

Stephanie and Bethany, Poppa and Momma Jones Historic Community Garden, East New York, Brooklyn
October 2, 2021

Rachel (00:00:00):

I'm pressing record, and then I also have a backup recording.

Stephanie (00:00:04):

Nice.

Rachel (00:00:04):

Just in case something happens.

Bethany (00:00:08):

I'll be forewarned that there will be sometimes a lot of loud background noise. As the cars drive by, they tend to have the really loud speakers.

Stephanie (00:00:14):

It's not so bad now. It's early.

Rachel (00:00:16):

This is honestly the quietest garden I've been to. I've done interviews where there's lawnmowers going on and like the loud-

Stephanie (00:00:30):

Yeah, that might come.

Rachel (00:00:31):

Motorcycles cross by, so-

Stephanie (00:00:32):

Screaming through, yeah. Okay.

Rachel (00:00:34):

The person who's really going to suffer from this is my friend who's going to be sound-mixing-

Bethany (00:00:38):

Oh, no.

Rachel (00:00:38):

The project. Sorry, Mike. I'm sure you're listening to this right now. So let's start. If you could both introduce yourself, tell me your name, where you grew up, where you live, your age, and sort of what you do and also how long you've been a member of Poppa & Momma Jones Historical Community Garden.

Stephanie (00:01:05):

Okay, so you want me to go first?

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Bethany (00:01:05):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Stephanie (00:01:08):

Okay. Hi, my name is Stephanie, and I am a member of the Poppa & Momma Jones Historical Community Garden. I'm also a resident of Brooklyn. I was raised here, and I moved to East New York about 11 years ago. What else did you want to know?

Rachel (00:01:08):

And ...

Stephanie (00:01:32):

Oh, my age. I'm 56 years old, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rachel (00:01:34):

Uh-huh (affirmative), and Bethany?

Bethany (00:01:39):

So again, my name is Bethany. I have been a member of Poppa & Momma Jones Historic Community Garden, I would say going on I would say maybe six years. I started when I was in college, like my sophomore year of college I started, and so okay, maybe a little longer than that but it hasn't been a decade as of yet, on and off. I am 28 years old. I was also born and raised in Brooklyn. I have only been living in East New York for going on three years now, so I'm still learning the neighborhood and the ins and outs of it. I was raised in Park Slope for most of my life, and moved around in between different areas of Brooklyn so kind of learning their areas. But East New York has been my home, and just as this garden has become a part of me in a sense as well, where there's just so much you can learn from a garden, and so much you can learn within a community, just watching people. It's kind of been a thrilling experience for me on that side.

Rachel (00:02:56):

Talk to me about that. I'm curious both about what brought you both here to the garden, and then yeah, Bethany, like what you were saying. What can you learn from being in this kind of space?

Bethany (00:03:09):

Well, originally my mother. This is my mom, Stephanie. She was the one who introduced me to the garden. I actually was unaware that we had community gardens at first. I had no idea what they were. I mean, I had a sense of what it was just based on putting the words together, but I didn't think that East New York would have them. I'd seen plenty of them in Park Slope. They're out there, some by the train stations, they're everywhere. So I knew they existed, and I knew there were some in Bed Stuy area. But when she told me about this one, it was much smaller at first. We were given an opportunity to expand, so it's a lot larger now, more space, and a lot has changed.

But when I first started seeing it, it was only a few boxes in here. I was just happy to help, because you don't always get that help at first when you're first starting out. My mother was already a part of the garden starting, and so any area where I'd come I'm like, "Oh, let me help here and there." And then it became more than just a helpful thing. I actually enjoyed it. I was like, "Okay." Gardening has

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always been my mother's thing, but once I started to do it, I didn't mind it so much. I was like, "Okay. It's not because I have to do it. I actually want to do it."

And then while sometimes I'm in here by myself, my mother has to come outside and do things around. I noticed people will come in and say, "Oh my gosh, it's so pretty in here." Kind of like how you felt. "It's so calm and relaxing in here. What is this place?" And we're like, "It's a community garden." They're like, "Oh, my gosh. It is? Can we come inside? Can we sit? Can we be a part of it?" I'm like, "Sure." I started to realize that I wasn't the only one that didn't know that we had community gardens in East New York, yeah. It was a lot.

Rachel (00:04:55):

And Stephanie, what brought you here and how long have you been a gardener?

Stephanie (00:04:59):

I love telling this story. When I moved here 10 years ago, I knew-

Rachel (00:05:04):

From Park Slope?

Stephanie (00:05:05):

From Park Slope. I knew nothing about East New York. Many, many years ago my family used to drive along Linden Boulevard to a store called TSS. That goes way, way back. Some of the old timers would probably say, "Oh, yeah. We remember that store." That's the only time I remember coming on this end of town. So when I would walk as close as the local ... The post office ... I don't mean the post office. The mail box, I'd get lost coming back. I didn't know the street names, so I started venturing out, taking a block at a time, then walking five blocks, and then double-backing where I left off. But then I'd still get lost, and coming back I couldn't find my way. I insisted on not asking for help.

I stumbled upon this space, and there was a gentleman inside, an elderly gentleman. I said, "Excuse me, sir. Can you tell me which way is Van Siclen and Pitkin?" He says, "You're right up the block from it." I said, "Thank you." He says, "Hold on now." He said, "Are you hungry?" I said, "Actually, I am." He said, "Well, come on in." And he came in, and he gave me a handful of tomatoes, a handful of string beans, and then he had water. What could I say? And that's how it started. I was like, "It's beautiful in here." He said, "Come on. There's more." We walked around, and it was just bush country. It was just bush ... Things growing everywhere, and that's how I started.

Rachel (00:06:32):

That's a great story.

Stephanie (00:06:34):

Yeah, I love telling the story.

Rachel (00:06:36):

Wow. It's like you were lost so you could find this place.

Stephanie (00:06:42):

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Yeah, and the irony is that I live a block away, but still ...

Rachel (00:06:45):

Yeah, I know. When you said, "Where's Van Siclen and Pitkin?" I'm like, "Just around the corner."

Stephanie (00:06:49):

But then when you don't know ... And a lot of people still, like Bethany, they walk around and they really don't know that we have these community gardens, what they're for. And sometimes we're caught up in our day-to-day, so we're not going to sit there or stand and just read a sign that gives us the whole breakdown. I think the fact that we have dual access; we love the opportunities that we do have to open both gates. So some people who don't walk along the Belmont side will walk along the Van Siclen side. Even if they just peer in sometimes, some people I notice they'll just park their car here. Very often UPS, FedEx, emergency, the ambulance, the EMS workers. They'll come here to have their lunch, because it's so peaceful and scenic.

Rachel (00:07:44):

That's really wonderful. And were you a gardener before you came here? Did you know how to grow?

Stephanie (00:07:49):

I was not. I didn't even have a plant in the house, never.

Rachel (00:07:53):

So you learned. Who taught you?

Stephanie (00:07:55):

Poppa Jones. He taught me what to identify. He turned leaves over to show me. He said, "You see these little guys?" He said, "Those are aphids." And he said, "Well, they have their job but if you want your food, you have to keep your ... Just like you keep your house clean, you have to keep your garden clean." And so he showed me by using just a little bit of soap and water, and spray that solution. The next morning, they were gone. So he taught me, as we went from box to box ... And his wife was also there.

