flooded, then yes, I have to move somewhere where there's less flooding. If all of a sudden we're at war, and Lower Manhattan gets blown up to pieces or whatever, then yes, I need to figure out what to do. If Asian hate explodes in this country, then I've got to ...

Rachel (50:24):

You mean more than it already has?

Fa-Tai (50:25):

Right. Then I've got to, I don't know, buy a gun, I don't know. I'm just kidding.

Rachel (50:30):

But you're not planning for those things right now?

Fa-Tai (50:38):

Right, right. Exactly.

Rachel (50:44):

How do you think we got here? How did we get here, and how do you define here, now? Then where do you think, not where do you hope, but where do you think, if you imagine 20 years into the future? So how did we get here, what's here and then where are we going from here?

Fa-Tai (51:13):

Here in Red Hook, here in the US?

Rachel (51:17):

Here at this moment in time globally. I'm asking a macro question.

Fa-Tai (51:34):

I think history defines where we are right now, obviously some of the biggest drivers are breakthroughs in medicine, technology, capitalism, and I keep going back to this, overpopulation. Yeah. Globalization, rather than localization, industrialization. There's a lot of things that got us to where we are here today, and those things aren't bad, we love advancements in science, we love advancements in medicine. I think in terms of what got us here is a very complicated question, but where we should be in 20 years, maybe a place where there less inequality, more cohesion, better resource management.

I don't know. A more spiritual community or world, I don't know. I hope to still be alive 20 years from now, I don't know where we will be. I would like, I personally would like to see just places in

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general become less globalized and more localized. It would be nice if communities across America become small little villages, no Walmart, no Target, just no Costco, that although we have these big things that allow communities to thrive, but at the same time it's killing the spirit and the soul and the personality of so many places across America. You go through all these towns, they're all cookie cutter. There's McDonald's, there's Starbucks. It would be nice for people to want more localized flavor of where they're from. But I feel like in a way, America invented that. I think you see less of it when you're traveling overseas.

Rachel (54:36):

Yeah. I think you're right, and when you see it, it's been exported.

Fa-Tai (54:37):

Yeah, yeah. I think America invented that, so I don't know. I literally have no idea. Maybe 20 years from now, the world will be run by China. I don't know. Or maybe 20 years from now, we won't be here, because some virus wiped us out. Who knows?

Rachel (55:01):

Well, my last question is just, is there any questions that I didn't ask you that you expected me to ask you, or that you wish I had asked you?

Fa-Tai (55:19):

I guess I could just say very briefly, I don't know if it's a question or not, that the community gardens across the city I think service an important role in educating people who live in New York City about nature, ecology, life cycles, and that in itself is not a direct climate change action point necessarily, but I think it brings awareness to the natural ecosystem that you might not have a chance to be aware of living in an urban environment.

I think it's really important and that these community gardens continue to thrive and exist and be supported, because I think they play an important role. Not necessarily just for food, but for recreation and for emotional wellbeing and a connector of people that live in the community. So yeah, no. So thank you for doing this.

Rachel (56:25):

Thank you for talking with me. This was a great conversation.

Fa-Tai (56:28):

Yeah.

Rachel (56:28):

I'm so glad you were here today to talk.

Fa-Tai (56:31):

I hope you have some good stuff to use.

Rachel (56:34):

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Yeah. No, this was amazing, thank you.

Fa-Tai (56:37):

No problem.