

Lori, 61 Franklin Street Community Garden, Greenpoint, Brooklyn  
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Lori (00:00):

My name is Lori Vroegindeweg and I am 38, soon to be 39 years old. I was born in New Jersey, not too far from the orbit of the city and moved here straight after college in 2004. And I've been a Greenpoint resident for now... I think this is going on 16 years. I'm raising a family here, two kids, I'm really invested in being here, and the garden is a big part of that. Yeah.

Rachel (00:39):

And how long have you been at 61 Franklin?

Lori (00:41):

I've been here since around 2014. A year after the garden began, I got involved.

Rachel (00:51):

And what kinds of things do you do here?

Lori (00:54):

Personally?

Rachel (00:55):

Yeah.

Lori (00:57):

Yeah, I help run the administrative side of the garden and I serve on the board. I've been on it I think since 2014 as well, and that means helping sign up members, doing tours, running meetings, and then I helped chair the Compost Committee for a number of years. I helped get our three-bin system going, and I also help run the education committee.

And we've gotten a couple different grants through that Greenpoint Community Environmental Fund, and we've done a whole lot of different projects, including a friend and I helped found and manage a kids' environmental program here, and we brought in a bunch of different workshops and this summer, we're doing a natural dye workshop next week. And we're doing a fire cider, an herbal workshop this summer. We're actually partnering with the library to do some story time, so activities that, we obviously hadn't been doing it this past year and we're excited to... We're starting to dip our toes back in.

Rachel (02:16):

Cool.

Lori (02:16):

But yeah, that's-

Rachel (02:18):

And what's your relationship been to gardening before you started at 61 Franklin?

Lori (02:24):

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Yeah, really growing up, I didn't have much experience with gardening. And then I had a life-changing experience. On a bike trip that I was doing, I WWOOFed at a farm for a month in... I think that was 2008. So I stayed on a farm for a year... not for a year, for a month.

And I think from there, that really ignited this desire to be more involved in gardening and environmental efforts back here when I got back, and yeah, that was the start of me becoming more involved.

Rachel (03:19):

And what exactly was that ignition? What did gardening and farming do for you?

Lori (03:28):

Well, I guess specifically that farmer introduced me to some writings, Wendell Berry, and a couple other writers that I started just becoming more aware of food systems and the inequities in our food, in our food web, and just becoming more conscious of my own personal choices within that. And yeah, I guess just a desire, I think, for a real connection to land came out of that. Yeah.

Rachel (04:23):

Cool. Okay. So I'm going to ask you a question that I ask everybody to begin this part of the conversation, but when you think about global warming or climate crisis, what do you think about and how do you feel?

Lori (04:50):

I feel I guess just deep panic, but then I am a real optimist. That's just my nature. I always try and be positive about things. So yeah, there's a lot of anger and frustration, I think that I live with around that, but then I try and turn that into positive action of things that I can actually control and help with in my local neighborhood.

So I don't try to dwell in the larger existential fear, which is real, and that I do feel, but try and turn that more into things I can help and do in my day-to-day life.

Rachel (05:53):

Because that fear is just so...

Lori (05:57):

Yeah. I mean, if I really sit in it, there's just real bleakness there about our shared future. And I think of my kids and what they're inheriting and I think I'm going to cry. I think how quickly that's going to change, and it just is really... Yeah. It's just devastating, when you really sit with that. I mean, I think that message is being at least, I don't know, heard, but at least taken up by media a little bit more urgently.

But yeah, even for myself, you can forget. You push it down, I think, the urgency of it. But yeah, I think it's really frightening and it's only getting worse and worse. So, yeah.

Rachel (07:49):

I know. I mean, you can't sit in the bad feelings, because it's just impossible and we do live in a world right now where we are able to forget. And I do think sometimes that forgetting is important, but I wrestle all the time with this dissonance around forgetting. Something that I've been thinking so much

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about is it's so easy for us to live in this world that we pretend like we're living in instead of the world that we're actually living in.

Lori (08:36):

Yeah, yeah.

