

Rini, Ashford Learning Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
September 11, 2021

Rachel (00:00):

Okay. So, Rini, can you tell me your name and your age, and where you were born, where you grew up, where you live now?

Rini (00:16):

Okay. My name is Rini [inaudible 00:00:20]. I'm from Bangladesh, and I'm 30-year-old.

Rachel (00:27):

And where do you live now?

Rini (00:29):

I live in [inaudible 00:00:32] Street.

Rachel (00:32):

Okay. And we're here at the Ashford Learning Community Garden?

Rini (00:35):

Yeah.

Rachel (00:36):

And when did you come to New York City?

Rini (00:40):

I came 2008.

Rachel (00:42):

Okay.

Rini (00:43):

December.

Rachel (00:43):

And how long have you been gardening here at Ashford?

Rini (00:46):

Here, this is my first year. Yeah. But I garden before, different location, not in here.

Rachel (00:55):

And you said you were gardening a little bit in Bangladesh as well?

Rini (00:58):

Yeah.

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Rachel (00:58):

What kind of gardening did you do in Bangladesh?

Rini (01:01):

Mostly vegetable. Like tomatoes, eggplant, pumpkins. Mostly Asian vegetable, you can say.

Rachel (01:14):

Enough to feed your family?

Rini (01:16):

Yeah.

Rachel (01:17):

Or just to supplement?

Rini (01:21):

You can say supplement also. Because over there, everything available, like all the vegetables everywhere. So we didn't feel like we have to grow vegetable for ourself. But here, it's different country. When we go grocery store, we don't see Asian vegetable all the time. So I want to grow. I miss my vegetables. So that's why I try to grow. When it's summer time, I try to grow Asian vegetable.

Rachel (01:53):

So you're growing vegetables to remind you a little bit more of home?

Rini (01:57):

Yeah, yeah. These are like our kind of vegetables that we like to eat. Yeah.

Rachel (01:57):

What kind of vegetables?

Rini (02:05):

It's like tomatoes, amaranth, callaloo, pumpkin, bitter gourd, and bitter melon, and eggplant, cucumber. Yeah.

Rachel (02:19):

Yeah?

Rini (02:19):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rachel (02:20):

Wow. Cool. And what brought you here? Why did you move from Bangladesh to New York?

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Rini (02:27):

Here, I don't know. It's a double up country. Everything seems like it's a better option for job, education. Quality is good here. Yeah. I think it's a better place.

Rachel (02:45):

How has your move been? Has it been easy? Has it been hard?

Rini (02:49):

I feel like it's not easy, but if you try it, obviously, if you move from your own place to different place, you have to give some time to adjust everything. You know?

Rachel (03:01):

Yeah. And did you know people here before you came?

Rini (03:04):

No.

Rachel (03:05):

Wow.

Rini (03:06):

No. Only my uncle was here that I know him from before. Yeah.

Rachel (03:12):

So I'm going to start the conversation with you. And again, we can talk for as long or as short as you want. So I'll check in. And if you want to stop, we can just stop. But this is the question I ask everybody. When you think about global warming, what do you think about and how do you feel?

Rini (03:35):

Global warming, I think when I was Bangladesh, is bad for over there because it is the country next to the sea.

Rachel (03:45):

Right.

Rini (03:46):

So I know when global warming is started it's not good for the area, like countries, like small countries and the country next to the sea because the water raising. When we have global warming, the ice around, I don't know, the place there is melting and the water raising. Bangladesh, some of the places going down under the water. So it's not good for the... Also, I heard New York, Florida also is next to the sea.

Rachel (04:22):

Right.

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Rini (04:22):

So it's not good for that because if we don't have enough plants, it will increase the global warming. And it's when you have more people, more carbon monoxide and less oxygen. So you should have more plants. So we could reduce the global warming.

Rachel (04:43):

Although, sea level rises affecting Bangladesh so intensely right now.

Rini (04:48):

Yeah. Yeah.

Rachel (04:49):

New York is going to feel the effects, but not quite yet.

Rini (04:52):

Yeah.

Rachel (04:53):

So how do you feel when you think about those things?

Rini (04:58):

I feel like we should have more greens.

Rachel (05:02):

Like plants?

Rini (05:03):

Yeah. Plants. Yeah.