Rachel (00:07:55):

Momma Jones.

Stephanie (00:08:36):

And they were just the most giving people, the most giving. Everything they did was given away, literally. Their time, what they grew, and that's what he's known for in the entire neighborhood. You talk about Poppa Jones? "Oh yeah, he used to give away clothes and food, and give barbecues," yeah.

Rachel (00:08:57):

Wow. Are they still here?

Stephanie (00:08:59):

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No, they passed. Well, he's passed on and Momma Jones moved down South, yeah.

Rachel (00:09:06):

So how long have they been here? When did they start this garden?

Stephanie (00:09:10):

Well, they started in the '90s and they were here ... Yeah, they were here for the whole time. They had another space on Pine Street, so he would plan a tag team. He was in his 70s doing this ... In his 70s.

Rachel (00:09:32):

Wow.

Stephanie (00:09:33):

Both of them.

Rachel (00:09:35):

Wow. So talk to me about what you learned by being in this space. Bethany, I want to come back to that comment that you made that you just learned so much by being here. Talk to me about what that is.

Bethany (00:09:55):

Well on the base of things, I learned how to garden. That was my biggest thing. I wasn't really big on plant life. I mean I've always been into organic life and maintaining the planet. I actually went to school for environmental science. I started at first, so I was really already into this idea of having space and making sure that it was green friendly. But learning how to garden for me was like, "Yay." It was a big smile on my face because I was like, "Okay. I can grow my own food, and I don't have to go all the way down the block to the store. That's great." That's why it was a big plus for me. That was one of the major things that was like, "Okay. This is why I want to keep doing it."

But after that ... Oh, it's a windy day. After that, it became more about what I started to see as I was gardening. So some days my mother would call me to help her, and we would do some weeding or put in some new plants that we would get from Green Thumb, some new soil. Whenever people would come and ask, "How did this all start? What gives you the drive to keep going when no one wants to help you?" or, "How can we help?" Those kind of questions are always invigorating to me, because I enjoy answering questions like those. Because it means that the community is interested, and my mom and my parents always taught me the sense of community and giving back. And so whenever I hear those questions I'm like, "Okay, so that means that you're interested. I want to keep [inaudible 00:11:35]."

Rachel (00:11:35):

Oh my gosh, it came apart. Sorry. "It means that you're interested, and I want to keep you interested," so ...

Bethany (00:11:42):

That's really been my experience, and also the children. I'm really big on kids. Any way that I can get kids involved and gain a new perspective or interest in something other than video games or music ... Because I mean, I'm a millennial so I understand that it doesn't seem as interesting when you see

somebody doing it. But when we have the kids come in and they're like, "Oh my gosh. This is really what it's about. Oh my gosh, mom, this is so fun. Can I come back?" That's also such a joy or me, because I want children to experience this so they can grow up and feel like there's more purpose for them than what they see in front of them. That there's more to just going to the park, or if they can't go to the park because there's not much to do there, that they can come to the garden, your community garden.

It doesn't have to be this one, but there's one down the block from your house. You can do more than that. You can have an event. Oh, we had a children's book ... We would do readings, and the children would come and listen. They would get to enjoy the space, and then if they had questions, like one kid came. It was one of our member's nieces, and she was like three years old. She ran into the ... I think it was the tomato patch. She was like, "I see this. What is this?" She was like, "It's a tomato." She's like, "Can I have one?" We're like, "Sure." She's like, "I love them." And then we turned around, and she was eating a whole bunch of tomatoes on the side. We're just like, "No, no. Don't eat all the tomatoes." It was just one of those moments where you get an understanding, because children are so innocent. When they want to understand something, you jump on it. And so that also was really big for me.

Rachel (00:13:31):

That's so cool. It sort of sounds like to me, like spending time in this garden opened up your eyes to so much more you can do with your time.

Bethany (00:13:45):

Yeah.

Rachel (00:13:45):

It expanded this idea of what you can be doing with your time.

Bethany (00:13:49):

It definitely did. I didn't think ... I mean, I don't have a lot of time, because I'm always doing something. But the garden allows you to stop for a moment and just enjoy what's naturally given to you. I think that's something that especially living in the city, in New York City, we all forget to do. We just stop, pause, take a moment and just enjoy the space that you're in, and make the most of that space, and then share that same energy with everyone around you.

Rachel (00:14:25):

That is so important, yeah. What about for you, Stephanie? What has gardening given you?

Stephanie (00:14:30):

Okay, so my new term ... Instead of some people say piggyback, so I'm going to vine trail off of her and say that for the garden, Bethany brings a good balance, as do most of the members. Everybody contributes in a different way. Everybody's not going to be so gung ho on pulling native plants. Some people are more ... We have a gardener. She's got just a really bubbly personality, and she just draws people. Just standing out on the sidewalk, people just turn to her and ask her questions. So she and Bethany, they're very personable. So I learned that everybody has something to give, and the garden is doing what it's supposed to do. It's just that open space that ...

Speaker 4 (00:15:18):

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Hey, good morning.

Stephanie (00:15:18):

Good morning.

Bethany (00:15:20):

Good morning.

Stephanie (00:15:21):

That the neighbors have come to really appreciate. What I love to also promote is the shared space between wildlife and us as people. I teach my students that we're animals, and parents don't like to hear that. I said, "But there are only two kingdoms. There's the animal kingdom and the plant kingdom, so if you're not a plant ..." I said, "We have to coexist." I'm very big on that, and there's a balance. If we don't have certain insects, then other insects and animals will kind of dominate, and then we'll get sicker and our plants won't thrive. So that's something I like to promote, that side of our community. Having the advantage of having a space like this and other green spaces brings a balance for us.

Rachel (00:16:13):

Cool, yeah. It's so powerful, like we're living in coexistence with our plant and animal siblings.

Stephanie (00:16:26):

Yeah, I mean and we don't realize how much they do for us until we miss them. I think I was speaking to a neighbor and I said, "Remember when we used to see what we called lightning bugs at night?" I said, "You don't see them very often." But then I drove by one evening and I saw them all hovering in the back of the garden. That was very encouraging. I said, "We need them, the crickets, the grasshoppers. We need every insect that's going to again bring that balance." Just those little things, yeah.

Rachel (00:17:03):

Yeah, so this is a question that's sort of my overall guiding question for this whole project. The question is, when you think about climate change or global warming, what do you think about and how do you feel?

Bethany (00:17:20):

Hmm, when I think about global warming and climate change the first thing that always comes to mind is because it's more of a school thing that's always been hammered into our heads. And the first thing we're supposed to always think about when we think about global warming and climate change is the ozone layer. That's the first thing they always pin into our heads. "Think about the ozone layer, the ozone layer. Don't smoke. You're poking holes in the ozone layer. Don't have carbon emissions. You're poking holes in the ozone layer." So when you think about it, that's the base of what they always teach us in school.

But outside of that, I think about also something I learned about composting. Even something as simple as composting is affecting the environment. If you take all of your used vegetables, if you have corn left over, you have apple, apple pits left over, and you put those in the compost versus putting them in the garbage and allowing them to rot, and allowing for the mold to develop. Bacteria's going to do its natural job and decompose, but you have to think about what's entering the atmosphere with that

decomposition. So that's another thing you learn in the garden is using compost versus just throwing it in the trash. Or if you're going to use a certain amount of paper, know how much paper you're going to use, talking about trees. If you're going to use plastic, try to cut down on plastic bottles or plastic in general, plastic utensils, or getting a Brita filter versus buying bottled water.

