

Ms. Johanna, Herbal Garden of East New York, Brooklyn  
September 18, 2021

Ms. Johanna (00:00:00):

Nothing. And I'm a person that I can finish what I'm doing. Start a project and then come back. If you leave it alone, I can come back and finish it. So I said, "You know what? I'm not doing nothing else."

Rachel (00:00:20):

That's a nice color. That's beautiful yarn.

Ms. Johanna (00:00:23):

Oh, this is what I do. I show you later what went on of some of my hats. Anyway. "I said, I'm not doing nothing else until he leaves." Because it's like, I don't know if you have any brothers or sisters, it's like, you do one thing and they come back and undo it. Oh, I was out [inaudible 00:00:46] and I didn't know you, this, this and everything. Leave it there. I didn't know this. I didn't know. Yes, you did know because I told you not to. Okay. And still you insist upon making a mess what I've already did, what I have to do.

And it makes no sense to start something, put it all back and come back and bring it out again and start it. Don't make sense.

Rachel (00:01:12):

That's very true.

Ms. Johanna (00:01:13):

So he's been upset with me and I told him I don't give a damn because this is my garden, not his, and you're not just supposed to say my garden, but I said, "Listen, I started it. I'm going to be here. You're not chasing me out. And that's the end of your story." So go ahead ask questions. I'm ready.

Rachel (00:01:34):

So Ms. Ms. Johanna, tell me your name. Where you grew up, where you live, your age or your age range, and who you are. Give me a little background about yourself.

Ms. Johanna (00:01:48):

My name is Ms. Johanna spelled with J-O-H-A-N-N-A. I grew up in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, New York. And it was mostly a lot of Caribbeans from Barbados and some southerners, but more Caribbean than anything else. We had one Jewish family that lived across the street. The man used to sit in his window all day. We called him Mister, we never knew his name. The children used to call him Mr. Nosy because he would sit in that window over the stairs and watch out everything going on the street. So we knew you can leave the doors open, you have to worry about that. But then remember I'm talking about at least 80 years ago.

Rachel (00:02:41):

You know what maybe would you feel more comfortable if I wore a mask and you don't and that way we can hear better?

Ms. Johanna (00:02:45):

Oh, okay, fine. The other thing is I went to a Catholic school. I went to a public school. I went into kindergarten, they put me in the first grade the next day. I know. But anyway, then I went to a Catholic

school and I stayed there until about sixth grade. And then I took sick and then I had to miss those two years. And then after those two years, I went to a school for the handicapped. So after the school for the handicapped, I went to Thomas Jefferson and they were the only people that really had a handicap program where you could come on the buses and you could use the elevators. But basically I came from Bedford Stuyvesant out here to east New York to go to Thomas Jefferson is over there.

Rachel (00:03:37):

That's a far commute.

Ms. Johanna (00:03:39):

That is, right. But by that time it was a number 10 or something bus. But at that time it wasn't called new lot. It was called something else. Anyway, we even had the trolley cars then running up in the down street. And the only ones that was left was the ones on Bergen Street. The ones on whatever weren't left.

I graduated from there went to business school. From business school, I got a little job working that I enjoyed very much. I was working for a bank. And of course being me, I wind up getting into a [inaudible 00:04:19] is that the proper word? With the head lady, because she would take work from the back and put it on my desk. That why I was typing 90 words a minute because everybody in the back was slow and they had to close out business by three, even though you work to six or whatever. I thought I wasn't doing it.

Case closed. I'm not doing it. I said, "They want to sit in the back." What I did was type checks and you had to type the check without errors. You had to keep corrections could not be made on checks and you had to be accountable for them. So if I issue 15 checks, one was missing, that means I had to give it to the person over me to make sure that they gave me another check, et cetera, to replace that one. So if I finish my work and I'm working with you, why am I doing the people's work in the back? What are they doing all day? So she said, "Well, you have to cooperate. You have to be a team player." I said, "Well, do a team player get more money?" I said, "Because if you ain't giving me no more money, I'm not working for nobody."

I don't know nothing about no team. I didn't have baseball teams or football teams that I played on. We knew about the Dodgers when they were in Brooklyn. We knew about the Giants where they were in Brooklyn or New York Giants where they was over there. I don't know nothing about team players because of my illness. I didn't play any sports. I could play double Dutch and play the old game ring [inaudible 00:06:01] and all them old games, but I was never to play basketball or hoops or volleyball anyway. So eventually, like I said, I got married. I moved out here and I went to work for another bank. And that one was another problem because I'm not a team player. I come in on time. I do my work. I don't want to know nothing about your gossip and your big toe, and you got a baby and the baby didn't sleep.

That's not my problem. That's not what the company is paying me for to do your job. And eventually I left that job and my daughter's godmother worked for a major television corporation, but she worked until she could get enough money to do nursing and told me she was leaving. So I went to work for that company and it was the best place I could work because I had bosses, but I worked in the office basically by myself. There's nobody. And they didn't even know anyway because that's just the time when computers came in, they were out computer literate. They couldn't type as fast as I could type. And they gave me the job and said, "Here's your desk. This is your space." That's it. And I basically got on. I stayed there 20 years. But once they understood, Ms. Johanna is not a team player.