Rachel (05:05):

How do you feel? Like an emotion.

Rini (05:08):

Emotion?

Rachel (05:09):

Yeah.

Rini (05:09):

I feel like so many people will lose their house. It's not good for us. So, obviously, it's bad.

Rachel (05:19):

And were you affected directly by rising waters?

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Rini (05:23):

Not yet. Because the place that I have, Bangladesh house is not affected right now. But I see in the news and other places, yeah, it's the river side area people houses are broken. Yeah. So many people lose their houses. Yeah.

Rachel (05:42):

Do you know people who were affected directly?

Rini (05:45):

I don't know directly. I saw only the news.

Rachel (05:50):

Now, talk to me about the seasons that you grew up in. Seasonal changes.

Rini (05:50):

Here?

Rachel (05:58):

In Bangladesh.

Rini (05:59):

Bangladesh is always hot, like summer. Only two month, I think, winter. But winter, also, you could grow vegetable. It's like the spring here.

Rachel (06:09):

Yeah.

Rini (06:10):

It's not like cold cold. So all year, you could grow vegetable. But mostly like-

Speaker 3 (06:15):

Mama?

Rini (06:16):

Yes?

Speaker 3 (06:20):

[inaudible 00:06:20].

Rini (06:21):

Yeah. All year, you could grow vegetable. Before, they used to do seasonal vegetable. But I see now, they do it all year, everything.

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Rachel (06:30):

So have the seasons changed since when you were a kid to when you were an adult? Have you noticed changes?

Rini (06:39):

Not so much, but more like it's less rain now over there, I think. Because the last 10 years, I didn't see that much, the weather. Because mostly I went over there winter time. I don't see all the seasons. You can say also it's not cold like before. It's more hot.

Rachel (07:00):

It used to get colder?

Rini (07:02):

Yeah. It's more hot, I think, now.

Rachel (07:07):

Was that affecting your day-to-day life when you were living there?

Rini (07:10):

I think whoever live over there, they got used to it. Yeah. They got used to. Okay. That's how they are. It's always hard.

Rachel (07:21):

And were you having conversations with people about those changes when you were living in Bangladesh?

Rini (07:27):

I feel like mostly they're okay with it. They don't really feel the change that much. But when it's come to whoever house broken or in the river area, they maybe feel the difference. But where my relatives and my people, they don't really feel it because it's not in their area.

Rachel (07:51):

Right.

Rini (07:51):

Yeah.

Rachel (07:52):

Right. So you're not having-

Rini (07:55):

It's like here in New York. And you can say Michigan. Other people, they don't feel the difference.

Rachel (07:59):

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Right.

Rini (08:00):

Yeah.

Rachel (08:01):

What about here, since you've been here since 2018? Have you noticed any changes in the season?

Rini (08:05):

Yeah, I feel like we used to have more winter, like longer winter than now. September, we used to get little chilly in the first week. We had to have sweater. But now, still, we don't have. We have summer clothes. But I feel like it's less cold now.

Rachel (08:26):

And does that affect you in any way on a day-to-day basis?

Rini (08:29):

It's not affecting me that much because I'm from the hard area. I like summer, but I feel the difference now. Also, it's not snowing like before. Before, you used to have more snow, I feel like. Now it's less. That's what I feel. I'm not sure.

Rachel (08:51):

Everybody is saying that. And it's fascinating that you are noticing that just in the short time that you've been here. Just in three years, you've already noticed that change.

Rini (09:03):

Yeah. Before, we always have to wear heavy clothes, like heavy jacket in the winter time. Nowadays, I feel like we don't have to wear all the time the heavy jackets. Like sometimes.

Rachel (09:18):

Now when you think about that, do you have an emotion that is attached to the reality of change?

Rini (09:26):

The change is not affecting me right now, but when I think about as for the global warming, that's affect me. It's not good for humans. Eventually, we lose something. I feel like that. Yeah.

Rachel (09:26):

And what do you feel?

Rini (09:39):

I feel like we should do something about it.

Rachel (09:40):

Right.

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Rini (09:49):

Yeah. Government should take some action about it. Like, what could we do to save our places? Yeah.

Rachel (09:57):

Have you taken any action around climate change yourself?

Rini (10:00):

No. I don't know what should I do to help. Yeah.