Those are things that when I think about it, I think about it in that sense, or even how often you're using your car to travel to pick up things. If you're going to go pick up items for the garden, is there a way that you can maybe, instead of using two vehicles, use one? Do a carpool, you know? I could go on and on. This is like my favorite topic, one of my favorite topics to talk about. But and then I think about the change in the climate as it's been this year. It has not been anything like I'm used to. I'm used to really hot summers, and long summers. I feel like we didn't really have a summer this year. It was more of like maybe a month worth of nice heat, and then it was just cool and a lot of rain.

When you think about how that can affect the garden, it gets the right amount of sunlight. It doesn't look like it shows much effect. It seems like everything's growing just fine, but we don't know what's going on underground, you know? There could be something developing that we don't see unless we have the equipment to dig under and see, "Okay. Well, this change in the climate, what's going on down there? Is it causing the soil to deteriorate? What's going on?" So those are some of the things that I think about when I think about those two together.

Rachel (00:20:14):

And how do you feel?

Bethany (00:20:18):

I mean, sometimes I feel sad. I mean, there's so much going on in the world, but when it comes to the environment it's one of those touchy subjects because you don't know what to feel at times. You want to be excited that there are people that are really taking the initiative to conserve the environment that you're in. Oh, that's nice.

Stephanie (00:20:39):

He's got to go.

Bethany (00:20:39):

Yeah. You want to take initiative and thank those people. And then on the other hand, I feel sad because there's so many people who don't care. They don't care what happens. Even here, around the perimeter, there are some very disgusting things on the ground that we have to pick up and throw away. Then there are people who will look at you and drop it right in front of your face, and they don't really care where it winds up, and it comes in here.

There are animals around here, raccoons, possums, cats, dogs, birds, and they pick up on these things. They take it. They use it for the birds' nest, and people don't think about that. They're like, "Oh, I just need somewhere to throw my trash." They're not thinking about the side effects of that. It could be a bottle cap, or the plastic ring around the bottles that winds up in the throat of maybe a bird or a raccoon. That's what saddens me, because it's a lack of care knowing that they could care. But I turn that around, and I just think about those that are still taking the initiative, because I can't focus on it.

Rachel (00:21:50):

Why do you think people don't care? What's the cause of that?

Bethany (00:21:54):

I think it's two major reasons. One, because of the world that we're in and there's so many things that you have to focus on that are not right with the world, that everyone chooses a topic to focus on. So on that line of topics, the environment has always kind of been on the lower end of the totem pole for thinking about things, up until maybe early 2000s. Then we started to care, because we noticed it was really causing a major impact on our water supply and on the soil and a whole bunch of other things. But when people think of the environment they're like, "Oh, well. If it doesn't affect me directly, and I'm not seeing it immediately, then why should I care?"

Whereas they have a bunch of other things that they can see happening, that at least even in the media-wise, that is affecting them directly or in an instantaneous manner. And so they're like, "Okay, well, I've chosen my topic because I can see it." So I think that if there was ... I think the United States anyway is trying to promote a larger awareness of the importance of maintaining a healthy environment. But it's still never going to be enough because it's still going to be on the bottom until something happens that's so major that everyone's like, "Oh, my gosh. I can't ignore this anymore. I have to pay attention." And it's going to take a while to get to that point, and that's a lot of different topics. It'll just take maybe even past when my kids are born, you know? So I think that's really what it is.

Rachel (00:23:32):

Like because it's more abstract for people. It's not the thing that's right in front of them.

Bethany (00:23:38):

Yes.

Rachel (00:23:39):

And it might not ... They don't see it as affecting their day-to-day.

Bethany (00:23:42):

Exactly.

Rachel (00:23:43):

Which is interesting, because we've had ... I hear a lot of people say that, that it's going to take a huge event. But we've already had, I mean Sandy, and I don't know if you were affected by the rains during Hurricane Ida.

Bethany (00:24:00):

Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

Rachel (00:24:02):

But I mean, it was terrifying.

Bethany (00:24:03):

Right, right.

Rachel (00:24:05):

But so what's bigger than that, you know?

Bethany (00:24:08):

That's the thing. People see it ... They don't see those as large things. So if they were in the countries that were really affected on a larger scale, then they would feel it more. But we're so used to smaller effects in comparison to other countries, that we don't feel that it's a major event. Even though flooding and houses being destroyed is a massive deal, they don't see it that way because again, the storm we just had. In this area, there was not really much of an effect. We got some flooding in our hallway, but-

Stephanie (00:24:47):

Yeah, not the greater metropolitan area.

Bethany (00:24:50):

Right, so-

Stephanie (00:24:51):

The outskirts.

Bethany (00:24:52):

Yeah. So because of that it was like, "Okay. Well, it was a hit or miss for us" even still. So mostly we don't see the dire consequences of what happens to other people, because again it's still not large enough for them. How much larger? How high can we go, you know?

Rachel (00:24:52):

Yeah.

Bethany (00:25:08):

So I think in order for ... Maybe there's scale. Like I said, everyone has a different scale, right?

Rachel (00:25:08):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Bethany (00:25:15):

So for some people, that scale may be Sandy was it for them. "I know I've got to change my ways." Some people may be, "Ida was it for me. I have to change my ways." And other people, it may take a tsunami to change their minds, or an earthquake, something so extensive that they would have to change their ways immediately. So I think it varies person to person, but the majority of I would just say the United States, because other worlds, countries, I feel like they kind of have an understanding because they had to. They're a little bit more worse off in some ends.

We could also be on the same level but not know, because we're not being publicized about it. So until there's also that publicity involved saying, "We're kind of in a bad state, guys. You need to pay attention. Wake up." We need both ends. We can't just think it's bad. We need to have someone step in, say it loud and proud so that everyone can jump on the bandwagon, in a sense, yeah.

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Rachel (00:26:23):

So for you, Stephanie, when you think about global warming or climate change, what do you think about and how do you feel?

Stephanie (00:26:32):

Well, I think about the impacts of very much of what Bethany said, but even from curbside trash, household trash, the implications of people not caring about the oceans. I don't live near the ocean. Why do I care about that? But we forget what we learned in school, that the earth is covered. Over 75% of the earth is water, yes? So, good morning.

Speaker 5 (00:26:32):

Good morning.

Stephanie (00:26:32):

Good morning.

Speaker 5 (00:27:03):

It's the community garden, no?

Stephanie (00:27:07):

Yes, si, si. So being in the city, a lot of it sets our mind to thinking, "Oh, that's somebody else's problem. Oh, I don't have to worry about that. The city will take care of that," and so we become detached. My affiliation with Operation S.P.L.A.S.H. really opened my eyes, because it showed what we have on our curbsides, what we put in the sewers, flows right back into the oceans. And then when we go to the fish market, if it's not farm-fed or farm-raised, you open your fish and you're surprised what's inside some of our fish. So on a smaller scale here in the garden, it's an opportunity for people to be able to raise their own food, control what's being grown, no pesticides, and how does that impact the environment?