I'm not playing no games. I'm not going to do your work. If you call me, if my coworker called me the night before and said, "Look, J, I can't make, I have something to do. Can you come in on my day? And I'll take your day, work a double or whatever," fine. But don't come in there and tell me you have to stay unless you was in accident or something like that. I mean, I wasn't that hardhearted. But I just didn't know what it is to be a tuned player. because I always had to look out for myself. And although I have a older sister and I have a younger brother, I looked out for my younger brother. I didn't care what my sister went and did because she was older than me. And what else? And so that was basically it.

So I learned how to do a lot of interesting work with some computers. I stayed there for my, not basically retirement, but what happened was after working so many years, being in the cold, doing this and doing that, my health started to give out and then they changed new information, new technology. That's what I'm looking for. New technology came in and they decided to get rid of us. But they kept me until everybody went and found another job because it was basically nothing to do. The new technicians had to come in and pick my brain to reload the computer for what the computer was supposed to do because in working with it, no one ever wrote down what they did to make the computer work. And all of it was up here. Nothing was on paper.

Rachel (00:09:27):

Wow.

Ms. Johanna (00:09:28):

So I worked there and then I started feeling, my knees started aching, my hands. I had wind up with carpal tunnel by then and I just got worn out. And then somebody said something about something. And I said, "What is that?" They said, "Disability." I said, "Well, what is disability?" Because we used to work until they caught you out by the toe or the head or feet under your nose. So I said, "Well, what is that?" So once I went and found out, I said, "You know what, I'm going put it for my disability," because by that time I had carpal tunnel, other issues with other issues that went with the issues I already had. I said, "I'm getting out of here." And so once I put it for things and everything agreed upon and everything was straight and I'm not cheating no government or no this and that. Finally I was able to retire.

Rachel (00:09:28):

At what age?

Ms. Johanna (00:10:29):

Let see. I must have been ... Well, I've been at this garden for 20 years. So it must have been sixties. I was about 60. So I was four, three years, something short of regular retirement at 63 or something like that. But I went out on disability. So when I finished with that, my mind was very busy. The rest of me was falling apart. But my mind was still active. I went to the Brooklyn Public Library when their computers came in. I became a computer coach. I taught keyboard at two different libraries. When you coming in everybody, I said, "No, you can't work that one finger." Read. And the computer had the keyboard in it. Take for five minutes every day, do the keyboard. You don't know what, and these are young people, you don't know what job you may be getting. You must memorize the keyboard.

How you going to work doing? I see people do it, but it drives me crazy. Anyway, so I taught keyboard at one of the, the libraries. I also taught crochet, knitting, arts and craft, sewing. Then I joined Brooklyn Botanical Garden. I became master composter and a couple other things, can't remember what all of them are. We started a garden club called Olympus Garden Club. And it was basically a quote unquote, "all Caucasian" garden club. And when we joined, we had three master composters. One of

them was something else. They worked for this big company in Long island and he had retired from the Air Force.

He was a landscaper, not really a land, but he knew all about plants. So they would have him come in. What's entitled people? Somebody would come in and say, "I have to have so and so and so and so and so." And he'd be standing there minding his business and he'd be looking at something. And when he'd be looking at it and he says, "You have to help me." Lenny was six foot three and medium complexion. But Lenny didn't take numbers. And someone would say, you know what entitled people are on on the Internet, right? Excuse me! Excuse me!

And he would turn around and according to what mood he was in, he would say, "Yes ma'am can I help you?" But if he didn't like the look of whoever it was, he says, "What the hell do you want? I don't work here. Go find ..." And they would naturally straighten up. And he would come to meetings, be in meetings, he would come to meetings and we'd be laughing for a half hour. I said, "Lenny, why you intimidate?" He said, "I didn't like the way she looked. She had on too much lipstick," or the most ... I said, "Well, what if she had came in with a suit and a tie and high heels?" He said, he said, "Well, I'm a married woman so I couldn't say nothing to her." And we would just fall out because it was just like, okay.

I mean so much. I enjoyed so much of that time when we were within the clubs and the group because I always had to work. So I wasn't used to being with people who had. One had worked in a bank. He had worked, he was in the Air Force and retired, then he went into landscaping. Then another one, she was the head librarian at the library. The other one was a bank expert. So our particular club was just mixed up with people from everywhere. We had a good time. We would get in to meeting and spend half the time laughing about somebody's silliness than we did about work. Anyway, that subject was going. What else?

Then when I came to here was at East New York Farms. Starting had my own little box, did my own little thing, had my little crocheting.

Rachel (00:15:22):

How did you get involved with starting East New York Farm?

Ms. Johanna (00:15:25):

Because I had started farming in my backyard.

Rachel (00:15:30):

Here in East New York?

Ms. Johanna (00:15:32):

Yeah. Yeah. And it wasn't enough. And then somebody, they sent out papers or flyers or something about needing people to work at a garden. And so I had nothing to do and I used to ride my big old mono all around the place keeping myself busy. And then somebody I went in, I said, "Can I come in the garden?" And said, "Yeah, come on in." And I saw they had all of this land in there. I said, "Oh no, I need some of this land." So I started with that and the people then were nice.