Rachel (10:06):

I know a lot of people say that. So is there any ways that global warming affects your day-to-day life?

Rini (10:13):

Not now. Yeah. No, not really.

Rachel (10:16):

What about growing vegetables-

Rini (10:18):

Vegetables?

Rachel (10:18):

... here?

Rini (10:18):

This year, I feel like we start the summer a little late, so that's why the plants grows a little late. That's the difference I see this year.

Rachel (10:29):

Oh, interesting.

Rini (10:30):

Yeah. Right now, it's still September, we still have good weather. Maybe we'll have more longer plants.

Rachel (10:39):

So you're just shifting?

Rini (10:40):

Yeah. I feel like little shifting this year. Like one month. Yeah.

Rachel (10:46):

One month? That feels significant.

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Rini (10:47):

Yeah. Because usually we grow, put the vegetable a little earlier than we did this year. Yeah. I think we start a little late.

Rachel (11:00):

Who taught you how to grow plants?

Rini (11:03):

I think from when I was small, I always see my mother growing plants, and my neighbors and other people. So that's how. If you see something always, you know how to do.

Rachel (11:17):

Oh, sure. Thank you.

Speaker 4 (11:17):

You want water, Rini?

Rini (11:17):

No, thank you.

Rachel (11:20):

Thank you very much.

Rini (11:21):

You want some chips, also?

Rachel (11:22):

No. I'm okay. Thanks.

Rini (11:26):

Yeah. So I always see people. My country, mostly people are farmers. Like 70, 80%. I'm not sure the percent is now. Because I'm from Bangladesh, I'm here a long time. So I don't know about the percentage. But mostly people are [inaudible 00:11:43]. They grow vegetables.

Rachel (11:44):

Are you teaching your daughter?

Rini (11:45):

About the garden?

Rachel (11:45):

Yeah.

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Rini (11:46):

Yeah. This year a little bit because this is her first year growing vegetables. Yeah. I have a small balcony. I have flowers only. So she only see the flowers, but we see the vegetable and everything.

Rachel (12:05):

Now, does thinking about global warming affect how you plan for your future?

Rini (12:10):

Yes, that's true. I wanted to buy house. I'm planning, but I'm not sure when I'm going to do it. But because I heard that water level is rising. And other thing, New York, could get affected. I can't make the decision. Should I buy house here or different state? Yeah, that's little confusing for me. That make me think different.

Rachel (12:39):

I have a-

Rini (12:40):

Mosquito.

Rachel (12:41):

Oh god. They're everywhere.

Rini (12:44):

Yeah.

Rachel (12:44):

I have to start wearing pants to these gardens. They're not in my neighborhood where there's no gardens. But here, they're everywhere. But they're like the kind that bite you and then the bites will go away soon. Now, do you think climate change will affect you differently because of your race, your ethnicity, your gender, your nationality, your religion? Sort of the specifics of who you are.

Rini (13:20):

I don't think it's not anything with the religion or ethnicity.

Rachel (13:24):

Yeah?

Rini (13:26):

But it'll harm everybody. So we are all human.

Rachel (13:31):

Right.

Rini (13:31):

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I feel like it's lose for all humans.

Rachel (13:35):

Right.

Rini (13:35):

But I don't think anything with the religion or ethnicity or anything else. But it's bad for human beings, I think. Yeah.

Rachel (13:47):

Does global warming affect how you think about and plan for your daughter's future?

Rini (13:52):

I told you, I want to buy houses.

Rachel (13:54):

Yeah.

Rini (13:54):

So it's about her future too. Yeah. So I'm confused after I hear that New York is in danger place. Yeah.

Rachel (14:04):

Where else are you considering buying a house?

Rini (14:07):

I'm not sure yet. I'm just thinking about that from last year. Yeah.

Rachel (14:13):

Because my next question is more theoretical, but how do you contextualize this moment? How do you understand it? And do you have any religious or social or ethical beliefs that help you navigate these questions of living in global warming and how to care for the planet?

Rini (14:42):

You have good answer. It doesn't have anything religious. But obviously, as a Muslim, we believe in the world will end some day. And before the world end, there will be so many earthquake, we will have bad situation. That's a religious belief, but I feel like that also is coming.