Boom, when it rains, when there's runoff from here, there are no chemicals. It's chemical-free. So I wish, yes, New York would be more environmentally conscious. They say they are, but you don't see the push for it. And then they're going to say, "Oh, well we don't have the funding." Who needs funding for throwing your garbage away the right way? You don't need funding for that. So it comes down to making it a priority, and the people rallying together to say, "We're not going to take it anymore." And there are people who are doing that. There's a lot of push for legislation to change about how we recycle, and so to me all that impacts how much space we have left over. Are we going to let developers continue to take away these green spaces? Because quiet as it's kept, that's what's happening to a lot of the community gardens.

When they're not maintained or if there are not enough members who are active in taking care of the space, the developers are tracking and collecting data that they can present to community boards, the city planning and review. They say, "See? It's been two years. This lot's been empty, unattended, and look what we could do. We can give homes to the homeless." And that really doesn't happen, because most of the time when they do develop it, whoever's homeless, they won't be able to afford a \$1,500 one bedroom.

Rachel (00:30:02):

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I'm hearing a lot about development, talking to people in East New York and also over in Ocean Hill. People have been talking to me a lot about developers coming in.

Stephanie (00:30:10):

Yeah, so we actually had a poster up and it was showing the implications of curbside trash that's not put in its right place, not recycled and so forth, how it could trickle into the oceans and impact marine life. A lot of people, they just didn't realize. They figured, "Oh, when you're on a cruise and they do tell you not to litter." But I see a lot of people who are boating, and they toss their cans into the ocean. They think, "Oh, it'll end up on shore." But then they show footage of water bottles at the ocean floor. Where does that end up? So a lot of it has to do, I think a lot of it, with education. Educating people, putting billboards on the side of the sanitation truck that shows the impacts of not putting our trash in the right place. And then even the word trash; I think I was telling you or somebody else-

Bethany (00:31:13):

Yeah, not to use the word trash.

Stephanie (00:31:13):

That I wish we could change that word. Because the word trash gives people the thought, "Just get rid of it." That's the mentality. "Just throw it in the trash. It'll disappear." And that's how we raise our children, and even our pets. We tell the pet, "Go get the newspaper," right? And then what do you do with the newspaper? You throw it in the trash. So it starts with small things, and then they have a greater impact, so that's what I'm thinking.

Rachel (00:31:44):

And how do you feel?

Stephanie (00:31:47):

We do our best, and there are other gardeners who are organizing so that we can almost tag team taking care of other gardens. There's the Herbal Gardens of East New York, on Schenck and Glenmore. It's headed by Johanna Willens. She's 80 years old. She's my mentor, and her space is almost twice this size. And so we take turns going over to help her, and there's another garden on our block right next door to us, East End Community Garden. We do the same thing. So we take turns, so no garden ... Well, the gardens that are in our proximity will continue to get attention. When people have questions, "Oh, how do I join?" We don't just shrug our shoulders. We tell them, "Call 311, or you can come back on Saturday when it's open," that sort of thing.

Rachel (00:32:48):

And also, it sounds like taking care of ... Maintaining these spaces is a way to ensure the survival of them.

Stephanie (00:32:53):

Yes.

Rachel (00:32:54):

Because they seem to be in danger of being taken away.

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Stephanie (00:32:58):

Yeah.

Rachel (00:32:59):

I'm going to ask you the question again, Stephanie.

Stephanie (00:33:03):

Sure.

Rachel (00:33:03):

How do you feel? What are the emotions that come up when you think about global warming?

Stephanie (00:33:10):

I feel that we're in more danger than we know. When you think about ... When you travel and you look from ... When you're in flight and you look down and you think, "Oh, well we've got so much space. We can continue to build," but it's really not. We have to take care of the spaces that we are in, and I just feel that there's not enough being done to educate people about that, to take care of the space-

Rachel (00:33:43):

And what does that make you feel? What are the emotions that come up?

Stephanie (00:33:46):

It makes me feel angry, yeah. It makes me feel angry. A lot of people are angry and frustrated that we feel we're doing what we can, but the people who have the power to do more are sitting on their hands.

Rachel (00:34:09):

What do you do with that anger?

Stephanie (00:34:12):

Then now, you find the channels to take to get them to take their hands from under their laps and start to put pen to paper, and hold them more accountable. Thankfully, we have social media to help track when we submit requests, when we submit demands from our local officials. I'm really pushing young people. When I teach, I kind of wiggle that message in there some kind of way, to the point where during lunchtime I showed a movie, a video about cows producing milk. I showed them the machines that are used and they said, "Where's the man that's supposed to be ...?" I said, "Not anymore." I said, "That's done sometimes, but for most of our milk machines are doing it." They were like, "Doesn't it hurt?" I was like, "I don't know, but they get used to it." And I said, "So don't waste your milk if you've got it." They were like, "I don't want to drink milk, because it's going to hurt the cow and the cow has to work harder." The children stopped drinking milk in the school.

Rachel (00:34:12):

Wow, wow.

Stephanie (00:35:26):

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And they wanted water instead, so they took me of lunch duty.

Rachel (00:35:34):

Oh, my God. The parents must have been so mad at you. But it's amazing how effective that was.

Stephanie (00:35:43):

Yeah.

Rachel (00:35:45):

So I'm going to skip ahead, since you kind of mentioned it already. Have you taken political action around climate crisis or around this issue at all?

Stephanie (00:35:56):

I did. There was a climate march a few years back. There was another recent one that I didn't make. There are some, let's see, Recycling Dive is an organization that I've started to follow. But really, I just started building partnerships with groups like Operation S.P.L.A.S.H.

Rachel (00:35:56):

What is that?

Stephanie (00:36:21):

They focus on protecting the waterways from corporations illegally dumping chemicals, organizing beach clean-ups, I guess educating residents about the impacts of litter on boardwalks and the beaches. They also do clean-ups in different marinas around Long Island. So I reached out to them when I went to the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge and I said, "Well, we're like cousins. Brooklyn and Long Island, we're one swan." So I reached out to them and they said that they'd be willing to come out next spring and do a couple of talks, and just do some demonstrations about the impacts of curbside trash into the sewers and into our waterways, yeah.

Rachel (00:37:18):

That's really cool that you got involved in that way. What led you to that? And I'm asking because I talk to a lot of people who are really deeply concerned about this issue, but don't know what to do or don't know how to put their time into action, or don't feel like they have the time to take action or get involved. So I'm so amazed and impressed with people who do go out of their way, go out of your comfort zone, take the time out to connect and be active. So, what is it about you that pushes you to do that and be active?

Stephanie (00:38:08):

Well, I have a history of suffering from asthma. I'd noticed when I started volunteering with Poppa Jones, I didn't need my inhaler.

Rachel (00:38:20):

Wow.

Stephanie (00:38:20):

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And I mean, this is the most labor-intensive work I've ever done in my life, except moving my mother's sofa. But here, I could be here 10 hours straight and never need my inhaler.

Rachel (00:38:35):

Wow.

Stephanie (00:38:37):

But then go home, and within an hour I may need it.

Rachel (00:38:37):

Wow.

Stephanie (00:38:43):

And I questioned them. I'm like, "I don't get it." And part of it is of course where I am, what I'm breathing, the quality of the air in this space. Even on the hottest day, 95 degrees when we had our little heat wave, and it was little ... You step out on the sidewalk. The sweat, you could just see it come pouring down. When you come in here where you are, immediately it feels like it's about 75 degrees. So just that is a haven for people who may have respiratory problems, or you know how the city has cooling centers? It's a refuge for some people, when they just want relief from the heat.

