

Traci, Prospect Heights Community Farm, Prospect Heights, Brooklyn
July 17, 2021

Rachel (00:00:01):

Traci, I'm just going to... I always do a backup just in case something happens with this recording.

Traci (00:00:07):

Definitely.

Rachel (00:00:09):

But just tell me what you had for breakfast, I'm going to check the levels.

Traci (00:00:12):

Okay. Frosted flakes and regular cow milk. Don't like almond milk and the other alternatives, they're just too thin for me. Strangely enough, I would drink half and half and have drunk half and half, but that's a bit much for cereal, so I don't do that. Am I talking loud enough or too low? Because I have been accused of talking too quietly too.

Rachel (00:00:42):

No, you're fine. I'm just getting the levels right, so you can talk at the level you're comfortable with.

Traci (00:00:48):

Either or because sometimes I just... I'm just not a yeller that's all.

Rachel (00:00:52):

And what'd you have for dinner?

Traci (00:00:59):

Cheese sandwich, actually, I had to think about that for a minute. Cheese sandwich didn't feel like cooking, it was too hot.

Rachel (00:01:06):

It was too hot.

Traci (00:01:09):

And I wasn't heavily hungry either.

Rachel (00:01:12):

So cheese sandwich was perfect.

Traci (00:01:13):

Exactly.

Rachel (00:01:15):

Okay. Traci.

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Traci (00:01:17):

Okay. Rachel.

Rachel (00:01:18):

So start by telling me who you are? Where you grew up? Where you live now and how old you are?

Traci (00:01:28):

Early 50s, I'm doing reverse order, early 50s, born and raised in Brooklyn. Pretty much two neighborhoods, went away for college and then came back, so I was out for six years. Commuted a long way to school, went to the Bronx from Brooklyn, hour and a half in the morning, hour and a quarter in the afternoon. Great time to do your homework and or play cards, UNO was a great game at the time, so we enjoyed that. And I am an architect actually and somewhat of a scientist, science inclined architect. I was going to be a physicist and then I was going to double major, and then I decided I really should pick one because they're both intense. So I picked architecture and I still use physics, so that's really cool. Actually, I very much enjoy that I'm able to use everything that I've learned in my profession actually, so that's really nice.

Rachel (00:02:24):

Sounds like you probably make some much safer buildings given your background in physics.

Traci (00:02:31):

Well, in physics you try not to blow stuff up, in architecture you try not to blow things over or down or blow things up, so sort of in a weird kind of way they coalesce. Yes.

Rachel (00:02:40):

And how long have you been a member at Prospect Heights Community Farm?

Traci (00:02:46):

Since 1997, one of the founding members. I haven't done the math, this is 2021, it's a mighty long time. There was a community garden here before but it went fallow and there was one person left because the teacher at the school, across the street at PS9 started it. Started the community garden here and when the teacher left, the program fell apart. But one person was left and they were gardening in the front and then somebody else on the block, a resident on this block said, "Hey, why don't we resurrect this community garden?" She hung up flyers on lamp posts when you could do that and responded, I responded to that.

Rachel (00:03:30):

Had you been involved in gardening previously?

Traci (00:03:36):

In a sideways kind of way, in community gardening, no. In planting things, house plants and trying things and stuff like that. Yes. My mom grew up on a farm and my dad grew up next to a farm actually, across the irrigation ditch from a farm, from a strawberry farm actually, which is cool. But his family didn't farm themselves, but he was in a farming community, so understood stuff and we talked about that. But

more of the stuff, information came from my mom and I would go visit my grandfather, who still had a working farm at that time and a mule, plowing with a mule, he didn't have a tractor.

He had all sorts of things. So there was corn, beans, peas, probably some other stuff too. I know there's a lot of corn. The mule had to be fed but there was other thing... Oh, onions, onions and things like that and some watermelons too. So when I was really little like four, four or five, the big thing was can we find a watermelon... I want to pick up a watermelon. And he was growing the big watermelons, so finding a little watermelon for a five year old to pick up was a hard task, but we found one and got a picture of it actually. And he actually, you can see that he's palming the watermelon helping hold it up.

But he was growing those big 40 pounders the long ones, but we found a 10 pounder or something like that. And it took some effort and I did hoist it a lot myself, but he was supportive so it wouldn't drop and fall on me or get hurt or anything like that. But from both of their stories, my parents stories and seeing at granddaddy's farm, I've always been interested in planting actually. And I tease my mom is like, "You made the mistake of showing me that those orange seeds in my lunch box, I can plant those and they'll grow into something."