I don't know. It's just religious talk, but I see all over the world now is like... Earthquake in Nepal last few years. Before, there is earthquake in Japan. Yeah. But it's religious stuff. And besides that, also, I feel like, yeah, it's all over the world that we see earthquake, flooding. Europe, this year, so many flooding everywhere.

That's also make us scared. We see where scientists used to tell us that there is something. And American people, I feel like they don't see it that much, that flooding and storm and all this. But it's now we see little bit. So I feel like something is coming.

Rachel (16:11):

So in terms of your religious beliefs, is that something that you yourself believe, that the world is going to end someday and you're seeing what's around you as the prophecy playing out? Or are you more skeptical, but still see that story playing out?

Rini (16:33):

Yeah. The last one you said. Yeah.

Rachel (16:36):

More skeptical?

Rini (16:36):

That's what I feel like. Yeah. But we don't know yet. They also said like, "You don't know. We just reading the things and when they have research and other things." But we don't know anything for sure. We just think. You know?

Rachel (16:51):

Right.

Rini (16:52):

We just have like, we need to plan and all this in the corona. And we feel like, yeah, we see some... How can I say it? Some similarity where it is. And now it's coming here. Yeah.

Rachel (17:08):

Does it give you any comfort thinking about-

Rini (17:12):

It doesn't give us comfort. Obviously, we want to live more peacefully. Everybody wants to be happy. We don't want to die. And obviously, we want to live longer, happy future for our daughter, our kids. So obviously, it doesn't give us comfort, no. But, yeah.

Rachel (17:36):

And an addendum to that question is, how do you think we did get here? And where is here? Where are we, and how did we get here in history?

Rini (17:56):

That's a long conversation.

Rachel (17:58):

I know.

Rini (18:01):

I think every religion has a different definition.

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Rachel (18:05):

What's your personal definition?

Rini (18:07):

I don't have personal definition. But as far as my religion, we grew up like religious place. So obviously, it's like first the God create Adam, and then the generation was bigger. Yeah. That's the way I know. Yeah.

Rachel (18:26):

And how did we get to this place where the earth is just warming, warming, warming, and we're tumbling towards?

Rini (18:37):

Yeah, because the forest is dying. Last year, or before last year, I think [inaudible 00:18:46] start burning some plants and other thing. So yeah, my country, they have the biggest mangrove forest. So that also day by day.

Speaker 3 (18:56):

Mommy, sit next to her?

Rini (18:58):

Yeah.

Rachel (18:58):

She's so cute.

Rini (18:59):

That's that's also day by day. They cut the plants. The animals are dying.

Rachel (19:06):

In the mangroves?

Rini (19:07):

Yeah. So yeah, we should have more plant. That's the only thing. We should have more plants, greens. We can't make the forests smaller, cut the plants. Yeah. We should have more animals. Yeah.

Rachel (19:27):

I just forgot my question. Oh, what are the issues that are most important to you right now in your life? What are the things that are concerning that keep you up at night?

Rini (19:41):

It's everything. The coronavirus, living my parents. Oh, I finished my medical assistant degree 2019, I think.

Rachel (19:54):

Congratulations.

Rini (19:54):

Yeah. Thank you. So I planning to work in the doctor places. I finished my internship. I got the job, same place where I finished my internship. But because of the corona, I couldn't do it because my parents are older. My father is almost 70. So, for them, I have to think about them. I can't do. So I work now as a cashier. I work over there almost eight, nine years now, but I wanted to do medical assistant.

But that, I couldn't do because I have to think about my parents, my kids. Because doctor office is the danger place for the corona. So, yeah. So that's make me to make decision. It's really back up all the plans. I don't know what should I do next. Should I go there or go there? All these things. I have to think so many times to do before. There is a corona now, there is global warming here. Yeah. So we always have to think before what we doing.

Rachel (21:12):

It sounds very frustrating to have to wait for your life.

Rini (21:13):

Yeah. Now, my daughter going to school and we still have corona around us. Before, okay. The school is starting in September. It's like regular thing. But now, you have to think so many situation different. I have my parents. So if she go to school, she will make stuff with so many kids. All those things. Every day now we have to think. Yeah.

Rachel (21:45):

Yeah. That sounds very scary.

Rini (21:47):

Yeah.