I'll call his name in a minute. The head person was very nice. He was a man, very nice. Later on it got other people in. Anyway, I needed food. I needed something because of health issues that were not ... Health issues that food just didn't taste good to me. You get lettuce and then I couldn't stomach this

and I couldn't stomach there. I said, "You know what? I'll go back to the old way." I will put some seeds or something in the ground and I'm going to eat my food.

Rachel (00:16:52):

It would taste better.

Ms. Johanna (00:16:54):

This food is terrible. It had no flavor. And the most thing is people from Barbados use a lot of thyme. You know what thyme is? In food. When you find it, it'd be all dried and shriveled up and everything.

I said, "I don't care if I don't do nothing but they put thyme in rice. They put thyme in meat. They put thyme in everything." So growing my own thyme, I said, "Oh, I like this here." Let me put some mint there so I can make cough syrup. And I started doing a lot of whatever in one little box and what happened was this woman came into the garden, and she said, "Miss, can I have some of your tomatoes?" I said, "No, you can't have none of my tomatoes. You want to buy some, you can have some, but you don't want to buy nothing, goodbye. Have a nice day." She said, "Oh, well I ..." and I'm looking at yeah, yeah. Make any excuse you want, but you want some tomato. You can buy some reasonably. Now at that time, I think tomatoes are 79 cents a pound or something like that.

But they were really what the Spanish people call, you know what [inaudible 00:18:09]. Ooh, they were horrible. So I said, "Well, look, here's what I'ma do. I'm going to wash this knife off, cut it an half. If you like the taste, you can buy some. You don't like it, goodbye, have nice day." She ate that tomato and she said, "Oh, let me buy two pounds from you." And said, "Okay, that's \$6," because the tomatoes were like tomatoes. They weighed a pound of piece. So she came in, she got the tomatoes and she went home. And about a half hour later, 45 minutes later, she came back. She said, "I need some more tomatoes." I said, "What you going to do with all in tomatoes?" She said, "I stopped by the [inaudible 00:18:54] my apartment building ad all the old cronies was out there. And I washed off the tomato and sat on the step and they wanted to know where I got those tomatoes from."

So she said, "I can get some more." I said, "Same price." She said, "Okay." So this woman must have went out there, and I mean I had tomatoes, because once tomatoes start, they ... I had tomatoes. So she must have went out of there with \$50 worth of tomatoes. I don't know what she did with them but I got 50 bucks.

Rachel (00:19:27):

Wow.

Ms. Johanna (00:19:28):

So I said, "I'm going to hold on this \$50 until I see some shoes or something that I want." Now, meanwhile, I was still in their garden. Then I said, You know what? I could buy my own tools. I could buy this. I could buy seeds for next year," whatever it is.

I didn't think nothing. Bye. Next week, Friday she comes back. She said, "Hi." I said, "Hi." She said, "Can you do me a favor?" I said, "It's going to cost you." She said, "Whatever it cost me. I don't care." But I was like, how you say? Laughing with you? Right?

Rachel (00:20:06):

Yeah.

Ms. Johanna (00:20:06):

And she says, "I need the same amount of tomatoes this week as I had the last week." I said, "Okay." I said, "You see that box right there?" I said, "You go pick them tomatoes because I'm not moving." Said, "You go pick them. Let me see what you have. And it's the same price." So she comes, she picks \$50 more of just tomatoes. I said, "By the way, I don't know what you're doing with them but I have mint and I have thyme." She said, "Thyme?" I said, "Yeah, I'm going to give you a sprig so you know what thyme is."

Next week, she came back, she needed thyme, she needed tomatoes, she needed ... And then the cucumbers started coming. I had some cucumbers like cucumbers and she said, "What about the cucumbers?" I said, "A dollar a piece." Now, you know what cucumbers look like. She said, "Oh, I have to go get the shopping cart," because that's how much you is buying from me in the garden. My box, my long box. I had cucumbers here, tomatoes here, thyme in between, not knowing what I was doing, of course. Tomatoes here and cucumbers there, whatever. I had these long, I don't even remember where I got these long beans. They're over there, but long beans this way. I said, "Here, let me show you what I really have in here." And I showed her the beans and showed her this. I had okra. Now people from the Caribbean love okra.

Rachel (00:21:45):

I love okra too.

Ms. Johanna (00:21:48):

My grandmother used to make something called Cocoo. That's from Barbados. The people from Aruba and [inaudible 00:21:57] calls it funji, but they don't add the okra to it. The other country do. I had okra that long. Soft, fresh, like the tip have to be soft and fresh. She comes back, I said, "You know what I'm going to do for you?" I said, "Since you buying stuff, I'm going to give you a pack, a sample of whatever it is I have here. Then you go to each one, see what they want, then tally it up and let them pay for it." And I said, "As you're doing this here, I'll give you half price on what you buy." She said, "You will?" I said, "Yeah. What am I going to do with all this? It's only me. I got more. If I want a tomato, eat a tomato. If I want whatever it is.