So I was like, "Oh, can we plant this? Can we plant that? Can we plant the corn that's in the freezer? 'No, that's been frozen, it's dead, it's not going to work.' Can we plant this? 'Yes, we can. We can try it.'" And it's like, "We don't know how it's going to work out, but we'll find out." It's been a lifelong adventure ever since she told me there was these things. It's like, "Okay, we're on," kind of thing. And I've always been, even prior to that, I'd always been interested in flowers, stopping by the florist and picking out flowers and we'd have house plants too. So there's a lot of house plants in the house now, there was a few when I was younger, but I think I was sort of... between the both of us, we collected a lot of plants.

So it's been fun and an adventure. And then because of being the scientist, I've done a lot of experiments, things that people say you can't grow, it's like I've grown them. My mom talked about how her mother used to take sticks of plants, cuttings of plants and stick them in the ground and they would grow. And I'm like, "Well, if grandma could do it, I can too." So I've tried that and propagated, a lot of plants that way too, so it's been great experiments over the years.

Rachel (00:06:42):

Why would people say you can't grow things that way?

Traci (00:06:44):

Because people are scared to try, I'm not scared to try. It's a cutting of a plant. It's a seed. All you need is two things. The thing and time and patience, so it's three things. If you're not patient enough you can think something is dead, but then it's not. It's like if you hang on it's going to sprout or it'll actually sprout out roots or things can go great. They can go wrong too but it's like just pay attention, watch, wait see what happens kind of thing. And if you're not stressing over it, which I'm not, because I'm not doing it for cash crop kind of thing. So it's okay, if I were, then I might have other issues if I was farming for a living that might be a thing, but I'm not so... I have no problems with trying and waiting and see. I got to say I went to Brooks High School of Science and that was part of our training too, it's like, "Try to experiment."

Figure it out, have some idea so you don't hurt yourself, kind of thing, don't blow up something. But you there's no predetermined outcome. And so don't assume that it's going to be this way or that way, kind of thing, so just try it, find out. And it's funny because my mom said the same thing to me too is, "Just try. Can't is not a part of your vocabulary, is not a word in your vocabulary." When your little kid gets frustrated and it's like, "I can't do this." You about to have a fallen out fit kind of thing. It's like,

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"Stop can't is not a word in your vocabulary." And I looked at her the first time she said that, I'm like, "I just said, can't what do you mean?" And she explained it's like you can do it either you just need to practice or try again, that kind of thing or figure out how, but can't really, isn't a thing.

She would say that to me when I would say I can't and that would infuriate me sometimes, but it's like, "Okay, I'll try it again." So that's why I always try it's like it can't... What's the worst can happen? It not root, it not work, if you're doing something chemical, the worst that could happen is you kill yourself blowing something up. That's not good. But with plants there's nothing to lose, so that's why.

Rachel (00:09:12):

When you started at the garden, how much did you have to learn when you started here at the garden and how much have you learned over the past 22 years?

Traci (00:09:23):

That's both interesting questions. I had a very deep foundation because I was always the kid asking why, "And tell me a story. Tell me a story when you were a little girl, tell me a story when you were a little boy, what did y'all do? What did your brother and sisters do?" Whatever happened, that kind of thing. "What happened with the mule? Who did what?" All these stories. So I had a lot of questions answered. So I had the theoretical knowledge, but I hadn't had the greatest opportunity to deploy that knowledge. So my knowledge was vicarious or my actions were vicarious, so I knew the rules but I hadn't had the opportunity to do it. So when I got here, I had a bigger opportunity, I'd lived in a brownstone, so I did have a stoop opportunity and deeper window sills.

So I had the better fortune than living in an apartment building where there's a four inch window sill and no stoop, but even still, that's not a yard or that's not a 4' x 8' planting box. So everything that I had heard I started actually practicing and was successful pretty much early right off the bat, because I knew the things what to and what not to do. However, again, being the experimenter, I'm like, "Okay, you put two tomatoes in about three square feet, right. Can I put three or four?" And succession planting and pushing the limits. How much can you get? How much can you do? What can you do before things over pressure and collapse, before the system collapses, kind of thing.

So that's some of the things that I have done over the past 20 years or especially early on, it's like, there is a limit of how much you can pack in a space. But on the same token, you don't have to go perfectly by the seed packet and what it says, because while that is an excellent guide, it's a very excellent starting point, that's not the only place to land kind of thing. So if you end up with four more, it's not the end of the world. I learned that you could pack a lot of string beans in a place, but you might not want to do that same concept with tomatoes kind of thing.