That's part of why ... I mean we didn't finish, but we had ordered a ramp because we want to encourage more seniors who may feel like walking on a wood chip surface is not steady for them. They don't want to walk on something where they feel they may trip, or not feel ... But yeah, just letting it be known that we need access to green space and we need the trees that are around us, to help keep the quality of our air. Well, to help improve the quality of our air, put it like that.

Rachel (00:40:14):

What about you, Stephanie? Have you taken any-

Stephanie (00:40:14):

That's Bethany.

Rachel (00:40:16):

Oh, Bethany.

Stephanie (00:40:17):

That's okay.

Bethany (00:40:19):

We get it all the time, Stephanie and Bethany.

Stephanie (00:40:20):

I know. It's okay.

Bethany (00:40:21):

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It's my mother's fault.

Rachel (00:40:22):

Yeah, I was going to say. It seems like it's one person's fault. Bethany, have you taken political action around climate crisis?

Bethany (00:40:32):

So not locally. Upstate, I did a lot of work. I did work with Habitat for Humanity.

Rachel (00:40:41):

In Buffalo?

Bethany (00:40:42):

Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse. In Buffalo, we would go to ... Buffalo as well as the Buffalo side of Niagara Falls, so close to the border but we didn't go to the Canadian side. We also went over there and basically we started to clean up the area, a group of us. We went over there. I forgot what the team is called.

Stephanie (00:41:11):

And we did the American Littoral Society, the beach clean-up, remember?

Bethany (00:41:15):

Right, and we did the beach clean-up.

Rachel (00:41:16):

Where was that?

Bethany (00:41:18):

We partnered with them, too.

Rachel (00:41:19):

What location?

Stephanie (00:41:19):

That was like Howard Beach.

Bethany (00:41:22):

Howard Beach, yeah. We did that, and that for me was ... I've never cleaned a beach before.

Rachel (00:41:27):

Me, either.

Bethany (00:41:28):

So that was a bit of an experience because I'm like, I'm always at the beach. I love swimming. But when you're there not for your own personal enjoyment but for actual help and aid, it was different for me. Because I was looking at, there were so many coconut shells everywhere, just they said from the rituals that people would have. Yeah, and they were just everywhere, just decomposing. And then the bottle caps and the plastic bags just hidden underneath the sand, that were just in pieces, all the plastic forks and just all this garbage everywhere. It was like a shock for me. Like when you think of culture shock, this was just a different kind of shock for me. I was amazed.

I knew we were bad in terms of leaving trash everywhere, but I didn't think it was that bad for a beach. But I'm thinking, "Well, most of that stuff probably washed up onto the shore, and some of it was already there." Fishing lines, and the weight from the fishing pole. It's just so much, and I was very upset. I was like, "It can't be." One bag of trash, a full garbage bag, in just one tiny part. Literally just one section of the beach, not even the whole beach, was one full bag. I was amazed. I was with my dad there too, and we were just shaking our head like, "This is ridiculous." We only had a short amount of time, because it was community service. But even if we had the whole day, it wouldn't be enough just to clean up that one area.

Stephanie (00:41:28):

Yeah, it was crazy.

Bethany (00:43:01):

And we had to move from section to section, in between the rocks. It was a lot. But it was also a beautiful experience because of how many people came out and were just like, "Are there more bags? Is there any other way we can pick this up? I know that we don't have ..." And we didn't have a lot of tools to work with, so we used what we had. But it was also a very unifying experience for everyone that came together.

Rachel (00:43:26):

So it felt meaningful.

Bethany (00:43:27):

Definitely did. I was very happy to have gone and been there.

Rachel (00:43:30):

And it feels like you made some meaningful change.

Bethany (00:43:35):

I think so. I definitely felt like it was a big deal for me, yeah.

Rachel (00:43:41):

That's so cool. Were you both [inaudible 00:43:46]?

Bethany (00:43:46):

Yes.

Rachel (00:43:47):

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So I'm curious about what changes you may have noticed in the weather, in the seasons, in the landscapes over the course of your time growing up and living here in New York City?

Bethany (00:44:05):

For me, between different parts of Brooklyn I have seen a few things. First in Park Slope, the house that I grew up in, there was a area at the end of my block on Degraw Street that was next to one of my best friend's houses.

Rachel (00:44:23):

Where was this on Degraw, and what ...?

Bethany (00:44:25):

This is Degraw and-

Stephanie (00:44:27):

Between 4th and 5th.

Bethany (00:44:29):

Between 4th and 5th Avenue.

Rachel (00:44:30):

Oh, I live on Bergen and 3rd-

Bethany (00:44:32):

Oh yeah, yeah.

Rachel (00:44:33):

I'm right there. I know what you're talking about.

Bethany (00:44:36):

Yeah, and there was this lot that was there since-

Stephanie (00:44:39):

Forever.

Bethany (00:44:40):

Forever, for as long as ... Even before I was born.

Stephanie (00:44:42):

Not any more.

Bethany (00:44:43):

And now, they're almost done building over there, and-

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Stephanie (00:44:48):

Yeah. Well, 4th Avenue is just-

Bethany (00:44:49):

Yeah, it's mind-blowing.

Rachel (00:44:52):

It's crazy, and it's terrible.

Bethany (00:44:54):

Yeah, and I'm just like, "That space could have been used for something so much better." From my understanding, the soil over there wasn't bad. The land itself is pretty okay. They could have done something to help the community use it in that sense. Across the street, there was a Chinese food restaurant that was always burning down. They kept rebuilding it, and it's just not a good area for a restaurant. But they could have used that space, but they chose not to. They continued to rebuild, and they refuse to change it from an industrial use or restaurant use purpose. So that is a change, and mainly for me it's buildings. What I see are buildings.

Stephanie (00:45:36):

And the development, over-development.

Bethany (00:45:40):

Yeah, a lot of over-development. It seems like Park Slope is becoming a little bit more crowded than it was when I was growing up. I had a lot of space. I keep doing that. I'm sorry.

Rachel (00:45:47):

That's okay.

Bethany (00:45:49):

I had a lot of ... Oh, no. I think I-

Rachel (00:45:51):

No, it's okay. It's still attached.

Bethany (00:45:52):

It's still attached to me?

Rachel (00:45:53):

Yeah, you can just clip it back in.

Bethany (00:45:54):

Oh, okay. I hope you can edit this part out.

Rachel (00:45:55):

This is the only part I'm going to use.

Bethany (00:46:00):

Oh, no. Yeah, so yeah, it's becoming a lot more crowded than what I remember. Like I said, I always had a lot of space when I was younger. Even, because I stayed in that neighborhood all throughout high school, so everything was pretty much level for the most part. The space, they were building here and there, but it wasn't massive building. But around middle school, I noticed that they just had a huge increase in development out-

Stephanie (00:46:33):

Yeah, a surge of building.

Bethany (00:46:34):

Yeah, a surge of developments out of nowhere. I'm sure it was in the works, because planning takes years.

Stephanie (00:46:40):

The zoning, yeah, it changed.