Rachel (08:38):

And I think that's one of the big obstacles for most people. I usually come to this more at the end, but we're there already. So another question that I'm thinking about is how do you deal with the feeling of loss and with the feeling of grief? Where does that grief go? How do you manage that, if you feel like you're able to manage, feel, or handle it?

Lori (09:22):

I don't know. I feel very fortunate to have two kids because especially this past year, you just literally can't... I don't don't have time I feel like, to... It's just so in the moment with children, and there's so much joy there, they're just seeing the world with children's awe and wonder, that I just really try and focus on that.

I'm just trying to educate myself and them more about not about necessarily... although we do talk about climate change. But just about the wonders of the world and trying to know who. I don't know. I like to read a lot. I think that's a way to manage grief. Yeah, I don't know. Does that answer? I don't know.

Rachel (09:22):

Yeah.

Lori (11:06):

I'm not sure.

Rachel (11:06):

No, it absolutely answers the question. There's also not necessarily an answer. It's a really hard question and I'm asking it because I want to know the answer for myself.

Lori (11:18):

Yeah. I try and lead with I think talking about it and talking with other people. And talking about it with my kids, I think that's one way, not hiding it, I think talking about things is a good remedy or at least, I don't know. I take that, I like that just in general. I like that method, just putting things really upfront. Hi. How are you?

Speaker 3 (12:02):

This is all going here.

Lori (12:04):

Oh, thanks. So I think that's a healthy way in general of dealing with grief, is communicating that, and not hiding things. Yeah. Not that I want to scare my kids, but we definitely... I don't shy away from

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having those conversations, or I welcome. I just use the terms and we talk about climate change, or this is happening because of climate change.

I guess I'm a believer, and yeah, not shying away from that. I think that's a management tool in some ways.

Rachel (13:04):

What do you mean a management tool?

Lori (13:05):

Management of grief, how to manage fear or grief, is actually confronting or talking about it.

Rachel (13:21):

In what ways does climate change affect your day-to-day life? When does it show up for you?

Lori (13:34):

Certainly news. I feel that's the main source of... Yeah, just news articles, hearing what's going around in the world. I think strange weather patterns, being more aware of long drought or really severe storm, I'm more aware of that these days. Yeah.

Rachel (14:21):

What kinds of changes have you noticed? I mean, you've said you've been here for 14 years.

Lori (14:26):

Yeah. I know. Yeah, I think it's memory, I don't know. I'm not sure. I just started thinking about my own childhood and thinking about winters, maybe winters being in my mind, snow being so much more prevalent, and that feeling it's lessening, but not totally sure of my own memory. I don't know.

Rachel (15:16):

I know, it's really slippery.

Lori (15:18):

Yeah. Yeah. I know. I mean, just even growing up, we didn't have air conditioning. That's something I was thinking about last week. I mean now, it's a bit different, because I'm on a fourth floor walk up and we just have one AC unit in one room. But now, yeah, it's just funny culturally, people's... Sorry, this is a tangent.

Rachel (15:55):

Go for it.

Lori (15:55):

Go for-

Rachel (15:56):

Yeah.

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Lori (15:56):

No, just culturally, assumptions, what people expect as we progress. I don't know. I was just in a conversation, just small things, but just everybody expects to have central air or something. Just assumptions. And I'm like, "Oh, I didn't even grow up with AC in New Jersey." And now, that's just so the assumption and I don't know, I'm like, "It's summer, you're supposed to be just hanging out in your underwear in your apartment."

Rachel (16:36):

Right.

Lori (16:37):

Although we put on our AC when needed, but...

Rachel (16:45):

But I don't know. I mean, my husband and I have always been very frugal around our air conditioning. Our apartment has tall ceilings and the main area's open and we don't air condition it. It has a ceiling fan and then we air condition our bedroom when we really need to. We'll put it in at 2:00 in the morning in the middle of July.

Lori (17:08):

Yes. Yeah.

Rachel (17:09):

But we put it in earlier this year. And this year, it's starting to feel like it's more dangerous not to have another window unit in that apartment. We're starting to think maybe we should just put a window unit in and put it on low, but just get a little bit of cool, because when it's 100 degrees in the city, it can be dangerous. And that for me feels shocking and big difference.