So it all varies and it's like I learned also by watching my mom, she was a member here too. She's gone, so she's not anymore, but she told me a lot. But seeing her do stuff also made a little bit of a nuance to some of the stories that I had heard. So there was a lot of interaction of me experimenting and then watching. It's like, "Oh, you never told me that," kind of things and informative that way as well. And so with that though I've been able to share my knowledge with other people in the garden and that's been fun.

And so it's a great resource. And then when people ask you questions, it also reinforces your knowledge. So that each one teach one kind of thing, it's a true thing I've come to find. And it reinforces your knowledge, it makes you expand and expand upon what you do know, that kind of thing. Because you want to be better, you don't want to not have an answer. So you strive for betterness or excellence, you strive for excellence really honestly. You strive for excellence, at a minimum betterment.

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Rachel (00:12:44):

And what is having a life that involves growing things and gardening, what's the value in that for you? What does it give you?

Traci (00:12:58):

Tomatoes are really great. I was always a salad eater as a young child. So my mom didn't have a hard time getting me to eat vegetables. I wasn't one of those kids, in fact, she would put a cookie and a cracker on the table and I would always go for the cracker kind of thing. Or I'd take a bite to the cookie and then put it down. But I would snack with salads when I got old enough to make the salad myself as of four, five and six years old, it's like, "Can I have a salad please?"

Rachel (00:13:29):

Oh my God. You're like the golden child.

Traci (00:13:30):

I know it was amazing, it's was like, "Really?" But yeah actually, so there was always iceberg lettuce in the house and there was always those... They don't have them now, but there was like a sleeve of three tomatoes in a cell pack in a cello pack with green plastic netting or not netting, but a green lacy stiff plastic packaging with cellophane wrapped over three. And you get three perfectly sized tomatoes in the sleeve, so those were always in the house and so I would eat that too. And I would eat carrots and peppers and stuff like that but then those stopped being sold and I didn't... We got other tomatoes, but I preferred when we got to the garden, I preferred the homegrown tomatoes versus the store bought tomatoes.

Rachel (00:13:30):

Of course.

Traci (00:14:23):

They were by no means of any color worth it kind of thing, so that made a big difference in our lives. Mom lived for the, "Can't wait for the tomatoes," actually. And it's funny because I had to drag her out here because after farming in her childhood, she's like, "I don't want to go to this thing. I'm only going with you because you asked me to, and I don't want you to go by yourself." So I dragged her around here and then when she got out here, it's like, "Oh, okay, fine, I don't want to work too hard, but this is cool." And so Brandywine tomatoes is the household favorite, but we like others too, Cherokee Purple.

Oh, Dr. Wyche's Yellow actually it's W-Y-C-H-E'S, which is an unusual yellow orange, no orange yellow, I'm thinking Crayola colors now when they used to have those two colors, which also is not anymore, but it's a nice flavor tomato it's meaty but juicy as well. Brandywines are sloppy, soft, but they're good. It's worth it, but sometimes we couldn't get them home without them cracking. So just carrying them in the plastic bag kind of thing because they're that tender skinned. But all the other stuff growing greens and string beans never got Ochre to grow well actually, strange enough. Oh, sweet potatoes that was an adventure too, because mom always talked about that and I can grow everything else, bell peppers and all the other stuff, but you can't grow sweet potatoes in the house, so that was an adventure.

And going through that process learning about that and asking uncles about that, it was interesting. And asking everybody who's was still back at home it's like, "How did y'all do, what did y'all

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do?" Because there was some other cousins who they farm differently. So it's like, "What did y'all do?" I tapped everybody about everything, still do actually from time to time, some of them are gone on now, but there are those who still answer my questions.

Rachel (00:16:33):

So you have a family knowledge of growing that you've been able to tap into.

Traci (00:16:44):

Exactly. I'm nodding my head and you can't see that on the microphone, but that's true. One of the last times I saw my great-grandmother, she had sweet potatoes in her field and she.... How old was she? She was deep into her 80s, she died at 97 years old. Oh wait, that's not the last time I saw her. The last time I saw her with my mom actually was in '78, but she was deep into her 80s or in her 80s. But she didn't have a mule and she didn't have anybody to come and plow the field for her, with a tractor. She went out and hoed the field.

Rachel (00:17:23):

When she was in her 80s?

Traci (00:17:24):

Yes.

Rachel (00:17:25):

Oh my God. That's why she lived to age 97.