Bethany (00:46:41):

Right. It takes years to develop that and decide, "Okay, we're going to do it in this time." But to me it was mind-boggling because I'm like, "This space over here that I was used to going to, this corner store is not here anymore." This ... Well, Blockbuster is gone, but you know. There was my favorite movie spot to go to, you know?

Stephanie (00:46:41):

Yeah.

Bethany (00:47:03):

And a lot of things were changing for me. I feel like I was losing the community that I loved, and the people started to move out. All of my friends are gone. Even their parents, they moved out from there. The house is still there, but they turned it into a doctor's office. And so a lot of that, it kind of keeps me in remembrance and reminds me that change is good, but it's the type of change that you want for your community. In order for you to have the change that you want, you have to speak on it. One of the things that I think that myself and my generation, that we didn't want to do because we just wanted to enjoy our lives ... We're young. We didn't really think about it. We could have said something that, "We enjoy this place. Don't take it from us."

I know that in the community, some people that my mother knew in the neighborhood, they did speak on it. They fought for it. I'm not even sure if they won that fight, but it's the fact that they did it that matters. But yeah, that repetition of starting building is really what I've seen. The change in the influx of people as well; it's always been a neighborhood with different cultures. That's always been the thing that hasn't changed much. But everywhere else, it seems like there's a shift to different areas. Like East New York, there's a shift and people from Park Slope are moving to East New York, or they moved out to Crown Heights and they formed their own separate individual communities instead of being in a collective community. But I think the separation is kind of increasing, at least that's ...

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Rachel (00:47:03):

In your experience-

Bethany (00:48:48):

Yeah, yeah.

Rachel (00:48:48):

It may level off.

Bethany (00:48:49):

Yeah, and I'm seeing it more and more, and that's something that that bothers me. I don't know how to address it personally, but it is something that I've seen.

Rachel (00:49:00):

Yeah. Yeah, I can't even imagine the amount of change that you've seen in the neighborhood,= and how upsetting that feels, to feel like your home is kind of being taken out from under you.

Bethany (00:49:18):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, it was big for me. But I mean, I moved around a lot so wherever I landed, I made my home. So it wasn't a bad thing for me, it was just more of a acknowledgement and noticing and understanding of my surroundings, and just being aware of what's going on so that I could be aware, if that makes sense.

Rachel (00:49:39):

Yeah. And how about for you, Stephanie? What kinds of changes ... Weather, seasons, landscapes, have you noticed in the 56 years that you've been in the city?

Stephanie (00:49:52):

Well, I will say I've noticed [inaudible 00:49:55] torrent rain at night, which we don't mind because usually we sleep better. But I have noticed that, and not always during the hurricane season, like during the summers. And what else? Hmm, weather-wise, I mean we used to get a lot more snow. So now we get maybe two or three snow storms and maybe one blizzard-

Bethany (00:50:29):

I'm okay with that.

Stephanie (00:50:29):

And over the course of an entire winter. I just remember growing up, a lot more snow, a lot more snow. I don't have a photo, but there was one day ... We used to live at 677 Degraw Street. The snow was so high, at the top of the brownstone stoop, snow reached the top. So I'm guessing that's like three or four feet, and we were doing homeschool. So one of the neighbors was coming, and [Deanna 00:51:03] ... They lived across the street. Her dad was able to walk her across the street from stoop to stoop. That's how much snow there was.

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Rachel (00:51:11):

Oh, my God.

Stephanie (00:51:12):

And I was like, I've been looking for that picture. When I do my little clean-up, I'm still looking for that photo; unbelievable. He was like, "I feel like I'm walking on a car right now." That's how much snow it was, and that was like 19 ... Because you guys were like three years old.

Bethany (00:51:12):

I think it would be like '97.

Stephanie (00:51:27):

So that had to be in 1995.

Rachel (00:51:30):

Wow.

Stephanie (00:51:31):

Yes.

Rachel (00:51:33):

That's really crazy.

Stephanie (00:51:36):

Yeah, because-

Rachel (00:51:37):

And you don't get that anymore.

Stephanie (00:51:38):

She was about three years old. So I do notice that.

Rachel (00:51:43):

Does it feel different? Do you have an emotional experience of feeling sort of like weather changes?

Stephanie (00:51:53):

I am concerned, like how does that affect our source of water? Because even we took a trip to the dam.

Bethany (00:52:02):

Oh yeah, that was crazy.

Stephanie (00:52:02):

Kensico Dam, up in Westchester.

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Bethany (00:52:04):

It's usually full.

Stephanie (00:52:05):

And the reservoir was bone dry. That was ... When was that, August? When did we go?

Bethany (00:52:12):

Yeah, that was the beginning of August.

Stephanie (00:52:14):

Yeah, and-

Bethany (00:52:15):

Right beginning of August.

Stephanie (00:52:17):

I took pictures and I was like, "Wow." In the past, they have like an annual African American festival in Westchester. You can see the water trickling down the wall, and then there's two pools of water in the reservoir. Bone dry. So I'm saying, "I mean, they wouldn't leave the drains open. That's what it's for." Very strange.

Rachel (00:52:48):

What does that feel like? What does strange feel like?

Stephanie (00:52:49):

Like, what happens when we don't have a back-up for our back-up?

Rachel (00:52:55):

Yeah.

Bethany (00:52:55):

Then the price of water goes up.

Stephanie (00:53:01):

Pretty much, yeah. The price of water would go up.

Rachel (00:53:04):

Do you feel like there's a way that global warming affects you on a daily basis?

Stephanie (00:53:12):

For sure. For sure. I mean, even our crops have not been the same in the last two years. Ms. Johanna is saying there's something in farming where it's like every other year ... I forgot how she explained it. But there's a low cycle and a high cycle, and this year was the low cycle so we got a very low harvest. Last

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year was better, but because of COVID we didn't really plant anything. The cherry trees were full for one day, and then the very next ... That night, there was torrent rain and they suffered from rain rot. Too much rain at once.

So the Botanic Garden, our affiliate there, Maureen O'Brien, she came. She took pictures. This was one of her annual trips out, and she witnessed it for herself. She said, "I've seen this before. It's a fungus." We were concerned if it was the soil, but no, it was rain rot. So what happens, we have these cycles where the rains will come, or there's a drought and so forth, and it does affect the crops. I said if it affects us on a small scale, I can't imagine farmers upstate.

Rachel (00:54:49):

That's an upsetting story about that cherry tree.

Stephanie (00:54:52):

It is, and I mean I'm glad we did have photographs. There was a bike tour, and so a group, they were basically garden-hopping. They came, they stopped, and each of them took a handful of cherries with them. They said, "We're going to come back next week and pick the rest." That following day, there's maybe out of the entire tree, only maybe 5% were edible.

Rachel (00:55:21):

Wow. Bethany, what about you? How does climate crisis, global warming, affect you on a daily basis?

Bethany (00:55:35):

That's actually a tough question for me. I think general answer for me would be, I think it affects everyone. I don't think there's a way you can step outside of your house in the morning and not think it affects you. I think for me, at least from a lab perspective because I work in a lab too, that I hear ... And it's the same car every day. I think that there hasn't been the same amount of sunlight as it used to be. I don't mean in terms of from day to day, the sun comes up, the sun goes down. I mean that the level of sunlight is not the same. A lot of people are experiencing a vitamin D deficiency. We naturally get our sunlight ... We get the vitamin D from the sun. I feel like it's been shifting in awkward ways. Maybe it's just me personally feeling that way, but I've been asking at work just the same and they feel that's part of the reason why a lot of the results are coming back with a deficiency. It's not just diet, but the exposure. It's less exposure.