Rachel (21:49):

How do you deal with that stress?

Rini (21:54):

We just have to think positive. We all are vaccinated. So that's one positive thing. Yeah. At least we are vaccinated. Some rural countries, they don't even get the vaccine yet.

Rachel (22:07):

Right.

Rini (22:07):

So we blessed that we are living here and get the vaccine early. I took the vaccine in February, I think.

Rachel (22:14):

Oh, good.

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Rini (22:16):

So yeah, my parents are vaccinated. So it's gave me a little strength. So, yeah.

Rachel (22:26):

Let me look and see if I have other questions. What do you fear for the future?

Rini (22:36):

Yeah. Always a bit. But at the same time, we have to always be positive. You know?

Rachel (22:42):

Yeah.

Rini (22:43):

We can't just live with the fear. We have to think positive. What could I do to get the best you? So yeah, even though you have fear, we have to think positive. You have to think what's good for you.

Rachel (22:59):

So what do you feel hopeful for?

Rini (23:03):

I don't know. You just have to be positive. That give you hope. You have to work hard. Yeah. You got to do what you got to do.

Rachel (23:13):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rini (23:13):

Yeah.

Rachel (23:16):

And what does growing vegetables in the garden do for you? How does it enhance your life?

Rini (23:21):

I feel like it's fresh. Organic is good for your health, also. And you save money also. Because usually our vegetable, we don't really see at the local supermarket. We always have to buy where our people have a grocery. So they sell it for sometimes \$10 pound, \$7 pound. It's expensive. When you grow, you could eat more and it's much cheaper. And it's organic. It's fresh. Yeah.

Rachel (23:53):

Yeah. And it's beautiful.

Rini (23:54):

Yeah.

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Rachel (23:58):

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

Rini (24:06):

No, I think you asked me all about the global warming and other thing. Yeah. But you could ask me anything.

Rachel (24:16):

I don't have more questions. Are there questions you're asking yourself that may or may not have answers right now?

Rini (24:23):

No. I can't think about anything.

Rachel (24:27):

Other than where to buy a house.

Rini (24:29):

Buy a house?

Rachel (24:30):

That's a big question.

Rini (24:31):

Oh, the only reason I want to buy a house is because I want to have my backyard so I could grow more vegetables. And I love flowers so I could have flower garden. Yeah. And my daughter can play outside. Because mostly, I'm always busy. I work, then I always cook. I don't buy from outside food. So, yeah.

So if she want to play, she could... I always don't get chance to take her to the park or anywhere. So she could go outside and play if I have a space around me. Because here, I don't have no backyard or anything she could do. Also, for my father also, he could walk around whenever he want. That's the only reason I want to buy a house.

Rachel (24:31):

That sounds like a great reason to buy a house.

Rini (25:13):

Yeah. Because my father, sometimes he don't want to dress up. He's lazy to go outside if he have to walk. So if I have my own backyard, he could just walk whenever he want, because he diabetic and other disease. So he is good. He need to walk ever day.

Rachel (25:41):

Yeah.

Rini (25:42):

So if I have my own house, he could work whenever he want, my daughter can play, and I have my garden. My mother also love gardening. So we could do gardening, flower, you know your own thing.

Rachel (25:56):

Wow. Thank you so much for talking with me. I really enjoyed this conversation.

Rini (26:02):

Thank you.

Rachel (26:03):

It's really interesting.

Rini (26:06):

Also, here, she come certain days. So I always have to wait for her until she come. If I have my own, I could just see friends anywhere; in the morning, in the night, every time.

Rachel (26:18):

Right. You have so much more freedom.

Rini (26:20):

Yeah.

Rachel (26:23):

I also feel like, from your perspective, at least the way you talk about it, you say, "Oh, yeah, I'm a gardener, but it's not that big of a deal. We just grow on food." Most people in New York City, most people in the US don't garden.

Rini (26:37):

And most of them don't know which plant is what. We know tomatoes, most of them. I'm curious, they don't know how the tomato plants look like.

Rachel (26:48):

No, they don't.

Rini (26:50):

Yeah. That's what I mean, to see that. That's what makes me easy. Because from when I was small and I see growing up vegetable. That's why if I see this plant, "Oh, I know this one is this." But mostly here, kids, they don't know nothing about where the fruit and vegetable are coming from, what the plants look like.