Traci (00:17:27):

90 something. Right. Exactly. And we were all like, "Wait, Ma Mary really?" Mom asked her who came over and plowed for you? Because she knew she didn't have a mule. Even if she did, she didn't think her grandmother had plowed. And so she's like, "Ain't nobody come over here and plow for me, I went out there and did it with a hoe." And we were all blown away. I was what nine or something like that. Even I knew that it was like, "Gee whizz," it's like, "this old lady did something." But I didn't quite understand the order of magnitude until I got older, but I didn't know it was a big deal then. But my mom and her sister were like, "Ma Mary," it was like, "you did that?" It was like, "You need to-" and then it was like... Well, they just stopped arguing. And it was like, "Okay, fine. You did it. You had the strength to do it. God bless you." So it was fine.

Rachel (00:18:25):

That's amazing.

Traci (00:18:28):

But it was amazing. It's still amazing to think about that. And people fall out here because they have to dig a hole for a transplant. Can you imagine hoeing a field?

Rachel (00:18:38):

No.

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Traci (00:18:38):

And planting a plant and stuff. I know it was insane. But on the flip side she wasn't going anywhere, she could go in when she felt like it.

Rachel (00:18:38):

Right.

Traci (00:18:49):

It was like she didn't have anything else to do, so it's like why not?

Rachel (00:18:51):

Tale your time.

Traci (00:18:52):

Yeah, exactly. Yep.

Rachel (00:18:55):

So Traci, my next question is the framing question for this whole project.

Traci (00:18:59):

Yes.

Rachel (00:18:59):

And then we'll kind of like move from there in the conversation. But the question is when you think about global warming, the climate crisis, what do you think out and how do you feel?

Traci (00:19:12):

Well, I'll take on the generational knowledge for a moment. When my mom and aunt and uncles, when my grownups were growing up, when they were kids, they were listening to the radio and they would say, "It's going to be 80 degrees and it's going to be hot out there today. Do what you need to do and get in." It was a farming community.

Virginia (00:19:38):

Look at the baby Monarchs, widely partially. See them.

Rachel (00:19:38):

Oh my God.

Virginia (00:19:45):

See them all over.

Rachel (00:19:48):

Oh my God.

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Virginia (00:19:48):

Oh, is that a cold. Oh my God.

Rachel (00:19:50):

Wow.

Traci (00:19:51):

You're in luck Virginia.

Virginia (00:19:51):

Oh my God.

Traci (00:19:53):

Excellent. So that being hot, 80 degrees being hot in Alabama, back then and compared to now it's like you've got to be kidding me, 80 degrees is a low in the summertime, kind of thing. Or 80 degrees could be in mid May, April, excuse me. But that was like a summertime temperature.

Rachel (00:20:16):

And how long ago was that?

Traci (00:20:18):

That was in the late 40s and 50s. Shoot now a 100 wouldn't be unheard of. That would be, "Ooh, it's hot outside." Versus 80, "Ooh, it's hot outside." Hey there.

Martha (00:20:35):

Hi. Is that Rachel?

Traci (00:20:36):

Yes, it is.

Rachel (00:20:37):

Hey Martha, nice to see you.

Traci (00:20:40):

So that in and of itself is amazing to hear. Even when I was a teenager or young, 80 degrees was like, "Ha, ha." When mom told me that because she told me this story a little bit later, not when I was a little girl, tell me the story, it was more in my teenage years. And I'm like, "Wait, what? Seriously?" And she was like, "82 used to be hot." And I'm like, "Man, y'all had it good. You just didn't know." And so fast forward to my youth. I also remember when it used to snow well in the city here in New York, and it would get cold and properly cold it's like you could really enjoy the seasons, and how summer wouldn't be killer hot kind of thing.

And a 100 degree day was an unusual thing. The time it happened in my lifetime was in the '90s, like '93, '94, summer '94, everybody was melting on the stoop kind of thing. But the last time it happened was in '66 and that was a big deal. It was like, "Oh my God, it's a 100 degrees." That year in

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'94, it was a 100, 102 for several days. The 66 one was one day, one and a half days or something like that, it was an anomaly. So the fact that summers got hotter and has crept up and it's like now half a century later, it is not so farfetched to have a 95 degree day in New York City is disappointing to say the least.

Because I remember when it used to be a lot more comfortable and a lot more, not palatable, but endurable because it wasn't as hot and people didn't have air conditioners, one because they weren't a thing, fans were a thing.

Rachel (00:22:50):

Hold on a minute.