We've been there for eight years, and it's hot. It's hot. It's not fun, but again, it's summer. You're supposed to be in your underwear, but yeah, this year feels different for me in terms of oh, I feel anxious about air conditioning. That's one of my environmental anxiety points. Yeah, because it has so much connotation that I'm like, "We might need to put another unit in."

Lori (18:07):

Yeah. We were just in New Jersey for a couple of... my kids were for a couple of weeks and then I joined them. But just suburbia, and it's just big house, central air. It's cool, or you're wearing full clothes. It's such a different-

Rachel (18:42):

I know, I hate that.

Lori (18:43):

I know, I know.

Rachel (18:44):

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I'm desperate to go outside.

Lori (18:46):

Yeah. Well, honestly, my folks don't keep it super cold. It was nice. I'm like, "This is nice." And then you go out, it's like, "Oh, it is hot." I can understand, but it just seems so... just big house. Yeah. I don't know.

Rachel (19:07):

When do you feel like, or have you felt like there was a time when the climate crisis showed up in your own backyard, so to speak, when you were confronted with the climate crisis in a physical way, material way?

Lori (19:27):

I guess, I mean, Hurricane Sandy, definitely. We had a friend who had to evacuate in Greenpoint. We weren't in the flood zone, but we're probably a block or two away from the flood zone. So I mean, in our area, we didn't lose electricity. We were fortunate to not. It felt pretty normal and everybody got off work and restaurants were open and it's strange, I wasn't affected by it, but my friend who lived five blocks over had to evacuate and she stayed with us for a night and you could walk down to the waterfront and it was flooded. These streets were flooded.

Yeah, it was serious stormage. It was really serious damage all over the city. And within our own area, it was definitely... I mean, obviously, we're a city of islands, which you can really easily forget. But I think that made me really realize, I'm like, "Oh, yeah, we're essentially a beach front..." Yeah. I mean, we are. The water is right here. We're surrounded all by water. And our creek, the creek is a heavily polluted body of water and we're really close to it. And yeah, I think that was a real turning point in my mind of thinking about how the neighborhood is just really fragile and is very... Yeah.

Rachel (22:00):

What would you say changed for you after that? And after having that realization, maybe that was the change, but...

Lori (22:17):

Yeah. I don't know. Honestly, this has been more gradual. I wouldn't say it was an immediate change, but... Hey! It's Lori, I'm forgetting your name.

Shereen (22:49):

Shereen.

Lori (22:50):

Shereen, yeah.

Shereen (22:50):

You're Lori?

Lori (22:50):

Lori.

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Shereen (22:53):

Yeah.

Rachel (22:53):

Hey, I'm Rachel.

Shereen (22:54):

Hey, yeah. I just wanted to come and check it out-

Rachel (22:58):

Oh, great.

Shereen (22:58):

... and pick up some herbs too.

Rachel (22:59):

Cool. Yeah, are you interested? You're interested in doing an interview?

Shereen (23:03):

I mean, maybe. I was like, I'll just mingle.

Rachel (23:05):

Okay, cool.

Shereen (23:05):

Are you guys in the middle of one?

Rachel (23:10):

We're in the middle, but yeah, just chill, and there's some donuts as well.

Shereen (23:18):

Oh, that's so sweet. Thank you.

Rachel (23:18):

Came to hang out.

Lori (23:26):

Yeah. It's so great. I know, thanks for coming. I was hopeful that members would just drop in. It's great. It's good.

Rachel (23:33):

What was it?

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Lori (23:35):

Yeah, I'm forgetting what the question was. What was it? Oh, the change-

Rachel (23:38):

What changed for you after that?

Lori (23:39):

The change. I think that, yeah, it was exciting. I think it was more gradual, but honestly, just thinking about... How should I put it? Permanence, of this place, of our neighborhood and I'm a renter and we're in a rental apartment. But we have lots of... in that time in my life when a lot of friends are buying and it's so incredibly... Real estate is obviously so crazy. But I'm a little bit like, I don't know if this answer this, but a little of me is just thinking about this place as impermanent a bit and being like, "It seems foolish to interact with the land in that way," you know what I mean?