She comes back and the guy comes in from Cornell and he said, "Hello, miss." I said, "Hello, how are you?" He says, "What you doing?" I said, "This lady comes every single week and she wants fresh tomatoes or whatever it is I have in my plot. And I've been selling it to her because eventually I want my own garden and I'll need tools and I'll need seeds and whatever else it is I need." He says, "Why do you want your own garden?" I said, "Because then I could be the boss to do what I want to do." He says, "Okay." He says, "What's your name?" I told him my name. And he said something, how do I get in touch with you? I say, "You find me here or here's my phone number." He says, "Because we need you to sit in on our meetings." And I said, "Okay."

I was [inaudible 00:23:40] I thought I don't want to be sitting in on a meeting. Anyway, so the next week comes in. No, they call me from the daycare center and the lady, she said, "Somebody needs you to come to a meeting on such and such a date." And I said, "Okay, where at?" And she told me, and I said, "No, I need a better address than that because if I'm coming by subway, I need to know whether I'm going left, right north, south, east, or west." So they had it at the Siemens Club or something. And I had to walk up these long flight stairs. And I looked out and I don't like elevators. I don't care what. If you was in elevator, I don't want to know about it. And I said, Miss, is there any way else to get up these flight of stairs?" She said, "No, it's only a two story building."

I said, "Okay, I'll make it." So I had to walk slowly up the stairs, whatever, got there, sat down, what next? Went next. get in there. Oh my goodness/ They had coffee, they had cookie, they had tea. I was like, "Oh, this must be a big meeting." And I said there and I said, "Okay, what's [inaudible 00:25:01]?" So we finished with the meeting and what it was is that ... He's my baby.

What it was that they wanted to start a farmer's market in East New York. But it had to be a way that we had to make a certain amount. It wasn't a lot. I think maybe it was \$300 to prove that it was a place for a farmer's market in East New York. And I said, "Well, I don't know about you \$300, but I know I made more than \$300 because I need it. I wanted to do my own garden." So we did this, we did that. And we started the farmer market on New Lots Avenue right now it's the washer, the laundry is there, in that spot, and a furniture store is in that same spot.

Rachel (00:26:08):

It used to be a lot. It used to be a garden and then [crosstalk 00:26:12].

Ms. Johanna (00:26:12):

It used to be a lot, an empty lot. It used to be a empty lot. But now the laundry mat is there and then the furniture store is there. And that's the only two things that's there. It's right down there where Western Beef used to be. And across the street, there was an alleyway. There was six old doors there. We got some milk crates, put the milk crates on the door, the doors on the milk crate, put the tablecloth on it. And we just stood there and people would come out of the Western Beef and would want thyme and sage and different herbs and stuff, mint and stuff.

I sold out within hour because you could not get those things here. So after we did that, I think it was \$300 we had. Oh, I had house plants, the snake plants I had [inaudible 00:27:12] and whatever those house plants I started. And some of them, I think I got them from Green Thumb. After I became a master composter, it was a lot going on at the same time. I got to a master compost, took classes here, there, and all that. Got involved with Green Thumb, blah, blah, blah.

So it was within a years time, there was a lot of things that came my way and I joined all these things because I didn't know what I was doing. And I joined all of these things. And so I said, "Oh, I can do this. Let me do this. Let me put this." And then don't forget, even though the season was going, I did a lot of experimenting because nobody told me I couldn't do it, so I experimented.

Rachel (00:28:03):

What kinds of experiments?

Ms. Johanna (00:28:06):

Growing herbs, starting things in a bottle, putting dirt in a bottle and turning it sideways and then taking the part I cut off and put it on top and made a little greenhouse.

I ain't going to give all my secrets, but I did a lot of experimenting.

Rachel (00:28:26):

You said you didn't know what you were doing. Does that mean you hadn't ever gardened before? When did you learn how to grow food?

Ms. Johanna (00:28:37):

Well, let's put it this way. We lived in Bedford Stuyvesant and we had a big backyard and every summer, my grandmother would grow thyme, okra something else she used to buy, and mint and it's another because she had asthma very bad in the summer. And I don't know what that other herb was, but she used to grow it in her backyard. And we had two dogs, Mickey and Spike and they would let them out, but they knew they did not want to hear my grandmother's voice tell them, "Don't you go near my garden." And Mickey would turn around and look at her like, "Don't you look at me. Don't you go near that garden." And I mean, this is a big yard, big, big yard. And hers was a kitchen garden, right off the kitchen window.

So he had the whole backyard to himself and she had this, as long as this table on this side. So he'd go out the shed. She said, "Don't you mind." No, she would say, "[inaudible 00:29:49] Don't you mind I looking at you." And he looked back at her and it was funny. It was like you're talking to a child and he would look at her and she would look at him. She'd say, " [inaudible 00:30:05] if I come outside, I going to cut your behind." That dog would turn around there and go all the way over there in the other corner, away from whatever was here, do what he had to do. And that was it. You never had worry about him going in there. He would not go. He would turn around and look at her. He would come out the shed door, turn around and look at her to see if she's watching and run over there. That was his corner.

We used to sweep up once a week. But like I said, I'm 80 now. I'm still here. So I guess I didn't die. She didn't die until she was 90 and the rest of the family to and died that they were 70, 80 years old. So I think it was all right. We didn't have all that stuff they got now anyway. So that's what made me interested in gardening. And plus I had a respiratory ailment and at that time, money was inch me pinch me. And she would make this cold syrup out of the mint, the various mints she had. One of her secret ingredients, which to this day I have no idea what it was. And if we got colds, that's what she would give. She gave that stuff, honey, that cold be gone tomorrow. So that's what made me interested in gardening.