Traci (00:22:52):

An escapee of paper. But at least we got a breeze today. It's maybe warm, but it's not hot, we got wind. But I remember when just a fan would be sufficient, it would be hot, but it wasn't too hot. You could either do the box fan in the window would exhaust the air out or draw some cool air in or something. You could get away with a fan now, but it's underwhelming and it's not sufficient necessarily. And so that's sad actually but that's the case. Garden wise I've found... Well, there's two things garden wise, sometimes I wish it would get really cold so it would kill insects quicker, better.

Some can over winter, but sometimes it seems like we just have a slow building explosion kind of thing of pests. And it's like if you freeze them they would die and we won't have to worry about this. On the flip side, it's been a little bit easier to grow some of the things that were not considered northern crops or you had a little bit longer, just a little bit longer time to make something happen where you could, if you started early enough you could get it growing.

Obviously, you could sprout it inside, but you may or may not get it to flower, but you may not get it to maturity. So there was always a, excuse me, a mitigation plan. It's like, "Okay, I want to grow this in a pot so that I can take it indoors and protect it if need be." I've found that I don't have to worry so hard about that now. And I don't know if that's a trend or a short span fluke kind of thing, because climate does ebb and flow. But here lately, I had tomatoes still on my vine for whatever reason they took all summer to make tomatoes and they were planted at a normal time, but I could pick them in November late-

Rachel (00:24:59):

When would you usually be picking them?

Traci (00:25:01):

Late October at the last, maybe November if you got a lucky "Indian summer" kind of thing. You can always eat green tomatoes, but you want red tomatoes that's a different thing. But you can pick them and store them and then pull them out of the storage container and let them ripen on the window sill. Another thing actually, I got a lot of other pre-knowledge too by watching Victory Garden in the early days on PBS, so I was a big PBS person for all its content. Even watched Upstairs, Downstairs, didn't understand what was going on and so I passed on it, but I liked the music and it was interesting, so it's like, "Yeah, okay, let me check this out."

But when you're a kid and you can't go outside either because it's raining or snowing or whatever, or you can't go outside when your parents aren't home kind of thing, I would watch PBS. Saturday morning cartoons, some sports maybe, do your homework and whatever time it might be

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watch PBS too. So a lot of Bob Ross when he was live and a live and This Old House, which also played into me becoming an architect as well, and then Victory Garden and something else. Oh, some cooking shows, the cooking shows. I didn't see the early, bless you, didn't see earlier Julia Child, but I did see when she was cooking The French Chef, I did enjoy that.

She was a weird lady kind of thing, but it was cool, it was like, "Okay, I'm not going to cook this, but I'm exposed to the world." When I got older it's like, "Oh, I know what this thing is because Julia Child talked about it." Or the Galloping Gourmet and all these other people, stuff like that. So a lot of my knowledge is, or a lot of my pre-knowledge was vicarious. And then I got the opportunity to exercise it myself, and that's what the garden has afforded me too. But back to the climate aspect of it.

Some of the things that those cooks were talking about, I can actually grow now that you wouldn't necessarily have been able to grow New York in the first place, either for availability or because when I was growing up oregano was exotic kind of thing. It was something you could get at the pizzeria kind of thing, but you wouldn't necessarily see it on the store shelves and dill too. So it's like you would see these things in cookbooks, but you wouldn't necessarily know what they were, have an opportunity to taste and it's really weird because New York is an immigrant place. But it was still segmented and portioned off and so everybody wasn't necessarily, you could get it at the restaurant, but you wouldn't necessarily see it on the store shelves.

So the garden has been cool like that because we could grow dill and see what it tastes like. We could grow lovage and see what that tastes like, cilantro and coriander. But then simultaneously, the farmer's market started happening and these things started being available in a store too. But we got seeds, Green Thumb the Parks Department organization or Parks Department department section that would support community gardens. And so they would have seeds and it's like, "Oh, let's try this. I read about this." My mom would say the same thing. It's like, "Oh, I read about this. Let's try these seeds." So it became a culinary adventure as well, as well as a gardening adventure, it was everything. Everything plays into the community garden actually. And I'll take this in a whole different aspect but even with our prunings, pruning is what? Small pieces of lumber.

I'm a woodworker too actually. We had to make models in architecture class. And I always been interested in woodworking as well because again, I watched This Old House. So it's like if we need to cut a dead maple branch, well, that's that's wood or that's a dead branch, but it's also where does lumber come from? Trees, kind of thing. So it's also an opportunity to try different things like that as well, so it's a broad interconnected life.