Rachel (27:08):

No. And it's such a wonderful knowledge to have, and it's such important knowledge to have.

Rini (27:18):

Yeah. And they never saw where the fish coming from mostly. I see where I was Bangladesh, we used to have a pond in front of my house and fish growing. My brothers, my father, they used to do fishing. I used to see the fish coming from the water. Those things. They don't know. They don't know where the rice plant look like. Those things. And we grow up like this. So I know about all the rice and other herbs coming from here.

Rachel (27:55):

Was that a big change for you when you moved to the US, to New York? Like being far close to your food and being farther away?

Rini (28:02):

I feel like I miss the nature. We used to see more bigger houses, and all big area. We used to walk around and always green around us because mostly summer time over there and always green. Also, coconut plants. We used to drink coconut water every day. And here, I miss those things. Like greens, vegetables, and the way that... Yeah.

Rachel (28:35):

How often do you get to go back and visit?

Rini (28:38):

I mostly go every two years or three years.

Rachel (28:38):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rini (28:41):

Yeah.

Rachel (28:42):

When's the last time you've been?

Rini (28:45):

Oh, I went 2019, I think. Yeah. But I wanted to go every year, but it's really expensive.

Rachel (28:52):

Oh my god. I bet.

Rini (28:54):

Yeah, they are tickets and every year. Because I'm planning to buy house here so I can't go every year and lose all the money. I have to think about my... Because we living here. So to think about here. Not-

Rachel (29:06):

Right.

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Rini (29:07):

Yeah.

Rachel (29:10):

So will you write down your name? So these interviews, they go onto my archive, my digital archive for the project. They'll also be in GreenThumb's oral history. So if you write down your name as you would like it to be online for the archive, and then if you write down your email address, I'll keep you updated on the project and I'll send you the project's information.

Speaker 4 (29:38):

Did you pick up your little tomatoes for your father?

Rini (29:38):

Yeah. I got this one.

Speaker 4 (29:38):

Good.

Rini (29:44):

Cherry tomatoes. Thank you.

Rachel (29:48):

[inaudible 00:29:48], you seem really busy today.

Speaker 4 (29:50):

That's okay. I'll take the time.

Rachel (29:52):

Really?

Rini (29:52):

[inaudible 00:29:52].

Rachel (29:53):

Oh, wonderful. Thanks.

Speaker 4 (29:55):

Rini, you want to take over my position and watch the kids.

Rachel (29:57):

Okay.

Speaker 4 (29:58):

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When you're finished. No, we take turns and everything. Everybody in this garden has to work.

Rachel (30:04):

How many members do you have here?

Speaker 4 (30:07):

Officially? I have Rini, [inaudible 00:30:11] was coming in a little while.

Rini (30:12):

Email. And what else?

Rachel (30:13):

Just your email address. Oh, and your name. How you'd like it to be credited in the oral history.

Rini (30:20):

However you want.

Speaker 4 (30:23):

And we have-

Rachel (30:23):

That's up to you.

Speaker 4 (30:24):

... somebody that comes from time to time, Alice. And then we have the two girls.

Rachel (30:27):

Hey.

Speaker 3 (30:28):

Hi.

Speaker 4 (30:29):

They come and help water. They come and help clean up.

Speaker 3 (30:34):

Mom? [inaudible 00:30:34].

Rachel (30:34):

Wow. That's great. So you guys are gardeners as well?

Speaker 3 (30:38):

[inaudible 00:30:38].

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Speaker 4 (30:37):

And the three girls because she's also a gardener here.

Rachel (30:43):

Oh, yeah.

Speaker 4 (30:44):

Yes. So all of them help in the garden.

Rachel (30:47):

Oh, wow.

Speaker 4 (30:48):

And today, they were doing the Halloween decoration things.

Rachel (30:51):

Cool. That's going to be great.

Speaker 3 (30:54):

I have this on my witch costume.

Speaker 4 (30:56):

And you're going to wear it, right? For the Halloween?

Speaker 3 (30:59):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 4 (30:59):

Okay. Now, grandma's not available.

Rachel (31:00):

Rini, thank you so much.

Rini (31:02):

Thank you.

Speaker 4 (31:02):

Okay. Rini, you take over. Thanks.