Rachel (24:52):

Yeah, to buy a home, imagining-

Lori (24:52):

To buy a home.

Rachel (24:53):

... that it might be permanent. Yeah, I know.

Lori (24:57):

I'm like, "Whoa, that seems..." and that's not to say I don't... Yeah, I think that made me want to double down on being in the community in more of this way, in a communal trying to learn more about this type of Greenpoint environment and plants and focus on that versus focusing on the hustle.

Rachel (25:43):

Why does that feel more useful for you?

Lori (25:52):

How to put it truer? I think this is impermanent, this is potentially... I mean, we are just in a flood zone here and New York is going under water. I don't know. So it feels useful to focus on growing for... I don't know how I would describe it, but yeah, it feels useful spending time doing this type of work.

Rachel (26:53):

Yeah. The question that I've been asking for years, and that has been shifting for me this past year is what are the tools that we need? The emotional, psychological tools that we need to move forward into the future in a livable and sustainable and joyful way? And then also, what I've been asking myself now, as I've been thinking about... The climate crisis is the ultimate in discontinuation.

Lori (27:32):

Say that again, it's the ultimate-



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Rachel (27:33):

In discontinuity, we grew up with this sense of continuity. We're about the same age. I grew up building a life on the assumption of a predictable climate and for the most part, a continuous civilization. And climate crisis throws all of that into question. I think that's one of the reasons why it's so hard to face the crisis and figure out how to shift your expectations, your psychological mindset, your hopes and dreams for the future and your value system.

But as I've been talking to people here at these gardens, I'm thinking that gardens actually really feel one of the frontline tools we have to get back to a different set of values that actually do feel exactly what you said, something to hold onto more permanent than maybe the values of the hustle or success or something more material, even if I don't consider myself to be someone who's deeply material.

So I'm just struck by you saying that you've shifted your focus to engaging in your community in a more community-oriented way, in a more in touch with the earth... It just really feels it aligns with what I've been thinking about and the importance of these green spaces for people to move more gracefully into a transition. I don't know if you have had any thoughts around those questions.

Lori (29:36):

Yeah. You said it really eloquently. I liked that. Yeah, I'm like, "Yeah, totally on the same page." Yeah, I know. It just made me think of our parents' generation and it just being, I feel that Boomer... Are they Boomers?

Rachel (29:57):

Yeah.

Lori (29:57):

Is that the right... Yeah, just the solidity. Or at least, I mean, I guess a certain demographic. It's white and middle class, which is my family's background. Just the security, and my parents had the same job their entire lives, and how their parents were immigrants, but just that progression and yeah, exactly as you're saying, this moment of our generation and obviously, I'm probably on the cusp of younger.

And then the younger generation of just so much uncertainty around. I know personally, there's also something liberating I think there of I can just see the falseness of the stability that they thought they had, or I guess they did have. But-

Rachel (31:18):

But it was always a myth, right?

Lori (31:20):

Yeah, yeah.

Rachel (31:21):

I mean, some people were able to hold onto that stability, but it is still a myth, this permanence.

Lori (31:24):

Yeah. Yeah, totally.

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Rachel (31:32):

Wow. I love that you talk about there's a liberation in that.

Lori (31:38):

Yeah.

Rachel (31:38):

I don't know if someone's really talked about that yet in my conversations.

Lori (31:45):

Yeah. Yeah, I'm starting to feel.

Shereen (31:51):

I got bit up all last weekend, so I'm like, "I don't want to go through that again."

Lori (31:55):

I know. You might have to-

Rachel (31:56):

I know, my ankles.

Lori (31:56):

You may have to take off the top and go put it directly, because that squirter gets a little... Yeah, it gets caught up in there.

Rachel (32:06):

Yeah, talk to me more about the liberation.

Lori (32:09):

I think just not wanting what culture dictates and that being a useful thing, and so much of that being against the Earth, being anti... being like, "Well, I don't want a house. I don't want to have my parents' set up. I don't want a big house, in the... or I don't want all these material things," or I guess, I was thinking more of that being a liberating force. And then like you were saying, refocusing on trying to connect back to land more.