Rachel (00:29:29):

That is so cool.

Traci (00:29:29):

And so people think I'm crazy, honestly. It's like, well, okay, if you want a maple chest or a maple jewelry box. You talk about the sizes of pieces of lumber that we get here. Or a maple cutting board or a maple coaster, where do you get it from? You can get it from a big piece of wood that's milled, or you can get it from the piece that just fell because of a storm. You just have to mill it and know how to do that, which has been another adventure, but it's all learning. So again, can't is not part of your vocabulary. Always try. Figure out a way to make it happen. This is a good introspective for myself, frankly. So I know I diverged off of the climate question and I forgot the climate question.

Rachel (00:30:28):

The question what do you think about, the next question is how do you feel?

Traci (00:30:29):

How do I feel? Conflicted, because nobody wants to suffer through winter storms kind of the thing. And so it's nice that they're not as intense as they used to be, but dang it I miss snow. I enjoy snow. I really like snow. I'm not a cross country skier or anything like that, but I did like to play in it and I don't mind it as much as other people who's like, "Man, it's snowing outside." It's like, no, I'm like, "Yeah, it's snowing outside." I still have that joy about it. So there's the snow, no snow pros and cons on that. The heat, I'm not so keen on that as long as it rains to relieve the heat, garden wise that's great because I don't have to water, but watering when it's hot is real difficult.

It got hot in the mid 2000s actually. Two funny stories. And so there's one, I used to take flowers to work actually and I was very much enjoying my daffodils and I'm like, "Oh, my daffodils are up. I'm going to take some to work." And then it was Easter Sunday. So it was April actually and it had gotten up to 90, and I was going to pick my daffodils and they were looking all lovely and everything, and they were crunchy. The flowers had got so hot that it had heat dried them. It looked fresh, but that hot spurt just desiccated them, they were perfectly preserved and I'm like, "Okay, this isn't happening." So that was a disappointment actually and bad. But it's also good because there are other things that you can grow. And this is like I was saying the temperature shift, there are other things that you can grow for longer, that they would thrive better in the warmer air.

Oh, peanuts is another thing. A man in Harlem actually grows them, grows peanuts. So I was like, "Well, heck I'm further south, if he can, I can." This has been a, I won't say a dream, a goal or an aspiration of mine to do so, so much that I actually ordered peanuts because we couldn't find raw peanuts, they were all roasted, so it's like that's not going to work either. But I ordered peanuts and I got one to grow again from parental knowledge, it's like, "What do I do?" It's like, "Tell me this," and stuff like that. So it was too cold that year to start them outside, the span of time that you need they're a long heat day crop. So I couldn't plant them in April like you do down south, because it was still snowing here that particular year, or it's still very low temperatures here, it will rot the peanuts. And so I plant them inside and I got it up to November, I got one peanut, it was pitiful, but I was elated. It was like, "Hey, it worked."

Rachel (00:33:34):

You got one.

Traci (00:33:35):

I got one.

Rachel (00:33:36):

It feels like a miracle.

Traci (00:33:37):

Yeah, exactly. Better than none. Which it's like, you wouldn't expect it to do that. I've tried off and on again. And this year fingers crossed. I will actually have a crop of peanuts. Why because it's hot and it's hotter longer, so they can thrive a little bit more robustly than they did in the 80 to 90 degree weather. Well, the 70 to 80 degree weather versus the 80 to 90 degree weather, for longer periods of time. So that's a pro and a con too. I also tried cotton. My mom almost disowned me honestly, but it was green cotton, it wasn't white cotton.

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Rachel (00:34:22):

What's green cotton?

Traci (00:34:23):

Cotton actually comes in natural colors, white is the bread color, the selected color. Cotton naturally comes in brown, yellow, green, rusty red.

Rachel (00:34:36):

Oh wow.

Traci (00:34:36):

Kind of thing. So the hybridization and the development of white cotton, so that you can make in any color that you want to be, is the new kid on the block. Historical cotton is different colors.

Rachel (00:34:48):

Interesting.

Traci (00:34:49):

So Sand Hill Preservation in Iowa, in Iowa is where... Iowa or Utah. I forget. Anyways, Sand Hill Preservation Center is where I got the green cotton from, and they had brown cotton and I'm like, "Nah, that doesn't really move me." So that's why I ordered that. And I got some peanuts from them and that's when I ordered that and it worked out, I got a cotton.

Rachel (00:35:14):

Wow.

