

Member of Red Shed Community Garden, East Williamsburg, Brooklyn  
June 20, 2021

Rachel (00:00):

All right, so now we're recording.

Member of Red Shed Community Garden (MRSCG) (00:01):

Okay.

Rachel (00:01):

So, tell me about, without like your name, but tell me who you are, where you grew up, where you live now. Your age or age range. What you do.

MRSCG (00:18):

Sure. Sure. So I'm 62 years old. I started off as a child being English educated first. My grandparents were gardeners for Lord... And I forget his name. I apologize. It will come to me later. It's a senior moment I'm having.

But he... You know what, Downton Abbey? Lord Cecil. That's the fella. Lord Cecil, and he was a gardener. I have a photograph of my great-grandfather holding a wheelbarrow, pruning roses for Lord Cecil. In, I'm not sure... It was something akin to Downton Abbey.

So my mother was a keen gardener. I developed the passion for horticulture by learning to grow cactus. I found them fascinating. Still do.

Rachel (01:19):

In England.

MRSCG (01:20):

In England, but then we moved to Ireland. My father's Polish, my mother's English, English educated. But I always had a love for gardening. I found it very calming, very peaceful.

And you have glass houses in the UK. You don't have these, what I call these plastic Quonset greenhouses, you have glasshouses. I think it's because of the climate. The climate tends to be more temperate. Rainier, not as...

The temperatures and the climate you have here in New York, you have these sort of fast and hard thunderstorms, right? Whereas in Ireland, especially, it was like this, what they call "The weather's very soft today." Meaning it's very misty.

Rachel (02:10):

The weather is very soft.

MRSCG (02:12):

Soft. It's a very soft [crosstalk 00:02:13].

Rachel (02:12):

That's so evocative.

MRSCG (02:16):

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Yeah, so it's a soft... When you go to Ireland, you'll hear somebody say, "It's a soft day." Meaning it's a very temperate day. The weather's very misty. It's this light showers, but it's not heavy rain. And it's always damp.

But that's perfect for growing plants. It's also not so perfect for growing plants that like warm conditions. So that's where you need greenhouses. Glasshouses, we call them. We don't call them greenhouses across the... We always call them glasshouses, because they made a glass.

Anyway. So I started from that as a kid, kept at it. Eventually went to the National Botanic Gardens in Glasnevin, Dublin. That's in North Dublin. And trained as a gardener for two years.

Of course, that was in the late '70s, early '80s. At that time there was no work available. Plenty of pot smoking at that time. We used to hang out in Amsterdam for a few months where you'd have these squats, right? It's a neighborhood called [foreign language 00:03:30]. It's all completely gentrified now.

But so yeah, a group. That's why you had the long haired hippie, there's something called a hippie look, all right? So yes, I do still love that certainly [inaudible 00:03:44], but then everything changed with the punk era. I love that too.

Anyway, so met my wife. She's from New York. My wife is also a gardener. She works for the parks. We don't get to spend much time gardening, she and I. We love these places within GreenThumb, because we have a chance to garden again. Go back to our childhood, go back to our roots.

I met her in Portland, Oregon, which is another great climate. Very soft weather. Fell in love with her almost immediately. She's Irish-American. We spent 10 years living, married, in Ireland.

And then we decided... I basically decided, and she felt more comfortable coming back to this country to go back to University of Massachusetts in Amherst, and do four years in... I did four years in regional planning and landscape architecture.

And that's going back, oh gosh, 20 years ago. And then I eventually became a landscape architect because of it. That's was long story. I warn you, I'm a storyteller. [crosstalk 00:05:04]

Rachel (05:05):

Great. That's what this... I mean it's an oral history. We want stories.

MRSCG (05:06):

[crosstalk 00:05:06] That's a story, okay?

Rachel (05:06):

Yeah.

MRSCG (05:07):

So stop with that and you ask me another question.

Rachel (05:13):

I'm going to ask you at the beginning of this conversation, questions about your memories of seasons and weather. And then how those seasons and weather, and also the landscape, might have changed. You've spent a lot of time in England and Ireland, and like 20 years in the Northeast.

So we'll kind of find our way through talking about those. But my first question is more about your childhood, and what were the seasonal rhythms that helped you mark time when you were growing up?

MRSCG (05:47):

Oh, well, I mean, when you're a child, you just expect winter to be cold and wet. Especially so in Ireland, because... Not necessarily a lot of snow, because the temperature's very even.

You know, you expected change, you expected springtime to be lush, green with plants, et cetera. You expected the summer to be warm. Not as hot and humid as it is here. It was kind of a normal life cycle. Never needed much thought really.

It was only when I started to note... When I became a landscape contractor in early '80s, mid '80s, because as I mentioned earlier, there was no work around. So you couldn't get a job. I found work. I put my name in the paper and just advertised myself as a gardener, just to try to get little cash in the hand.