And yeah, like I said, I had a great, wonderful childhood and definitely was outside and things, but I feel like wasn't instilled with a deep connection to growing and these types of things. So finding that on my own in my adult life, that feels very liberating, and so much fun too, just learning about plants and there's so much to learn about. I feel as we know, just the resiliency of plants and trees and there's so much to learn from nature. And I just find that really exciting. Yeah. I just finished that book. Have you guys has read Parable of a Seller?

Rachel (34:23):

Oh, God.

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Lori (34:24):

Have you read that?

Rachel (34:25):

Yeah. Did you read a Parable of the Talents, the second one?

Lori (34:29):

No, I literally just finished the first book.

Rachel (34:31):

Oh, it's so good.

Lori (34:33):

It's really good.

Shereen (34:34):

What's it about?

Lori (34:36):

It's a dystopian world. It actually takes place in the 2020s. It was written in 1990s by this woman, Octavia Butler. And yeah, so it's a dystopian... It's set in California, right outside of Los Angeles. And the world has socially collapsed because of climate crisis, and this young woman is... I just found it really interesting. She's in this community that eventually is attacked and yeah, society as a whole has really gone back to there's water shortages, there's fires.

And they think that her family's in this very tight-knit community that's... But then eventually, that's attacked. She has to go on this journey. They're trying to go north to find a safer space to live. But in her preparation in doing that she studies all the plant identification, and she's trying to teach herself how to... survival. Yeah. Anyway, that just really struck me as yeah, she's trying to... This character is looking in guides and trying to learn about plant life.

I was like, "Wow." Yeah, how is the second?

Rachel (36:14):

Oh, it's so good.

Lori (36:15):

It's the same characters or different story?

Rachel (36:17):

Yeah. It's the same characters.

Lori (36:18):

Same characters.

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Rachel (36:19):

It's pretty bleak. But the books are bleak, but I also find fascinating, especially in the first one, her theology that she builds, this idea that God has changed. Also for me, that was such a signal of oh yes, we need to be nimble in the future. We need to be able to accept change, and move with change, and have change be apart of our continual present.

I just feel like Octavia Butler, that book, it's a handbook for building the tools you need.

Lori (36:56):

Yeah, yeah. Totally.

Rachel (37:00):

We talked about this, but I'll ask the question more specifically. How does climate change affect how you plan for your future?

Lori (37:41):

I know I want to live here and so that's definitely... I think about ways to just try and build community around green issues here. So that's one I think. And then two, I think... Yeah, definitely, just like I was saying, adjusting my desire. Really questioning what culture deems as desirable and-

Shereen (38:30):

How to not live in excess. I contemplate that a lot. Am I being excessive now? Do I really need this? Is it really contributing to my happiness, or my feelings of harmony? Yeah.

Lori (38:51):

Totally.

Shereen (38:53):

We live in a consumeristic society, so it's hard to step back and be like, "Okay, I don't really need to purchase this. And I could just go to the garden instead and find the same..." I guess because people are always trying to satisfy certain feelings or needs. And for me, it's shifting to, well, can a hike satisfy that need? Yeah, they can. So once you start realizing that though, because there's a lot of people who haven't made that connection yet, because they're so disconnected from themselves and what's going on in the world. So yeah, I guess I immediately thought excess, how do I reduce my desire for excess?

Lori (39:53):

Yeah. That really speaks to me, how you're... excess in material, but also excess, just how to control desire, what you think you want. Just changing that mentality as part of that.

Shereen (40:21):

I mean, but even in the hiking world, because I used to live in Colorado, and it was a big part of my life. Some things are excess. Everyone wanting to hike a fourteener, and everyone wanting to hike every fourteener in Colorado, and the keepers of the land, they're being like, "Hey, you guys can't all hike this fourteener. The land is eroding. Some of you need to make a new plan." That also needs to be balanced, because if too many people are out wanting to do this hike, it's destroying the habitat too. So I think

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sometimes, also applying it in that context, and I think that's why I love the garden because I feel it gives you enough. Yeah.