Even what also made me interested in gardening is when I worked, you have the medical coverage and stuff. I caught a bad cold. You catch a bad cold in January you may not get rid of it till March. And I caught this horrible. It was like, I couldn't breathe. I couldn't sit up. I couldn't lay down. I couldn't do nothing. So I get to the doctor and he gives me this cold remedy, cold medicine. I called Rite Aid. They don't have it. I call the other Rite Aid. They don't have it. Well, I didn't call. They call. Call the other Rite aid. They don't have it. Called Walgreen. They don't have it. What am I going to do? Why don't you people have medicine? You ought to know if you take, sorry. If you take the last one off the shelf, don't you order next to the last one, don't you know, you're supposed to order it?

Nobody had it. I said, "You know what? Let me go down to the garden. Something has got to be coming up. Something has got to be coming up." Even if it was a little bit, I'll make my own cough medicine. And I went over there to that spot. You see where the rain barrel is?

Rachel (00:28:37):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ms. Johanna (00:32:54):

And there's a big, this is longer than this table box. I had black mint, white mint, chocolate mint, spearmint, peppermint, lemon ball, not lemon grass that doesn't come up to later, but whatever mint was there, I had it there. And I said, "Ooh." I got a little bit of this little went home, put it in the pot with some water, stopped at the liquor store, got some of that rock and rye. You know what rock and rye is? Okay, so rock and rye. I said, "Oh, I got some Mount Gay Rum. Let me go see where [inaudible 00:33:28]



because you can't get Mount Gay Rum, well at that time you couldn't get Mount Gay Rum, but that's the best Barbados rum.

Put it in, took like two cap fulls of that rum and that rock and rye. I put it in a pot and let it simmer took a warm, warm bath, wrapped up about three blankets. I sat in the lounge chair went to sleep. Girl, about five o'clock in the morning. I woke up my head hurt, my back hurt, my ears were ringing. My stomach was upset and everything was upset. So I went, ran upstairs and I said, "Oh my gosh, I think I'm dying."

But when I got better do whatever nature called the duty was, let me tell you, I felt 100%, 100%. My eyes were not running. My nose was cleared up. My stomach wasn't that clinching stuff. And I said, "You know what? This stuff really works." I couldn't remember her cough syrup remedy, but I made my own. So that's what made me start herb and garden of east New York. I said, "If I need these things, where am I going there full of pesticides and I don't know where they came from. I might as well start my own."

Rachel (00:34:50):

When was them?

Ms. Johanna (00:34:51):

1999. Think it says here own the paper.

Rachel (00:35:05):

Yeah, it says that was the first vendor at the market in 1998. And then so in 1999 you started the garden here?

Ms. Johanna (00:35:14):

Right. And when I started here, I kept that little box there because it was closer to where we were going to set up the farmer's market. Because I was a computer operator and the library had just gotten their computers and everything was free then, I was able to type up flyers and give it to people coming down that street. Where are you going to give them to people who are not coming, give it to people going this way or give it to people going that way. And the train station on New Lots down Strickland Avenue is only down the street and around the corner from that farmer's because the farmer's market is on [inaudible 00:36:01], just like whatever. So I would go out there and give people the library and people and get up Sunday morning and give it to the people, whatever it is.

I did my own thing. And eventually we started getting people. I went to the senior citizen centers, went to what's that big place there? Star city. And gave our choir. Nobody told me to, but I say, you want people, we're not on TV advertising. We needed to let people know we were here. And it was pretty good. Within days or whatever it is. So everything that I made, went into the garden. I would buy my own fertilizer, which would be the compost. I bought my own fertilizer. I bought my own tools because at that time, Green Thumb wasn't giving away tools. So the fertilizer, tools, my own beds, my own seeds, I would buy yarn and make crochet hats because then in the fall you get a little, one side. So my table was always a mixture. I have hats, baby blankets, slippers, what else?

And of course the herbs. And then I got the fig trees. I could never, ever have enough figs. This is a cherry tree here. I haven't seen any cherries on it this year. For some reason, that's ginkgo. People who know what a ginkgo is would come and get the ginkgo. I have a juniper bush that's over there. That bozo had cut my juniper bush. Ooh girl, I haven't lost my temper like that in 20 years. Well, I called

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everything, but the wrath of God on him. I said, "How could you go there and cut my juniper bush? Juniper is a winter Bush. It does not get cut in the middle of the summer. In fact, you see it over there?"

Rachel (00:38:10):

Yeah.

Ms. Johanna (00:38:11):

That's my juniper Bush. He cut them big limbs. Now what do I do with juniper, just to digress, I take the juniper bush and I make little, put little red ribbons on it.

And at the end of say last day of the farmer's market, I will give it out to my customers. And I tell them you go put it in your car. And the little berries is what they made gin out of.

Rachel (00:38:38):

Right, right.