Anyway, that developed into a business for about 15 years. Some of my clients used to be Guinness Brewery. I used to have a client that was the bass player at Def Leopard.

I've met Bono, talked to him about his... I didn't talk to him in his garden, but I did meet him when I had my first child at the Dublin airport. That was a terrific experience.

Rachel (07:11):

In the Dublin airport?

MRSCG (07:12):

Yes. Before he made it huge here in this country, globally, I should say. He was a gentleman. He was really cool.

So as a child, what I remember as a young man in my twenties and thirties, over a period of... As I said, I did it for about 15 years. I would cut grass, prune trees and shrubs, and weed and plant. And I started to notice that the weather was getting a little dry, even in Ireland at that time. And that's going back 1980s, '90s, right? Even then.

Rachel (07:59):

Really early.

MRSCG (08:00):

That early, okay? As a landscape contractor, it's essential, when you're cutting grass, to cut the grass dry. Because when you cut grass and it's wet, it really hurts the machinery. It erodes the blades, erodes away the motor very... Most of these things are petrol-driven, two and a half horsepower, five horsepower.

But because it's wet, the grass, it has more friction, which puts more strain on the engine, which basically kills diesel engines at the time. Because I was using diesel engines rather than petrol engines. Because diesel is an engine, it's more robust compared to gas. I say petrol, it's gas. Just another scientific... Okay?

I've noticed also, even though I'm in the office more these days, and for the last 20 years, that, especially in the last five, it's just getting hotter and humid. And now it really concerns me that,

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particularly on the West Coast of America, and more Midwest, how they're having accelerating temperature that's reaching record temperatures up to the hundreds and above.

Rachel ([09:18](#)):

Yeah.

MRSCG ([09:18](#)):

That's concerning. Deeply concerning. And that is not something that you can just dismiss in a few years. That is something the planet needs to heal over a period of decades. And the change, I may be quoting Greta Thunberg, she's right though. The change needs to happen now, in a global sense.

We really need to start thinking about becoming all vegetarians. Because the worst impact of all, environmentally, is not just from vehicles and from... What's the word I'm... Carbon producing factories. It's actually from commercial agriculture.

Rachel ([10:06](#)):

Yeah.

MRSCG ([10:07](#)):

For instance, you have acres and acres of cattle, sheep. So what do they produce? They produce methane, from their excrement.

Rachel ([10:16](#)):

Right.

MRSCG ([10:16](#)):

All that methane goes up into the environment. That's actually 10 times worse than all the cars that goes around the planet, believe it or not.

And I'm a hypocrite in that regard, because I still eat meat. Because, as I mentioned, I'm 62, and hard to change my ways. I am starting to go more organic. Thinking about starting to eat more vegetables. Not just for my health. It's not that.

It's basically just to support the local farmer here and support organic horticulture. Because of that. I know it's healthier, but it's really because of just to change your consciousness, right?

Rachel ([11:03](#)):

Yeah.

MRSCG ([11:06](#)):

So that's how I feel about that, really.

Rachel ([11:11](#)):

When you started noticing... What was that? Like 30 years ago, 40 years ago, that things felt drier. Did you have a context for that change that you started noticing? Or how did you [crosstalk 00:11:27]

MRSCG ([11:26](#)):

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How do you mean context?

Rachel (11:28):

How did you understand the change in the weather and the ecology?

MRSCG (11:33):

Well, because, as a landscape contractor, you're always outdoors all the time.

Rachel (11:37):

Yeah.

MRSCG (11:38):

So you become very mindful of the weather conditions. From a selfish point of view, actually. Not from an environmental point of view. Because you know that it's very difficult to operate machinery when everything's wet all the time, as I mentioned about grass cutting.

Or it's very difficult, when you're trying to weed and the soil is soaking wet, it's muddy. It's easy, of course, to do it when it's dry.

Rachel (12:06):

Right.

MRSCG (12:07):

But I noticed that, for sure, with that 15-year period. I mean, I started in particular noticing it in the middle of summer. And then the autumn would be cut... Instead of being a three month season, it'd become a four-month season. Maybe even a four-and-a-half month season.

So you're getting to the end of mid-November, end of November, and finally the weather would start breaking then. And this is in Ireland, you remember. This is in Europe. Have you been to Europe?

Rachel (12:32):

Yeah. But I haven't been to Ireland.

MRSCG (12:34):

Okay. Where have you been, by the way?

Rachel (12:37):

France, Spain, Italy.

MRSCG (12:40):

South, or north?

Rachel (12:42):

France, Paris. Italy, the north. Spain, sort of all over. Maybe like the mid-area. Not that far south.

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MRSCG (12:51):

Right. Okay. So yeah, the weather, it's not as fluctuating as here, but Paris would tend to be a little drier than the United Kingdom. Because both, the UK, British Isles, they're both islands.