Rachel (00:56:57):

What would be the cause of that?

Bethany (00:57:00):

Well, we still do to this day don't know the ins and outs of the rotation of the earth.

Rachel (00:57:06):

Oh.

Bethany (00:57:07):

We think we do. We know a lot, because based off of from before, when first we thought the earth was flat, then we said it was round. We say the sun shifts this way at this time, and that way another time.

But there's still so much science behind the rotation of the earth, and how the sun orbits around it, that we don't really know yet.

Rachel (00:57:27):

Wow.

Bethany (00:57:27):

So I feel like that's ... I wouldn't know how to explain why. But I do think that with the change in climate that they're related.

Rachel (00:57:40):

Interesting.

Bethany (00:57:43):

Just because that's how our seasons come into play. So in that essence, I think that's one thing. Another thing I've noticed, I think I'm affected by again like I mentioned, the change in temperatures. I am a big fan of the sun and hot weather, and I love it. I wanted my summer really badly. I wanted a whole month of a hot wave. My mom was talking about snow when I was three. I remember I was nine, and it was almost 100 degrees outside. For me, that was great. The pools were open. I mean, of course COVID times, I know it's different with a pool and the beaches. But it was 100 degrees outside. They had the sprinklers going, and it was just a really fun summer.

But this year, and it seems consecutively, that it's less and less time for summer. It seems like the summer is getting shorter, and the fall is kind of ... It seems like it's extended, or it starts earlier, like the fall is starting earlier and earlier with each year. It could just be that I got accustomed to the weather in Buffalo, where it was cold and it was really hot. It could be that. But when I came back, I got acclimated back into the climate. But I still feel that this change is indicative of a serious issue that's occurring beyond our understanding. Also, I do keep up to date with the polarized caps, so there's definitely something going on that we can rectify. I think it might be too late, because it's already melting. But I just want to know what we can do now, you know? What do you do when it's too late? What can you do?

Rachel (00:59:38):

What can you do?

Bethany (00:59:40):

So that's-

Rachel (00:59:40):

Do you have an answer, Bethany? Because I'm looking for one.

Bethany (00:59:45):

I mean, I think there is one thing that we can do. Once something goes wrong ... Okay, so think of it like this, right? When you spill milk ... Everybody uses this analogy all the time. What happens when you spill the milk, you know?

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Rachel (00:59:57):

You cry.

Bethany (00:59:58):

Right. Right, what can you do? The milk has already spilled. But you can still ... Even though the milk is spilled, right? And you take whatever, and you soak it up with a paper towel, it depends on your perspective. Do you still use it? Are you afraid of germs, or do you take that paper towel and throw it away? So I say that to say, if we know that our polar ice caps are melting, if we know that our emissions are causing this change in climate, and shifting, and the earth is sad right now, then why don't we make the change with our cars? Why don't we make the change with how we conserve waste, or how we can reduce our waste? If we know what to do, why not just do it? And I think that's the only solution. You know what to do. Just do it. I like Nike's phrase, "Just do it." Why not just do it? If you know, you know. That's the only solution. Because if you don't just do it today, and you don't do it tomorrow, then you really have lost what you were trying to prevent.

Stephanie (01:01:10):

Instead of mandating people getting vaccinated against their will, mandate compost, which will help the entire planet.

Bethany (01:01:19):

And not just mandating compost, but in schools they always promote, "Recycle your cartons." They tell the children, after your milk or your juice, usually they have a recycling bin. If-

Stephanie (01:01:29):

Now they do.

Bethany (01:01:30):

Now they do, because it was mandated. But if you can teach a child to recycle in school, imagine what else you can tell them that when they get older they're like, "Oh, I learned this," and they continue to do it. Over the years, obviously there will be change versus ... Which is why we are where we are. Because over time, this is a build-up of things, the climate change. It's a build-up of lack of care and lack of taking responsibility for your actions. So if we flip a script and we, like my mother said, mandate education within the schools, mandate that everyone ... Just like they took away plastic bags, you can also tell them where to put those plastic bags or cups and such. If we flip it and do it just like that, then the years that go by may reverse the effect that we created in the end.

Stephanie (01:02:21):

It's not too late.

Bethany (01:02:22):

It's not too late. That's how it's not too late. That's how you do the milk story.

Rachel (01:02:26):

So is there a way that climate crisis, global warming, affects how you plan for your future?

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Bethany (01:02:33):

Oh, for sure.

Rachel (01:02:37):

Yeah?

Bethany (01:02:37):

For sure, yeah.

Rachel (01:02:38):

Tell me.

Bethany (01:02:42):

For me, I like to think of everything. I think all things are related. So when I think about how I plan for the future, I like to start off with where I am right now. So for example, when I think about the first house I'm going to buy, because that's usually the first thing I think about, like the first house I'm going to buy. I think about the area that I'm going to buy it. I think about where it's going to be on the land. What kind of land am I going to be sitting on?

Rachel (01:03:17):

How high is that land?

Bethany (01:03:18):

How high is that land? What's the source of the water in the area that I'm going to be living in? And then, the community; what greenery am I surrounded by, or lack thereof? Can we put greenery in the area? Are there any gas stations nearby? Not for driving, but for those purposes. Could there be a leak somewhere? So when I think about my future, I think about all of the things that cause issues in the environment, and what which one of them or all of them will be in my path in the plans for my future, such as the house, children, transportation? How I will be reducing my own carbon footprint, and how I can do that and bring that into my future. All of that plays a role in how I view the future with environmental changes, climate change, and just ... And then also promoting the education of it, starting from now. That prepares the future, yeah.

Rachel (01:04:36):

How about you, Stephanie? How does it affect how you plan for your future?

Stephanie (01:04:41):

Hmm, I think about how the word sustainability is misunderstood. When people think of sustainable, they think of that it's, "Oh, that's a good thing. It's sustainable." But I think most people misunderstand what that means, like this garden. This garden is not as sustainable as it should be or could be. And so I'm thinking either we have to have one concrete definition of sustainability, not everybody's opinion of what it looks like or is. And ask ourselves, "What's keeping us from changing the way that we think and how we live?" Because like California, they seem to be the leaders in sustainability. They're very strict with their recycling rules, and it's not that they want to find people. It's just that they want a better quality of living for their state, and that should be nationwide.

But everybody has different thoughts on it, so for us it takes deciding, "Well, what can we do on a small scale?" Because maybe we can't march on Washington right now, but we can start from where we are. So I'm not sure if that's answering all of the question, but that's what I think about. "What part, what role am I playing to make it better, and to help people understand what they can do?" It doesn't take a lot. It's not a labor-intensive task. It's just knowing what not to buy. What's a better buy? Instead of saying what not to buy, what's a better choice? Instead of wood beds, can we use plastic? Is that better for my soil? Because then I don't have to cut down any more trees.

Rachel (01:06:55):

Were you not supposed to say that?