Ms. Johanna (00:38:39):

And I would take them. Here's two things you can do if you're going to put them in your car because the needles fall off. You could have a lady friend cut the stocking from here to here and put a knot in it and put the little juniper in it and put it underneath the-

Rachel (00:38:58):

Oh. And then it smells good.

Ms. Johanna (00:39:00):

It smells good.

Rachel (00:39:01):

That's nice.

Ms. Johanna (00:39:01):

So I made, I did a lot of things. Okay. Nobody told me to do most of the things I do is because I think about, oh, let me give them a thank give for coming to the table because remember you're coming back next year and you want them to remember you.

Oh yeah. Okay. And I come from working in a TV company where you have advertising, blah, blah, blah, blah. So I did okay. But like I said, every thing, whatever it was that got made here went right back in here, seeds getting some of the lazy now to do, to move, move things. I mean they want to be paid. And so I made money, but I didn't because it all went back here. I used to go cook my big pot. I got to find it. I would make herbal tea and anybody passing by. Thank you for whatever it is. I'd give out tea. I used to make tea up there too. Used to make tea up there and that tea would sell. But like everything else, you could do things in such a way, and then when everybody copies you, you're not making no money. And that's what happened.

Rachel (00:40:34):

Yeah. Of course, of course.

Ms. Johanna (00:40:35):

Everything I did is like AT&T started a cell phone, now you got a hundred cell phone. Right. But there's so many people it's okay. In a farmer's market, you have people, but you don't have Times Square people like on New Year's Eve night. So everybody has to have their own little customers do their own little thing. Well, we had a group there. I have something called Egyptian walking onions. And then I have something called flowering garlic. I will buy this here. So and so. So they paid for it. Not knowing they didn't use it. What they did was buy it and turn around and put it in their garden. And the following season, you'll say, "Why nobody's buying onions? Why nobody's buying garlic?"

Because they were at the beginning of the garden and I was more or less in the middle of the farmer's market. And I was more or less in the middle. So I would get the people coming from Livonia Avenue, but they would get all the people coming from New Lots, which is a much more busier street. And I said, "Well, when I go back there, I look at them," I said, "You know what? Do me a favor. Don't come to my table no more. Don't buy nothing from mine. I don't care if you paid for it."

They would come. I got these beans. They're back there. They're beans that most the people from India, Bangladesh. Well, Bangladesh is in India. But anyway, people -

Rachel (00:42:16):

Oh, those long beans.

Ms. Johanna (00:42:16):

Those long beans.

Rachel (00:42:16):

I've seen that.

Ms. Johanna (00:42:19):

And the other one is the symes. S-Y-M-E-S or something. The symes bean. The people from Ghana like those. I have those back there also. You don't have film on here, you could take a picture of the coocoos, my award winning coocoos. They didn't like that my garden came in first prize for Green Thumbs.

Rachel (00:42:46):

The harvest fair?

Ms. Johanna (00:42:49):

Yes. They didn't like that at all. And then I had a friend of mine, he was an artist going to school and it's over there somewhere. I don't know how it got messed up, but anyway, I had it in the closet and they came and took everything out of wherever, the shed and did it and it got messed up. But he made me a great big banner on this black fuzzy material.

And it had a queens hat. Then it had the coocoosi and the corn and everything on the side. They didn't like that either. They were very upset with that. But I told them I don't care. I said, "This is my [inaudible 00:43:29] farmer's market." You came after the fact. You waited to see how it was go. You didn't put an input in it. But every time we have a meeting, they would say, "Oh, I would do so and so." And I would look at them and I wouldn't say nothing.

Plus at the time my friend, Ms. Oliver was alive and she was sitting next to me. She would look at me, but I'd getting ready to tear somebody's throat out for sitting up there telling lies and she'd tell me, or she take me, reach out and touch me. What? I said, "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I promise. I promise. I promise." Well, she had to get my ... I was ready to go up there and do murder because they would sit and lie. I did this, I did this. I bought this to the market. You ain't bring nothing there. And then they were from Jamaica. So it was, "And my country," listen, excuse me. Last time I knew when I woke up this morning, I was in the United States of America.

Rachel (00:44:42):

Now let me ask you a question. This is a question that I ask everybody. It's the founding question for the interview. And the question is when you think about global warming, what do you think about and how do you feel?

Ms. Johanna (00:44:58):

Say that one more time.

Rachel (00:44:59):

When you think about global warming, what do you think about and how do you feel?

Ms. Johanna (00:45:05):

I feel very upset. I feel upset because I watch YouTube and it's the other one.

Rachel (00:45:15):

Facebook?

Ms. Johanna (00:45:17):

Not Facebook. It's the, I can't remember, but it's another one that tells you about animals in Africa and how the animals in Africa are dying because the people are taking over the land or this is the last species or there's animals in cages because their habitat has been lost, like the orangutans and the elephants. And this is the last wild herd of this. And this is the last wild herd of dogs. It's very upsetting to me, very, very upsetting. I watch these things late at night because I'm not a good sleeper and it just makes me sick. How could humanity? You are supposed to be the smartest thing that was created. And yet still you ride, you know that in Australia, this is the crossing from, they put a road, wait a minute, they put a road right in the middle of where the platypus go to lay eggs or whatever it is.

And then you don't know not to go a hundred miles an hour because you put the road there. Now the platypus is trying to get from laying eggs or whatever.