They experience the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. And then they get the North Sea breezes. So they're going to get that cold winds. And by the way, Ireland is pretty much treeless. Because it's very much an agricultural country.

Rachel (13:27):

There were trees, but they were cut down.

MRSCG (13:29):

They were all cut down. Well, at the time and for decades, they have always been a poverty-stricken agricultural country. It's only just recently that it's become the Celtic Tiger, and it's become relatively wealthy with its GDP compared to the rest of other European countries. So yeah. And [crosstalk 00:13:53]

Rachel (13:52):

Was there a way you made sense of that? How did you make sense of that change? Like, did you know it in the context of global warming?

MRSCG (14:03):

Yeah, sort of. I mean, even then, I mean, we were taught about global warming 30 years ago. We were all about greenhouse gases.

Rachel (14:12):

Yeah.

MRSCG (14:13):

It's not something... It's not a unusual or unknown science. This has been going for... If not 40 years. This has been well known and documented. The issue is, unfortunately, is that it's starting to accelerate more and more now, at a more rapid pace.

In the beginning of, during my early twenties or late childhood, it was just a theory then. Relatively unproven, but accurate. Because it wasn't going up that much temperature-wise from a global point of view.

It's only now that people are starting to experience, particularly in this country with the bush fires in California. As I mentioned earlier about the rising temperatures on the West Coast of America and the Mid West.

And also, it's because there's a greater demand on food. So that means that most of the land is plowed. So the soil is, there's no plant material. It's all barren.

Rachel (15:26):

Yeah.

MRSCG (15:27):

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So that topsoil is exposed to the elements. What's happening is, and it's hard for me to relate to feelings, because I'm speaking more by science. But I know that it has a bad impact. Because what happens is, is that soil, that topsoil, gets eroded away.

As the temperature rises, storms get more frequent, and they become harsher, more vigorous. More soil gets eroded away. More fertilizers get added to the soil, which makes it more poisonous. It's all very unorganic. And it's all because of the demand put on the farmer to keep producing and to keep producing.

So we need, as a human race, is need to change globally. Globally. To make any sort of significant impact at all.

I was watching something on Netflix. There is a way of agriculture, what they call... You don't till the land anymore. You actually keep the grasses and a mixture of herbs and forbs, and nitrogen-fixing plants within the soil. And you try to plant within that... So it stops the erosion.

Because topsoil, the way we're carrying on, it could be gone in about 25, 30 years time. We'll be left with nothing to grow, in terms of, there'll be nothing... You'll be [crosstalk 00:17:01].

Rachel (17:01):

That soon?

MRSCG (17:02):

Yeah. Oh God, yeah, absolutely. No question. The way we're carrying on right now... I joked to my son... It's Father's Day today. I'm going to father stated today. I'm going to see my two young men today.

Rachel (17:14):

How old are your sons?

MRSCG (17:15):

They're 26 and 24. One's a tennis coach, and the other one is a computer programmer. And I keep laughing and say, "It's all right for me. I'm going to be underwater, not under the ground. I'm going to be underwater when I'm gone. You guys are going to have to experience the idea of rising waters."

Wouldn't a bit surprise me if Williamsburg becomes front row property, it becomes coastline. Wouldn't surprise me at all. Think of Hurricane Sandy, and what the damage that did. That was, what? Was in 2012, I think it was? 2013, wasn't that? Five, six years ago, right?

I would never buy property in Rockaway ever. The whole place would be flooded. The devastation that caused. And that's not a one in 100-year storm, by the way. That's going to happen again within... I don't know when exactly, but it's going to happen again.

It's going to happen definitely within 100 years. I suspect within 25. Same thing's going to happen again. And it's going to be worse. Not going to be better, it's going to be worse.

You have the technology. Look at Google Earth, right? You see all those aerial photographs. And you can go back historically to the likes of Antarctica and Arctic. And you see how the polar icecap is all melting.

That's volume of water that just doesn't disappear. That goes into the oceans. It has to go somewhere, this displacement. It simply rises the water up, right? So how are you going to block water? You're going to build walls through the entire of New York City? You're not. It's not possible.

Rachel (19:01):

Something I'm really curious about. Talking to someone like you, who has been aware of the issue of a warming climate over a period of time, seeing the way warming has accelerated. I feel like in the '80s and '90s, there was this sense that this was like 100-year, 200-year problem.

Which is still an extraordinarily short period of time. But for some reason we consider that to be a long period of time, of which we can punt it down the road. And all of a sudden, in the past 10, 5, 2 years, it's accelerated to this unimaginable extent.

And I'm curious about someone like you, who's seen that evolution. What's the experience like of seeing the coming crisis hurtling towards us faster and faster. How does that affect you? Has that changed anything for you in terms of how you've been planning your life, your day-to-day? What is that experience like?