Traci (00:35:14):

And I got cotton blossoms, again, late in the season, like September, down south they finished picking their cotton by September, but it's New York, so ow. But it was like it was an experiment, again, I tried. And then I had that plant in a pot so I could bring it in because I knew it was going to take too long. I didn't have the heat days that was necessary for it to thrive. So I brought it in and the rest of the bowls popped open. I got one to pop open out here, which was pushing the limits of temperature kind of thing, because it was rainy and cool and they need it to be hot and dry to bust open.

Rachel (00:35:55):

And what month was that?

Traci (00:35:56):

November.

Rachel (00:35:58):

Okay.

Traci (00:35:58):

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It's like pushing the limits of, "Is it going to be warm enough?" Fingers crossed hopefully, maybe it'll pop out on a 70 degree day versus freezing the death and killing the plant. But I brought it in it desiccated, so it did die. But I did get bowls to partly open and then they look pecans actually strangely enough. And unfortunately squirrels think they look like pecans too. They steal the buds when they're forming, they steal the bowls before they open because they're pointy looking like green pecans, if you've ever had that opportunity.

But hopefully this year that'll work out better. I started earlier, we have a greenhouse so I got a little bit of jumpstart, a warmth jumpstart plus it's been a hotter year. And who knows what it'll be in October, November, it could be snowing in October like it did in 2018, it snowed early and people were stuck in six inches of snow. And it's like, "Y'all forgot how to drive." But people were stranded on the highways and stuff like that, or it could be 60 degrees through Christmas. We don't know. So again it's like never say never, you just don't know what's going to happen. Again try, if it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out. But at least you tried, you might get lucky and something could be in your favor.

Rachel (00:37:23):

This is interesting. I hear you talking about your response to experiencing global warming is from the perspective of adaptation is what I'm hearing you say.

Traci (00:37:38):

Yeah. That's true. Or, go ahead sorry. I interrupted you.

Rachel (00:37:43):

No, no continue.

Traci (00:37:45):

Yeah. Well, no adaptation is not the word, but that is true. There's another word. Not metamorphosis.

Rachel (00:38:05):

Transformation.

Traci (00:38:06):

Yeah. I guess adaptation is the best thing. There's another word that's crossing my mind, it's a long word too, but I can't... There's a word in my head, but it's not coming out yet.

Rachel (00:38:16):

I know.

Traci (00:38:18):

But let's roll with adaptation. Yes. It is about adaptability or flexibility, which is adaptability to but in a slightly different nuanced way. Because you can be flexible, you can either cover your plants or give it up, to protect them from the cold, you can use thermal blankets. So if I were a farmer, I'd probably be giving up the crop because you can't thermal blanket a field, but you can't thermal blanket a 4' x 8' bed, so that's a nice alternative. And those are some things that I've learned over the years too, going to the Green Thumb workshops, they give out materials and stuff like that, that we've shared. Hoop houses,

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concepts, and cold frames and extending harvests and things like that, early start late extension kind of thing, protections and stuff, so those are different kinds of experiments that are fun to try too.

It's like you never know what's going to happen, you could have tomatoes in April crazy thought, but nothing's impossible. Nothing's impossible. It would be about flexibility and adaptation. Ask me your next question and I'll come back to that.

Rachel (00:39:41):

I'm curious still about what has been your emotional or psychological experience witnessing all of this change? The change that you're talking about is drastic.

Traci (00:39:57):

That's true.

Rachel (00:39:58):

And how do you contextualize it? How do you understand it? How have you responded to it emotionally, psychologically?

Traci (00:40:16):

That's an excellent question. I don't necessarily know that I have an excellent answer because I haven't quite thought about it like that. I do tend to think a little bit more empirically kind of thing.

Rachel (00:40:30):

I can see that.

Traci (00:40:31):

What do you do to mitigate a situation? Actually, I think that's the word mitigation, it's not necessarily adaptability or flexibility, but mitigation. What do you do to mitigate a situation? How do you mitigate floods? How do you mitigate heat? How do you mitigate cold? How do you mitigate insects actually, they all interplay with each other. And this is where, for me, where architecture and the land come together. There are some architects who build non-contextually or with exclusion to the environment in which they're building is. Like Corbusier European architect, I was going to say French architect, was more of the guy who did his thing in the field.