Rachel (41:28):

So, I'm going to switch gears a little bit. How much energy and time do you have? Do you have time for a few more questions?

Lori (41:38):

Yeah, I can.

Rachel (41:40):

I have no idea what time it is right now, actually. It's 11:15.

Lori (41:49):

Yeah. I can do a couple more questions. Okay. And then if Shereen, yeah.

Rachel (41:51):

Okay, cool. So what are the questions? Okay. How do you make sense of this moment? How do you contextualize it? How did we get here? Within the span of history, human history, within the span of Earth's history?

Lori (42:19):

Well, I guess I think it's pretty crazy. I always think of that... I don't know what you would call it, but when people talk about the history of the world and that humans, if you did it within a year, dinosaurs were came in December and humans December 29th, or December 30th, humans were-

Rachel (42:47):

I think it's even crazier. I think it's a stroke before midnight or something.

Lori (42:51):

Yes, yes, yes. Yeah, I always think of that and then within that, the history of humans, it's just the industrial age that all of a sudden, humans just started just polluting, spewing things into our atmosphere. And that's just within the last 100 and... It was the turn of the 20th century. That's crazy.

When you think of that, that's just, it's a blink of an eye within the history of the world that humans can just really shift, have this huge impact, which is just... when I think of climate deniers, to deny... I don't know. It's so clearly a manmade crisis. Yeah. So I guess that's how I think about it.

Rachel (44:07):

And what do you feel hopeful for?

Lori (44:14):

I think like we were just saying, when I come to the garden, I feel hopeful for plants teaching us things that we don't know, and more and more people tapping into that knowledge. I think it makes me

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hopeful my children just eat up this, when I bring them, when I bring my own kids and when I see other kids interacting with this world, if taught to, kids just love it.

And that makes me really hopeful. When I connect with more and more people that are on the same page, that makes me hopeful the more I live here, the more people I find to think about these things and want to help grow that. So that all makes me hopeful. Meeting you makes me hopeful. Yeah.

Rachel (45:33):

And my last question is just, were there any questions that you expected me to ask you that I didn't or hoped that I would ask you that I didn't?

Lori (45:43):

I don't think so. No, I don't think so.

Rachel (45:48):

And are there any questions you're asking yourself right now that may or may not have answers?

Lori (46:03):

I don't think so. Do you have any tools or how do you cope? What do you think about?

Rachel (46:15):

I'm trying to figure that out. I mean, I've been making art for years as a way to cope. And that work has shifted. For many years, it was unearthing my own anxieties and really trying to... really language and talking. And I made a bunch of projects that were really about figuring out specifically when I'm anxious for the future, what am I anxious for exactly? How can I pin down the abstract miasma of dread that I walk around with?

And then the work has shifted of how do I tell stories that help contextualize this moment and make me feel braver, and make me feel like what we were talking about, more ready for change, shifting my own expectations. I mean, I'm newly pregnant.

Lori (47:24):

Oh, yay!

Rachel (47:25):

Which it's really early, it's if you were someone I know, I wouldn't tell you. It's that kind of thing.

Lori (47:33):

Totally. Yeah.

Rachel (47:33):

But it's such an exercise. I mean, you have two kids, it is such an exercise in hope. And it was a big, big question. I don't know if you had the same questions for yourself when you decided to have kids, but I just ultimately had to be like, "I can't live in a world where there's so little hope that I can't imagine having a child who could live in some kind of future."

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But that also means shifting your expectations for what the future is. I don't know. Just trying to be brave and curious, that's what I'm thinking about right now. Yeah. Well, Lori, thanks.

Lori (48:22):

I know, thank you.

Rachel (48:23):

I really, really appreciate this conversation.

Lori (48:26):

Yeah, I do too. Thank you. Thanks so much.

Rachel (48:28):

Yeah. Thank you. I can take your-

Lori (48:32):

Oops.

Rachel (48:32):

... your microphone.

Lori (48:36):

Yeah. Thanks.

Rachel (48:37):

I know.

Lori (48:37):

This was great.

Rachel (48:38):

It was lovely.

Lori (48:39):

Yeah.