MRSCG (20:14):

Well, look, I mean, from a personal point of view, I mean, at least I'm doing something that's giving back towards the city. Not just an environmental point of view, from a climate change, but also I'm giving communities something that they can enjoy. An outdoor space they can enjoy.

For me, it's too late. I feel it. It's not too late for you guys. You guys are unfortunately going to have to be the climate activists here, and really force politicians to wake up and really realize that there is actually a crisis going on right now.

They seem to think that you can punch this thing down the road, 5, 10 years down the road. So I've become cynical because, whatever I do, what I've showed you, it's just a drop in the ocean. It's a drop in the ocean compared to what really needs to happen.

What really needs to happen is, people really need to start thinking about seriously considering all of the roofs becoming green. I'm sure you've heard of the urban heat island. That cities are much hotter temperature-wise than they are in the country, for instance. Because all of the asphalt roads, the sun hits the asphalt and it bounces back up, and it just heats up everything. You get these heat islands.

So all I can do is do my job. I can't really preach, because I'm a hypocrite in that respect. It's taken me decades to sort of start to take this thing seriously.

Rachel (22:02):

Why?

MRSCG (22:02):

Because I made the mistake that... In the '80s and '90s, you're young. You don't really want to take these things seriously. I don't really believe much in politicians anyway, what they say. I find them full of false promises. All I can do is do my job well.

But I'm realizing now that I should have taken more responsibility. So I regret that I could have become a vegetarian. Still could, I guess, but it's not me. My dear wife has provided me with more organic vegetables, thank goodness for that. I'm one of these guys that won't cook guys. Lazy, lazy. Mama's boy, what can I tell you?

But I'm sensing now... And thank God. I mean, I watched something on Hulu... Greta Thunberg, the other day. She's like a real shining light. But she can't be the only one that can do it. I mean, she set this whole global trend.



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I ended watching this movie about... I Am Greta, it was called. And I sense, a great deal of sadness at the end of it, because she was doing all this great work and getting everyone getting more globally conscious of the crisis that's occurring.

But unfortunately, the young people like yourself are the ones that don't really holding the purse strings and making... Because you need to be in politics. You need to have a position of authority to make change. You can make change doing it in a global sense.

It did seem that when she was going around to these UN conferences, and these global climate change conferences, that change was happening very slowly. Change was just... It was just a lot of these politicians were just saying these things, they're saying these things, but not actually doing anything.

Rachel (22:02):

Right.

MRSCG (23:56):

So I hope that there's more protests, and I hope that there's more... I have a sense of hope for that. That there's much more protesting going on. More anger about, "You're wrecking our future." You are. Because think of... You've experienced Hurricane Sandy, right?

Rachel (24:15):

I think...

MRSCG (24:16):

Oh, it fell off.

Rachel (24:17):

Yeah.

MRSCG (24:17):

Got muted.

Rachel (24:17):

Okay.

MRSCG (24:21):

Oh boy. So it's going to be muffled-

Rachel (24:21):

There we go. It's okay. I have backup here.

MRSCG (24:26):

Were you around for Hurricane Sandy?

Rachel (24:27):

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Yeah.

MRSCG (24:27):

So you understand the devastation of that.

Rachel (24:29):

Yeah.

MRSCG (24:30):

And you understand that it's not going to get better, it's going to get worse.

Rachel (24:33):

No. Actually, I was certain that it was going to happen every year after. I'm surprised, and sort of thankful that it hasn't happened again since then yet.

MRSCG (24:43):

Yeah. Okay, so we've had this pandemic. Oh, by the way, I'm double-vaccinated by the way. So it's okay. But because people... I work indoors now, and I haven't used the car at all for about 15 months. I don't have to go to work. I don't have to drive to work. I would use the subway anyway.

But the point being is that, because most people were forced to work indoors and to stop traveling to work, it actually reduced the carbon footprint quite considerably. To a point. So what's happened is, is that the global warming has decelerated back to... It's 2021 now, 2008. We've only pulled back about 13, 14 years, despite all the changes that have happened, like the less travel that's happened, right?

Rachel (25:39):

That actually feels shockingly like a lot... That feels like a large chunk.

MRSCG (25:44):

It's a chunk, but it's not enough.

Rachel (25:46):

Well, and it's coming back now anyway.

MRSCG (25:49):

It's coming back. Now it's going to come back again, because people haven't really changed. They haven't really... And when I say people, I speak very generally [crosstalk 00:25:59]

Rachel (25:58):

But also you, right? I mean, I'm curious about this. What would it have... And I'm asking these questions, because I'm struggling with it myself. I'm struggling with this question of continuity versus discontinuity. And climate crisis as the ultimate in discontinuity.

It threatens our sense of, well, just say the word again, continuity. There's this sense of, we, as individuals, have built our own lives. And to make the kinds of change that we imagine need to be made

in order to really fight the climate crisis, that requires a real break and a real sacrifice and loss from what we have built.