Rachel (00:46:39):

Right. One side to the other.

Ms. Johanna (00:46:41):

From one place to the other. And you come down there, you could find 10 dead mamas laying on the road because you are too stupid and evil to know that this used to be where the platypus lived. Just like they had that bad fire in Australia and the koala bears, well, they don't know, their thing to flee and save themselves is to go up the trees. Well, the trees are on fire. They don't understand that the trees are on

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fire. They know that if they run up the trees, they're supposed to be safe. So a lot of koalas died and a lot of land was ... What's the word? Decimated? Is that the correct word?

Rachel (00:46:41):

Yeah.

Ms. Johanna (00:47:32):

Was just gone. And they were finding this woman that'll show you a woman, she took off her shirt to take the koala out the tree and wrap the baby in her shirt to take her to a place where it could be cured, Bondi clinic or something like that. I just feel horrible. I mean, I love animals. I love dogs and cats. But when I see these things, it's almost that humanity is a word I think I want for imploding. Is imploding on their self.

Rachel (00:47:32):

I agree.

Ms. Johanna (00:48:12):

Okay.

Rachel (00:48:12):

Yep.

Ms. Johanna (00:48:13):

And you don't have sense enough. You want this lawn to go from here to the gate, but all you want to do is put pesticides and you don't know that you're killing off the Monarch butterfly. You don't know you're killing off the honeybees. You don't know you're killing off the wasps. You don't know you. They're eating this stuff or the dew from the soil and they're eating these herbicides and they're dying.

Rachel (00:48:51):

Have you noticed any changes here locally in New York and has it affected you and how you grow food?

Ms. Johanna (00:48:58):

Well, I noticed that this year I have not seen the Monarch butterfly and she only eats milkweed and I have not seen her all yet. And milkweed is a weed, is not basically something good. You shouldn't have a lot of it, but I have three big bushes in a corner somewhere. So if she comes through, she has milkweed. That's the only thing she eats. And you do know that she goes from here or wherever, California, whatever crosses the Pacific ocean to go spawn in Mexico. And one year Mexico was really cold and she wind up dying.

So it's very, very sad, very, very sad. And it's like -

Rachel (00:49:56):

I'm just going to move your scarf. It's over ...

Ms. Johanna (00:49:57):

Oh, I'm sorry. And it's like, you don't care. So what? The next generation. What next generation? There was a movie book too. It was a movie made, it was black and white. And it was about the grasshopper and the ant type of thing, same scenario. Where it was made in black and white, where one side knew certain believed that something was announced and they believed it. And they decided to go up on their rooftops and put a garden up there so they would have food over the winter. And the other side didn't do nothing, but get out there and play music all day or night or whatever it is they did and have a good time and party.

And that got cold, they realized there was no food. So what they did? First thing they did was go across the street and they warn the people across the street who kept saying, "We'll help you, but you got to help yourself. You didn't help yourself. Now you want to come over here and get our food." And they did things like make secret tunnels in the house that they lived in. So when you passed like this door or whatever it is, it was really like when you opened it, it was nothing but cement, but really and truly, it was another door that was locked from the other side.

It was really good.

Rachel (00:51:22):

What movie was that?

Ms. Johanna (00:51:23):

I can't remember what it was. I can't remember. I don't know. I'm trying to think if Harry Belafonte was in that movie, he may have been, I'm not sure, but I remember that movie. I'm a movie buff. I can't remember the name of it, but it was like the last Robo Cop that they did was they were moving people out of the slums and they were moving people out of the slums.

So they were telling them, "Oh, come on, we're going to take you some place," but really what they were doing, I think was taking you to places like a concentration camp, so they could level this whole old block and then put in all these here high rises and it was basically the same thing. It's amazing. But like I said, I'm a movie buff. Sometime I can tell you the movie from beginning to end and who was in it and I can't remember the title. But it's just, like I said, with this global warning, as you say, it's just horrible to know that you don't have sense enough to value the trees. You don't have sense enough to know that if you keep doing the things that you do, I won't be here to see it.

Rachel (00:52:48):

So has it affected how you grow food at all? Have you noticed?

Ms. Johanna (00:52:52):

Well, yeah, because I find that this summer has not been as hot as it normally be. We have not had that sweltering heat. We haven't even had one week, solid week of that. Oh, let me get out of this house because it's so hot I can't stand it. We haven't had it. It's changing. It is changing. We haven't had the rainfall. I think we had one good storm or two good storms, but normally I don't have to fill up the rain barrels, but I've had to fill up the rain barrels.

No gardener wants to see rain when they have to garden, but we want to see rain the day we not in the garden, if you understand that.

Rachel (00:53:40):

Yeah, yeah.

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Ms. Johanna (00:53:41):

Okay. If I get up at six o'clock in the morning, I don't want to see no rain.

Rachel (00:53:47):

Right, right. Of course.

Ms. Johanna (00:53:47):

I want to come and do it and if it rains, when I want, I don't care at all, but yes, I've seen it because some things that should have produced a lot did not. I had to water and fill up the rain barrels when rain water is because the hydrant because the hydrant has fluoride or whatever it is. And I had to fill up rain barrels. That takes time when I could have been doing other things.

