

Genevieve, Red Shed Community Garden, East Williamsburg, Brooklyn
June 25, 2021

Rachel (00:00):

We are recording. Hey Genevieve, can you start by just telling me who you are, what you do, where you're from, where you are now? Any information you might want us to know about you.

Genevieve (00:20):

Sure. So my name's Genevieve Aoki. I work as a book editor in academic publishing. I live in New York, in Brooklyn. I've lived here for about 10 years now. Yeah, pretty much exactly 10 years. And I grew up in Virginia, in Northern Virginia, outside of DC. I went to college in Chicago and I moved to New York after college. So that's basically the different regions that I've lived in.

Rachel (00:52):

So you've lived here for 10 years?

Genevieve (00:52):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rachel (00:54):

Okay, great. Cool. So I'm actually going to do a totally new thing with this interview. I'm rearranging my questions, which has no meaning for you, but it has meaning. I'm working through this in a different way. So I'll start with my main framing question, which the question is, when you think about global warming, what do you think about and how do you feel?

Genevieve (01:22):

Yeah, I think about the extent of transformation that is happening and going to happen within my lifetime, and the near future, to our environment and how people live. And I think about how I can't fully grasp it. I think that there's a level to which I have in mind. I can anticipate and imagine what is happening, but I think that there are levels of change that we're all going to experience that we can't currently really fully envision.

So I think about like displacement, refugees, the effect on just the world. On countries and politics, and people's poverty and lives. And I think about the effect on nature and the natural world. And I see all of those things already happening, but I think there's this gap in imagination of really what it means that, but just sort of the knowledge that these enormous changes are happening. I think that's kind of what I feel. And there's something overwhelming about that. I think there's a feeling of just struggle to really come to terms with it.

Rachel (03:09):

So how does that feel?

Genevieve (03:11):

Yeah. It feels daunting, I guess. I think emotionally. It's interesting that you're exploring the emotions of this, I think. I think that there's a certain reaction you can have which is just fear or a despair. And I certainly have a sense of fear and despair about climate change. But I think I try to focus on also a hopefulness that is grounded in the realities of that the despair as well. Because I don't see us getting out of it. There's no escape button that we are capable of really achieving, but we're going to go through this no matter what. It's going to happen to some extent.

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So we have to find ways to do what we can and be resilient, I guess. So I think fear. Fear, a feeling of sort of being overwhelmed. And certainly there's this loss also. This sort of future grief, future loss. Sorry, I just whacked the microphone.

Rachel (04:47):

That's okay.

Genevieve (04:49):

In that, for someone like me who comes from a American middle class family where I had a very secure childhood, they're was a sense of sort of a stability to the world that really, it really was always elusory, but climate change really drives home how elusory that is.

And I think one can be kind of just caught up in the loss of that. Part of grappling with climate change is grappling with the fact that you don't, the future is not secure, and it's not stable. And the life that you live right now is not, there's no sort of necessary permanence to it. In fact, actually the life that we live is kind of inherently, it has the seeds of its own destruction, I guess. So there's a grief to that, I guess. Like a grief that we have been destroying the planet and our own futures. And a grief that you can't reside in a simple life that without this larger world I'm shooting.

Rachel (06:13):

You've thought about this a lot.

Genevieve (06:14):

Yeah. Yeah. Sorry. I guess that's part of why I was interested in the project, and maybe that's not the ideal candidate for it.

Rachel (06:22):

It's so good.

Genevieve (06:23):

Yeah.

Rachel (06:24):

It's so good. But you really have thought about this a lot.

Genevieve (06:26):

Yeah.

Rachel (06:27):

And you've done reading and thinking and conversations about this topic.

Genevieve (06:33):

Some, yeah. I definitely have been reading about it. I think over the last few years I felt really a sense of urgency to trying to read and think about it, and the sort of slow process of changing my thinking and how I relate to the world because of climate change. I guess.

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Rachel (06:53):

I want to hear more about that. So what catalyzed that feel of urgency?

Genevieve (07:00):

I don't know that there was any one thing. I think it's just more something that's been growing just more obvious over the past several years, just as time goes on. And the sort of urgency of the climate crisis becomes more and more visible and it's reported on. I think this is like a widespread thing that we've begun talking about the climate crisis. We've begun talking about climate change as something that is already happening. It's not in the future anymore. It's not something we're trying to prevent. It's something we're trying to mitigate. So I think there's not one thing that has driven this, it's been a lot of little things. I think we have been through a lot, there've been a lot of extreme weather things that people talk about and link to climate change. I was here for Hurricane Sandy. My sister lives out west and they've had all the wildfires. And the fact that there's this constant stream of things like that, that kind of rings at home, I think.

So yeah, I don't think there was any one catalyst. It's just sort of been, it's a sense of increasing urgency about it.

Rachel (08:30):

And so since you've been more actively reading and thinking, I guess I have two questions. The first is sort of, what's been the goal of that work, and what has become the results of that work?

Genevieve (08:51):

Yeah. I think, for me personally, I feel like the goal is just to be an ethical person, basically. I feel like a sense of, like if I'm trying to live responsibly in the world today this is part of it. Being aware of it and trying to think about it, and find myself in relation to it is part of that. I haven't been like an activist. I haven't done climate activism. But I think that just on a personal level engagement with the climate crisis feels vital. I don't know.

Rachel (09:41):

And then talk to me a little more specifically, what is your engagement with the climate crisis?

Genevieve (09:46):

Yeah, I think like, this is interesting because I think about it a lot. But on a day to day level, have I changed my life? Not necessarily. I think I try to do very small things, like reducing plastics and composting, and trying to just like live a lower impact lifestyle. But I'm sort of very conscious that that's not doing that much. And the biggest factors in climate change are on a larger scale. It's policy. The industry is ... I'm very conscious of it when I'm voting or things like that. And yeah, I think I would come out for a climate protest. I haven't joined an activist group or anything though.

Rachel (11:04):

Why not?

Genevieve (11:06):

I think I'm not very good at putting myself out there, I guess. There's a inertia to life and the sort of just daily demands of, I only have so much energy outside of work and just getting through each day to do

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something. So, I don't know. Maybe I should just drop everything and devote myself to climate activism, but that hasn't been something that I've been at the point of considering yet.

Rachel (11:58):

So I have a comment about that, but I want to have a quick question. What would it look like for you to, quote unquote, drop everything and focus on climate action? What is that imagination?

Genevieve (12:12):

Like an entire career change? Certainly in the career I have, I will try to promote things that are making positive change on climate. But my current career is not very related to that. And I published books on music, so there are people in music field who are engaging with climate, but it's not really a direct impact, you know? So I think I still feel like I have to pay the rent. I have to do that. And because I am in a sort of like ... I'm still able to live a life that's not just about climate change.

Rachel (13:07):

You're still able to live with life that is not just about climate change.

Genevieve (13:11):

Yeah.

Rachel (13:12):

Wow.

Genevieve (13:14):

And I think that it's very hard to, I think there's a level in which I realize that's not true. But, I mean, most people are going to, I don't know, quit their jobs today and switch to-

Rachel (13:44):

Activism.

Genevieve (13:44):

Activism. Yeah.

Rachel (13:47):

I'm going to pause for a second. I'm flying too close to the sun with these batteries. So I'm going to just switch out the.

Genevieve (13:51):

Yeah.

(Silence).(Silence).