MRSCG (26:49):

So, okay. So from a global sense, I think, change happens very slowly from a global sense. But to go back to a personal issue. I mean, I, for instance, for me, from a personal point of view, I would grow more plants. Start with something small that you can handle.

Rachel (27:06):

You would've done that like 30 years ago?

MRSCG (27:08):

Yeah. I'm still doing it now. I still love it, right?

Rachel (27:08):

Right.

MRSCG (27:11):

And I'm glad that I still grow plants. I'm glad that I'm more involved with GreenThumb now than I'm having a little more time since my young men are now grown up. So my advice to you is, to make a change is to make the change yourself without the expectation of others making a change for you.

In other words, if you want to grow more plants, great. If you want to become a vegetarian, great. If you want to become more involved in climate activism, great. Those are the sort of things that people have to do individually themselves, and question their own moral values.

And the only way that's really going to be forced upon them to change climate, is it's going to be forced upon them when people are forced... When you get another Hurricane Sandy again. And it devastates their lives entirely.

Or you'll get a bush fire that happens in California, or particularly so, a couple of years ago in Australia where they had bush fires that was devastating. It was on a scale that was never been recorded before.

And people need to stop listening to people like Republicans. I won't say his name. I'm a Democrat. But they have to start thinking about themselves, and start thinking outside of their own environment, and start thinking about globally what they're doing that's harming the environment. [crosstalk 00:28:52]

Rachel (28:52):

So you feel like really change happens on an individual level.

MRSCG (28:55):

Yeah. It definitely does. You can't [crosstalk 00:28:57]

Rachel (28:57):

I'm going to swap our [inaudible 00:28:59] mics.

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MRSCG (28:59):

All right. You can make speeches, and you can influence people. But the change comes from within. It doesn't come from... It really comes from yourself, you know? And that's all you can really hope for.

So I guess from a level to make global change, is you just keep educating people. Greta Thunberg does it at the [inaudible 00:29:34] by yelling at the politicians, and telling them they're doing a terrible job, which they are.

And it's good to be that dramatic, because sometimes you need to hit with a... Somebody needs to hit with a sledgehammer to really get it. If change is gradual, you don't really get it. It has to be dramatic to make the change. Unfortunately.

So I suspect what will happen is, there will be another Sandy event that the will happen, which will really, this time, will be worse than the last one. And that will start making people really start to think about... Do we need to get out of here?

Speaker 3 (30:12):

I'm just letting you know that she's leaving soon. I'm also leaving.

Rachel (30:15):

Oh, so we'll leave. Yeah.

Speaker 3 (30:17):

I can leave you here. I'm just going to show you, if you don't mind. Like [crosstalk 00:30:21].

MRSCG (30:17):

No.

Rachel (30:21):

Oh no, thanks. Yeah. Let me...

Speaker 3 (30:26):

You're going to leave or you're going to stay?

Rachel (30:26):

How much time do you have, MRSCG?

MRSCG (30:30):

What time is it now?

Rachel (30:31):

It's...

Speaker 3 (30:31):

It's 1:15.

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Rachel (30:33):

1:15.

MRSCG (30:33):

I've got time.

Rachel (30:34):

Okay. Yeah, let's just look at how to lock...

Speaker 3 (30:36):

I'll leave it unlocked for you.

Rachel (30:37):

Yeah.

Speaker 3 (30:38):

And then just make sure you lock it [inaudible 00:30:38]

Rachel (30:38):

Is it clear? Is it just like [inaudible 00:30:38] Okay, great. Thanks. Thanks for [inaudible 00:30:42]

Speaker 3 (30:41):

Yeah, I didn't want to kick you out, because I know you were doing [inaudible 00:30:55].

Rachel (30:41):

No, I really appreciate it.

MRSCG (30:55):

Yeah, we're just having a chat really.

Speaker 3 (30:56):

And the shade under this tree is actually really comfortable.

Rachel (30:58):

I know this is very nice.

Speaker 3 (31:00):

You get a bit of a breeze every so often, and it's actually cool.

Rachel (31:02):

Yeah. It's great.

MRSCG (31:05):

I'm lost. [inaudible 00:31:07] First of all, hook me up first.

Rachel (31:08):

Okay. Just, here you go.

MRSCG (31:12):

So I apologize. I'm coming more from a professional level, rather than an emotional level. Because an emotional level, you get too emotional. It doesn't make for clear thinking, unfortunately. You can get angry, everyone's human, but the way to approach it is to be mindful of what's going on, and then you make your own change internally.

Then try not to judge others who don't see your point of view, and hope that they will change in time. Unfortunately for me, through my life, I think change really only happens when it's forced upon you, I think. When you become so entrenched, as you do, over the decades as you grow into an old fellow like me, right?