Rachel (00:54:22):

Right. Right.

Ms. Johanna (00:54:24):

Anything else?

Rachel (00:54:28):

Are there any questions that I didn't ask you that you expected me to ask you or wish I had asked you?

Ms. Johanna (00:54:33):

No, because I never do interviews. I only did it because you asked me to and nobody can see my face. And I just wanted to tell that ... Oh, the other thing is that this side of Atlantic Avenue is basically safe for the gardens because I think it was our council person or congressman who said they didn't want these high rise buildings on this side. And as you know, Brooklyn Botanical Garden is still fighting the fight for light or something because some idiot wants to put this building and where he wants to put this 20 story building -

Rachel (00:54:33):

That's so horrible.

Ms. Johanna (00:55:22):

Will kill their hundred year old, 200 year old Ginkgo tree.

Rachel (00:55:22):

Oh, man.

Ms. Johanna (00:55:28):

Are you crazy? What do you mean? People don't need that. Of course they need that. You know how much that tree takes in the bad stuff. It cleans the air. That's a Ginkgo tree there. That's my Ginkgo tree.

Rachel (00:55:49):

And it's a beautiful tree.

Ms. Johanna (00:55:50):

It's a beautiful tree, beautiful tree. And you saying you don't care? Well, I guess you don't care because you are not going to be around after for 10 or 15 years from now. And that it was one, another one of those movies where this man went and gathered all this stuff made this big old ... Ah. There was a movie with [inaudible 00:56:28] about real war. And I think he was an English man that got shot down and the Nazis were looking for them. But what he did was the girl's brother was a cripple and he had this boot made for him and to hide him from the Nazis, they made [inaudible 00:56:52]. He said my brother and they don't know where the brother were at. And put on this boot and he would wait tables.

So if he's got a boot on, you know he's not a soldier. All right. That makes sense. And he would go there and he spoke German too. And all of the stuff was going on. And he told them that he had to find a way to get out of where they were. So if they were on Pennsylvania Avenue, he had to get from Pennsylvania Avenue to the last street that's here in Brooklyn to get to the headquarters, to give them all this me information of where the Germans or whatever was and what he did with that boot leg, he said, he put all the information in the sole of the boot and then he'd re leather the boot. And what he did was if they caught him, of course they would've said he was a spy. But the crux of the story is they making me forget the train of it is that you have to do things sometimes to camouflage what you're doing in order to be successful basically.

And when he did that, he found, that's why I was trying to remember what the whole thing. He found the map because they figured, well, he don't know. He can't go. And they left the map on the table. I was trying to remember this picture and the word was Cairo, C-A-I-R-O which is the capital of ...

Rachel (00:58:34):

Egypt.

Ms. Johanna (00:58:37):

Yeah. Whatever. But under the C, when the Nazis went to Egypt, they bought in things, planning for a war. Now this was this movie now. I don't know if it's true. So under the C, they might have put petro or under the R they might have put food. C-R-I, they might have put bandages and or whatever it is. Now you have to remember, it is not Cairo, it's Cairo. So there's so much. They're miles apart, whatever it was. They did not figure on the heat of the Sahara Desert and the amount of soil they put on top of these things that they buried because remember they were supposed to go in that archeologist, right?

When they got there, they found that the water bottles had bursts from the pressure. So they had no water. When they got there, they found that the ammunition was no good. The clothes had rotted and whatever else. The food rations had burst open and whatever it is. So supposedly this is why Ramo had to go back to Germany to get all of this stuff because you don't have no food for your people. What you going to do? You have no clothes, you have no water, you have no this and whatever. Now you can't expect the people to help you. Right? So this is one of the reasons that supposedly, I don't know how true a story it is, that Germany could not conquer Africa, because remember Africa had jewels and all those old stones and whatever it is.

And why the army basically lost because you can't run people on empty bellies, and no clothes. Their boots wear out and things like that. Very good picture. I can't remember. You got to find that movie. It's very, very interesting. Me personally, I believe it. This is what they did. And a lot of people don't know that supposedly one of the reasons that Hitler did all the things he did was cause he himself was sick. He had that shaking disease.

Rachel (01:01:13):



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Yeah, Parkinson's. Parkinson's.

Ms. Johanna (01:01:18):

Oh, he had Parkinson's. He had that. So he experimented on all these people to find a cure for what was wrong with him. I don't know, modern times. And like I said, I born in 1942 and this is whatever year, almost 80 years later, whatever it is. And it's just, just amazing that nobody understands that war don't help nobody.

Rachel (01:01:47):

That is so true.

Ms. Johanna (01:01:50):

Ms. Ms. Johanna, thank you so much.

Rachel (01:01:52):

You're welcome. I hope it was interesting.

Ms. Johanna (01:01:55):

It was fascinating.

Rachel (01:01:56):

Okay.

Ms. Johanna (01:01:57):

It's fascinating. It's so great to hear your stories and I just so appreciate you taking the time.

Rachel (01:02:05):

You're welcome. You're welcome.

Ms. Johanna (01:02:05):

With the experiences and your thoughts.

Rachel (01:02:05):

Thank you.

Ms. Johanna (01:02:07):

Very generous.