Stephanie (01:07:02):

And Green Thumb will ... No, it's fine. And Green Thumb will recognize how many trees they'll save by not using wood for their new beds. We will find a good alternative, and thereby other homeowners and people will say, "You know what? That's a great idea. That will last for 100 years, as opposed to rotting in four." That's sustainable, and that's what we want to ... We want to be role models for that. That's why we have the trash bins out on the sidewalk. People driving by, they're not going to go all the way home to throw anything away. But if they knew every community garden had a bin for recycling and whatever they'd say, "You know what? Oh, there's a garden coming up. Let's toss it there." That's what I would like to be a part of, that change.

Rachel (01:08:05):

Well, we have been talking for an hour and I don't want to take up all of your time. So I'm going to ask, I have two and a half more questions. Is that okay?

Stephanie (01:08:16):

Sure, that's fine.

Rachel (01:08:17):

Okay, so the first, I'm combining my question. But what do you fear for the future, and what do you feel hopeful for?

Stephanie (01:08:25):

Okay, you go first.

Bethany (01:08:30):

I think my biggest fear for the future is that we are not going to have enough resources to support the people just within the United States. Not even all of North America, but just within the United States alone, because as we mentioned earlier, we lack that want and initiative to backtrack and understand that we need to preserve our resources. We need to find ways to promote preserving our resources. And without that, I really fear that we're going to be struggling and scrambling for just the basic necessities like water, vegetation. The stuff that we're used to getting from the grocery store almost instantaneously, I fear we're not going to be able to get it and people are going to be very upset about it. It may cause a very, very, very bad slippery slope.

I am hopeful for a change to come that will allow for people not to just understand the importance of preservation, but to take part in the preservation, because that's one of the biggest things. You can know and understand all good and well, just like studying a topic at school. You can know and understand it and pass. But if you don't take part in the activity yourself, you will never truly grasp or understand exactly what's going on, or help to prevent a bad or downhill effect. So I am hopeful that there will be more volunteers, without being paid for or compensated in any way, shape or form. I am hopeful that communities will come together, whether it's two or three people that decide to come in and help each garden. And not just the gardens, but just the community as a whole, and come together.

If they see trash on the floor, they pick it up, throw it in the garbage. If they see an entire corner of trash and other things to be unmentioned on the floor, that they will either alert ... Call 311 and have them do a pick-up, or they'll get someone from next door, because everyone here knows each other. Get someone from next door and say, "Hey, let's go pick this up together and throw it away." I'm hopeful that everyone will get on the compost bandwagon, and there will be sites all over New York City within the garden, outside of the garden, and there will be pick-up here, pick-up there, and everyone will be a part of the process. Generally, I'm just hopeful that we'll come together and ensure that we're on a livable planet because Mars is not going to be-

Stephanie (01:11:30):

It's not an option.

Bethany (01:11:31):

It's not. It's not.

Rachel (01:11:32):

Cold, red planet.

Bethany (01:11:33):

Yeah. As much as we try to make it happen, can't make it happen.

Stephanie (01:11:33):

Not much.

Bethany (01:11:37):

It's just not meant to be, so we've got to make it work on earth.

Rachel (01:11:41):

How about you, Stephanie? What do you fear for the future and what do you feel hopeful for?

Stephanie (01:11:47):

I really fear that this upcoming generation, this digital ... You know, they're so digitized. I find that too many of them are far removed from being connected to spaces like this. Even the parks; the parks that have that blacktop, that just kind of defeats the whole purpose of having an open space. And so I fear that young people will have a tough time connecting to appreciating green spaces, and having a role in protecting the environment. I really fear that.

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Rachel (01:12:38):

What do you feel hopeful for?

Stephanie (01:12:39):

I'm hopeful that community gardeners and spaces like this can be a part of the resurgence of appreciating green spaces. And that if we could begin to go into our schools and classrooms, and pull on and tug on some of our seniors to get their stories, their experiences growing up, whether it was in the country or here. Just forge that intergenerational alliance that ... I mean COVID has done a lot, but even before then there seems to be that break. The seniors are out during the day, and then when the kids get out of school the kids are out. You want to see that. You're hoping that you can see that again, and that gardens could be that come-together place. The second lot ... These are two city lots. There was an abandoned house on this north side. The community board fought, or I should say they pitched the idea that it be given to HPD, and then HPD granted it to Green Thumb. So that's how originally, the original spot ... The original lot had ended right where this picnic table is.

Rachel (01:12:39):

Wow.

Stephanie (01:14:13):

So this is the second lot.

Rachel (01:14:15):

Wow. It really opens up the space.

Stephanie (01:14:19):

Yes, so when we went through the design process, the redesign process, we all agreed that this would be for the social setting, and for people to come and have a meeting place to hold rallies, conversations, debates. That's what it would be for, yeah, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rachel (01:14:42):

Wow. Cool.

Stephanie (01:14:42):

Yeah, so we had Sandy Nurse come here several times for campaign meetings and rallies.

Rachel (01:14:48):

Cool.

Stephanie (01:14:49):

Yeah.

Rachel (01:14:51):

So my last question is just, are there any questions I didn't ask you that you expected me to ask you, or that you wish I had asked you?

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Stephanie (01:14:59):

No, I don't think so.

Rachel (01:14:59):

Bethany?

Bethany (01:15:10):

I didn't know what to expect, so I wouldn't say there were any questions I felt went unasked or unanswered. I think it was a pretty thorough questionnaire that we received, on all levels. It tackled all environmental aspects. It tackled the garden here and there. I think the only question maybe up upkeep. How does upkeep or environmental change affect upkeep, maybe?

Rachel (01:15:40):

Yeah, that's a good question.

Stephanie (01:15:41):

Oh, and participation.

Bethany (01:15:43):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rachel (01:15:43):

That's a good question. What's the answer?

Bethany (01:15:47):

A lot of the gardens were inactive because of COVID, and they just opted not to meet for safety. We lost a lot of gardeners to COVID. Miss [Jeannette 01:16:04] from Escape to Nature passed away, and Miss Rose from East End, she passed away. I spoke with Bill from Green Thumb. We lost about, I think in the organization, at least in Brooklyn, about 10 gardeners. Yeah, it's a lot.

Rachel (01:15:47):

I'm so sorry.

Bethany (01:16:27):

That's just in Brooklyn, yeah. And the irony is that they were shut in. So I don't know if it was during a home visit with a nurse's aide or whatever. I don't know the nature of it, but they did have some other underlying illnesses. And so I know here, we are planning a memorial for Poppa and Momma Jones, and just to give a little bit more backdrop story about their lives and the role that they played here with the garden. I would imagine at some point they're going to do the same thing for the other gardeners, so people will remember the work that they did.

Rachel (01:17:12):

That's so important.

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Bethany (01:17:13):

Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

Rachel (01:17:16):

Thank you both so much.

Bethany (01:17:18):

Oh, you're welcome. Thank you.

Rachel (01:17:20):

I loved talking with both of you. This is such a treat, and it's such a treat to talk, like I said, like talk to a mom and a daughter. That's really cool. It's cool to hear how your experiences intersect and how they are different. I loved hearing about this garden and the work that you do and the community that you foster. You're just doing really important work.

Stephanie (01:17:20):

Thank you. So are you.

Rachel (01:17:46):

And I'm glad I got to hear about it. Thank you so much.

Stephanie (01:17:47):

Thank you for coming.

Bethany (01:17:47):

Thank you.

Rachel (01:17:48):

Yeah.