You become more entrenched in your ways. You just do. You have a certain personality, a certain way of doing things. You have a certain way of how you approach things in life. And it's hard to change as you get older. And that's maybe partly the thing as well. To make such a sudden dramatic change...

Because what I'm suggesting to you today is that people need to start driving all electrical cars. People need to start growing more of their own stuff, rather than just getting it from the supermarket. People need to understand that there need to be far more rain gardens along the streets. Well, this type of change, this is huge change.

Rachel (32:57):

Huge change.

MRSCG (33:00):

You need to start thinking about understanding that all the methane that's going into the atmosphere. You need to start thinking about not traveling by plane anymore. You see what I'm saying?

Rachel (33:13):

Yeah.

MRSCG (33:14):

Aviation also is just as bad at causing global warming. You have to start thinking about what Greta Thunberg did, and start thinking about taking sailing ships.

Rachel (33:27):

Well, and there's this question, would you rather live a comfortable life or would you rather live a life that's dedicated to mitigating or fighting climate crisis? And what's the relationship between those two choices?

MRSCG (33:44):

Well, okay. The relationship is basically... The choice is simple. It's either black or white. You either make the change now you simply don't.

Or you simply carry on as is, the way we are now, with the expectation, knowing that it's just going to get hotter and hotter and hotter. It just is, okay?

Rachel (34:01):

Right.

MRSCG (34:02):

And by the way, unfortunately the solar energy, by the way. That too will help, solar energy. It will help to an extent, I feel, but that's for certain countries. Solar energy is not going to work for some countries around by the Arctic Circle, like Europe, for instance.

It might, if we get hotter and hotter, it might actually, come to think of it now. I did say, the Arctic and the Antarctic, it's all melting away. But I just think we need to really radically rethink our whole lives completely. And that's not my generation, I'm afraid.

Rachel (35:01):

What about your sons?

MRSCG (35:02):

Well, they are much more mindful and aware of it, because their father and mother are into the world of horticulture. So they get the fact about how important it is to grow things. And they're much more healthier than I am. They eat better than I do.

And they choose what they eat more. They drink and eat more carefully than what I do. But they're like young men, they still like going to bars and having a couple of beers, and doing some things that aren't healthy too.

Rachel (35:38):

Do you worry for their futures?

MRSCG (35:39):

Well, not in the global warming sense. I mean, I don't worry about them because they're well-adjusted young men. And they will adapt, I think. They will be adaptable. More adaptable than I will be.

So no, I don't. I can't. I can't worry about them anymore. I've done the parenting thing. I've done it. Beyond worrying at this point. You just have to trust that they will do the right thing, and see how it goes. But that has to be on a collective level.

I would be very proud of them if they joined climate activists, something like that. Or became much more environmentally friendly. But I don't think we're there yet, unfortunately. I don't think we're there yet. Change will have to be forced.

Rachel (36:32):

Thanks.

MRSCG (36:33):

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I sound like a doom and gloom guy.

Rachel (36:35):

Well, I mean, you sound realistic.

MRSCG (36:39):

Yeah.

Rachel (36:40):

I mean, this whole project is kind of... You said that you can only be so emotional, otherwise it's hard to think clearly. But, especially for people in my generation, and people your sons' age, I mean, there's so much discomfort in the feelings of a future that is disorientingly different.

And part of me is trying to figure out, how do we live in the world that we're living in, instead of pretending like we're living in another world? We really go about our day-to-day living as if we're in a world that has a consistent climate. And we're living... It's like Bill McKibben's Eearth, you know? How do we live in alignment with the world that we're living in?

MRSCG (37:37):

Well, the hard part is, the hardest part for your generation, young generation, is that you have to start thinking outside of yourself. You have to start thinking globally. And that's very hard to do.

Because the scale that I'm talking about is enormous. And it's very hard to grasp that. If you just make a change yourself, and then all your friends around you are still driving their SUVs and whatnot.

Rachel (38:05):

It's like, what am I doing?

MRSCG (38:07):

What am I doing? But you see, that's the point. You have to stand for what is true to you, and be your authentic self. And that's all you can do. You cannot change people. You can influence them, but they have to make the change themselves.

You can influence people. You can suggest what needs to happen to make change. But ultimately, you have to make your own physical and emotional and mental change for that to happen in the individual. But it has to happen on a huge scale. Huge scale. All right? It's almost like a whole generation has to change completely. Completely turn around.

So, I mean, what's good is that you see more of these GreenThumb activity. I see a lot of activity of this, which is great. More of this needs to happen. More green space needs to happen. What I'm doing is, I'm doing what I can. But I can tell you that New York City Parks are overwhelmed with its use. So for instance, that's [inaudible 00:39:20] employment.

Because for instance, playgrounds, they're supposed to have a shelf life for on or around 25 to 30 years outside of New York. What generally tends to happen is that they're shot at around between seven to 10 years, because of the overuse.

Especially so with sports fields, for instance. They're all worn out. Baseball fields, they're all worn out because of the overuse. There's not enough green space. There's too much given to residential property.



Also there's another thing as well, is the global world population is accelerating. You look at the world's population and you go back... You asked me about my childhood. I can't remember the exact numbers, but I'm pretty certain what was the population 1970 is probably doubled to 2020, right?

How is that all going to be sustainable? How are you going to manage feeding a population that's exploded, it's doubled in 50... Global population has doubled in 50 years. And that's probably going to double again in 25 years. How is that going to be sustainable?

We think of the Amazon forest as the lungs of the world. But every second that I talk to you, there's the size of a football field, an American football field, that's been deforested at this point. Every second.

So that means that in the near future, not exactly sure when, but the very near future, the Amazon forest will not exist anymore. It'll be gone. Now what?

Rachel ([41:16](#)):

What do you do with that loss? How do you grieve that?

MRSCG ([41:19](#)):

You know how long it takes to redo a forest like that? Decades. It doesn't happen overnight. But you know what, don't underestimate the power of nature though.

It needs to start with the shrub level. And then... But these trees, they take about on or around between 30, 40, 50 years to get to this full maturity. And then I can come in with the chain score crew, and this is going to be down within a day. See that?

So you can't replace ecosystems that fast. It's impossible. You just can't magically produce fast-growing trees that are going to create a forest within five years. It doesn't happen. It's impossible.

There are trees that are fast growing, but again, these trees are not mature specimen trees. They need to develop. So a forest develops slowly. It develops with shrubs. And it develops with initial trees that grow up fast. They are taken over by older generation of trees that are more life-sustaining, that last for centuries.

Have you ever been to Seattle and seen the forests over there, how beautiful they are? I've been to that. Spiritually, it feels so comforting. But those are so few and far between those... What was the... I forget the tree's name, but they're evergreens, I believe. I can't remember. I apologize, I can't remember. All I remember was how majestic those trees were. But they're not going to survive.

Rachel ([43:01](#)):

They're fir trees, aren't they?

MRSCG ([43:01](#)):

Yeah, the fir trees, that's it. I don't remember exactly what they are, but I just remember the scale of them and how tall they were. But unfortunately, because of acid rain from Seattle, a lot those trees are dying and are suffering.

Same in Canada with all of the forest there. A lot of trees are dying because of climate change. Because, as the temperatures get high, these trees can't adapt that quickly to a change in climate. So we start dying off.

They also, by the way, start increasing pest infestations, disease infestations. Because the warmer it gets, the more insects there are. And then their nature becomes imbalanced. And then you get more invasive species killing more of the plants.

The whole thing is not balanced anymore, you see? Nature's very sensitive. And you have to be very mindful of that. So you need diversification for a forest.

Rachel (43:58):

How would you contextualize this moment of change? Like from an historical perspective, or from the perspective of deep time? I mean, how do you contextualize and understand this moment?

MRSCG (44:11):

I can't, really. You can't understand it. I can't, really. All I know is what the problems are. And that's the sad thing. All I can tell you is the problems and what's happening now.

I hope that the future, that your generation comes to their senses and starts using more public transportation, and using electrical vehicles. And start walking more and using bikes more. And start growing more plants. On using roof gardens, for instance.

And start thinking like that. Plant more. Plant more trees. Plant a tree. Start with that and see where you go from there. I can't promise what change it will make, but it's a step in the right direction, I know. Because the way we're going right now, is just asking for disaster.

And you know what? I hate to say this. I think partly the COVID has been a bit of a blessing in disguise. Because it's forced people to rethink their life what they were used to, their lifestyle they were used to. And it's forced people to think that, maybe this is part of the global warming issue as well.

Because everything is getting so out of balance from a global level. God, I do sound like gloom and doom. I don't mean to be. I don't mean to be. I am doing my [crosstalk 00:45:39].

Rachel (45:39):

Like I said, it's realistic.

MRSCG (45:40):

Yeah. I think you should take from this... I mean, who are you presenting this to, by the way? Who's going to listen to you after this?

Rachel (45:52):

I don't know. I mean, well, what I am going to do with these interviews is, I'm doing a public audio installation, QR code based. So hopefully on participating gardens and farms, I'm going to have little plaques with a question from the interview.

Then I'll do a compilation of different clips from people's interviews that sort of answer one specific question on a plaque. And people can access it through a QR code. So that's one way. I'm still trying to figure out what to do with this archive. I've got like 50 interviews so far, just sitting on a website.

MRSCG (46:29):

From all walks of life, right?

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Rachel (46:31):

Yeah, yeah. And increasingly so.

MRSCG (46:35):

So maybe you need to reach out to some of the GreenThumb coordinators a little bit. Because there are some GreenThumbs that are very successful around here. There's this one. There's one in Powell Street that's very successful. There's another one on [inaudible 00:46:48]

It's all very hopeful, because these were abandoned sites. And it's all very hopeful. And the demand is there to grow more plants, to grow more vegetables, to grow more fruit. It's there. And maybe get their perspective.

You need a sort of a Park's Department's perspective, I think, out of this. Because if you ask anyone on the street, you're going to get such a variety of opinion. And such a diverse opinion.

Rachel (47:18):

Which is what I'm interested in.

MRSCG (47:19):

Right. But it's going to be very hard to decipher what's the commonality out of all of these interviews. You see what I'm saying?

Rachel (47:19):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

MRSCG (47:29):

You said you've done 50. I mean, have you met a cynic that says, "Oh, global warming doesn't exist. It's a fib."

Rachel (47:36):

No. And when I started the project, I sort of said I wasn't that interested in talking to climate deniers. It just feels like, energy that I didn't want to... I'm interested in people who are starting to think about this, or wrestling with it, or have thought about it for a long time.

Or maybe understand it, but don't think about it. I also don't... I mean, I've gotten a diversity of kinds of people, but I'm culling from a larger network of-

MRSCG (48:11):

Okay. Yeah, I think... My advice to you is, to make a balanced opinion you need to get the naysayers in part of your interview process. You need to hear the other side of the story. Where actually they're coming from.

You need to meet that self-centered guy that's driving a Hummer and has never given any thought at all, or any person. You need the other balanced point of view. Because that would make your project interesting.

Because otherwise what you're doing is, basically you're preaching to the converted already. You need to make the change of those that are not converted.

Rachel (48:49):

Well, what I'm hoping to do with the project is build models for having emotionally-rooted conversations about the climate crisis. That's what I'm really hoping to do. Through this project, and through my other work, I'm trying to figure out how we build emotional resilience to change.

MRSCG (49:11):

Well, apathy is one that you need to consider. A lot of people, a problem in New York City, they are aware of it. And they know that climate change is not good.

But I mean, apathy is an emotion where people are resistant to change. Resistant to a changing of... For instance, going from a meat-eater to a vegetarian, which does help the climate, by the way.

Rachel (49:36):

Right.

MRSCG (49:40):

Or changing from, "Ah, I can't be bothered with gardening. It's tedious. It's hard work. It's hot and humid. I'd rather watch the telly all day." That sort of apathy is what... That's the kind of change you need to look at. And that's the type of emotional response you need to look at.

And ask the question, "Well, okay. My question would be to you is, you know that the climate's getting hotter. You see it on the TV all the time. So what are you doing about it? How do you feel about that? You think, oh, it's not going to happen to me because I live in New York and we never get bush fires in California. That's something over there."

Well, guess what? No, you're in denial. It sounds judgmental, but it's the truth. And yeah, I would talk to some of the naysayers. To the ones that are in... Maybe not naysayers, but the ones in denial.

That would give you a... Remember, I said nature is balanced. It would give you a balanced point of view. You want both sides of the argument. You do. And then I would be interested in hearing what your final project would be. Because you have my email address.

Rachel (50:49):

Yeah.

MRSCG (50:51):

I probably have taken enough of your time.

Rachel (50:52):

MRSCG, let may ask you one more question.

MRSCG (50:54):

Sure.

Rachel (50:55):

This is just the question that I ask everyone. It's the framing question for the project. But when you think about global warming, what do you think about, and how do you feel?

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MRSCG (51:04):

When I think about global warming, I know it's now, it's happening now. It's happening all the time. It's increasing, it's getting worse. I'm pessimistic.

I worry for the younger generation. You asked me the question earlier, do I worry for my sons? Yeah, I suppose I do. I mean, this conversation has allowed me to think that I will worry about them. Because if they are in denial, and they're not really dealing with the global climate crisis, it's going to hit you guys like a sledgehammer on the head.

It's going to hit you hard. Financially, emotionally, economically, physically. In all sorts of ways. Because weather, when it gets angry, it does a lot of damage. You think such as thunderstorms and water rising. It's also all of the...

Notice that all of the hurricanes are getting worse and worse. I don't live in the South, the Deep South, like Mississippi, Louisiana, New Orleans, where they're constantly getting flooded every year. Florida, right? That's like normal for them. It's just going to get worse. It's not going to get better.

And there will become a breaking point. So I am not hopeful right now, not hopeful. I am disillusioned and pessimistic. And the only thing I'm hopeful is, is that you guys all gather together as an enormous group, and come to a great agreement, and really force politics and politicians to change their mind and to force climate change.

At least President Biden now is addressing this issue. It's not enough, but it's a start. There needs to be way more than that. And faster and more of it.

Rachel (53:03):

Thanks MRSCG.

MRSCG (53:05):

Thank you. [inaudible 00:00:01]