His building was somewhat of an object in a broad vast landscape. His high rise buildings can be some way considered that way too, it's just a grouping. But he had mega blocks sort of what you see a lot of projects built, it's that mindset or that type of model of thinking, it's not exactly translatable. It's not the exact same thing, but it's similar concepts of the thinking of the time and then these things come forward. I've always been one who is equally interested in the land upon which you're building sits or resides in the context of which it is and the environment that it works with. So for me, that's why they're not disparate or separate, they're all integrated. So when I was growing up, energy was not that big of a deal until the energy crisis and people had to wait in line for gas. But siting your building properly so that you can use the southern sun, if you so desired or decided to not take in the southern sun, depending on where you are in the country.

And that kind of thing was always important to me, prevailing winds, where's your tree, where's your view, kind of thing. People always think about the views, you can create a view and also create an environment and a context in which everything works together, so this symbiotic relationship. I was

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always interested in that whereas I know in school, some of my classmates weren't as concerned and I'm like, "Well, why not?" Even if you're in a city there's context, it's like either you're on the hill or you're on the low lands, you're in the flood zone or you're not, kind of thing, or you're next to old buildings and new buildings.

Sometimes you want to be a little bit more contextual, sometimes it doesn't matter because it could be a splash of everything, but sometimes you don't want your building to look like an alien in the midst of other buildings. Similar today like in Brownstone Brooklyn, you get some buildings that land and it's like, "Who did what and what were they thinking and why?" It's like just because you can, doesn't mean you should, use a little discretion. And so it can be a little crazy.

Rachel (00:43:51):

Hi.

Traci (00:43:52):

So long be well.

Speaker 5 (00:43:54):

[inaudible 00:43:54].

Traci (00:43:56):

Again, I have digressed from the question.

Rachel (00:43:59):

No, but I'm curious.

Traci (00:44:00):

How do I feel?

Rachel (00:44:02):

Well, yeah, how do you feel?

Traci (00:44:08):

Wait, sorry, state your question again, do you remember?

Rachel (00:44:10):

The full question is-

Traci (00:44:11):

Yeah. Sorry.

Rachel (00:44:12):

... when you think about global warming or the climate crisis, what do you think about it-

Traci (00:44:12):

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About that.

Rachel (00:44:12):

... how do you feel?

Traci (00:44:17):

Right. Okay. So there was a point to that. Because now there's LEAD and there are other systems too, that talk about how your building interacts with your environment. My mom used to say, it's like, "I'm not recycling because it's too late now." And I'm like, "But it ain't over. You can try." And I understood her point, but again-

Rachel (00:44:39):

I'm not recycling because it's too... that sounds very stubborn.

Traci (00:44:43):

Yeah. Yeah. That's true. She obliged, but she's like, "I'm sick of this, it's too late." Relatively speaking for her, yes, it might have been. But I'm still here and I got cousins who got kids, so it's like, if you're looking in the global, in the broad, there's the planet for the children kind of thing. You still would even though, and in fact you might even go so far as to mine landfills actually for stuff, for resources, which is not so farfetched a thing, but recycling doing your building to mitigate climate effects or to lessen your load on the environment it's sort of crazy. Back in homesteading days and after the Civil War, the sodbusters, we were building houses that were partly in the ground, and they would put sod on their roofs because it would keep the house warm.

Now, if you're out in the middle of the prairie and there's no trees, you need something to keep your house warm because there's no trees for fuel. There's only so much grass you can burn, kind of thing, and cow dung or Buffalo dung, whatever, kind of thing, in the fireplace to make for fire. We used to do that concept, but of course with modernization, you get away from such things. And so using strategies of the environment to either lighten your load and lighten your footprint on the environment is a good thing.

There's been great advances in the industrial revolution, but there was a lot of excesses. Again, just because you can, doesn't mean you should. Doesn't mean you should cut down all the trees, doesn't mean you should take everything and it's just you blow the ecosystem in the process. And so that concept of... I forgot what that one was.

Rachel (00:46:43):

Mitigation.

Traci (00:46:44):

Well, no, that man is the superior creature on the planet and can take any and all resources, and all the resources are for man's use, kind of thing. That can be true, but it doesn't mean that you have to abuse it. And that turns back into conservation and Native American principles and things like that, so it's like you use what you need, don't take it all. Don't waste it and stuff like that. So which again comes back to my woodworking thought is the tree fell, use some of the tree, it would ordinarily be lumber too.

But instead of just chopping it up and pitching it or burning it or throwing in the landfill, which is what we used to do, any storm damage, stuff like that. But it's like there are companies who take storm

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damage trees and make lumber. So that's a business model and it's relatively free, go get it kind of thing, those kinds of things appeal to me actually.

Rachel (00:47:47):

How does climate crisis shift the way you do your job? What kinds of things do you build or do you design?

Traci (00:47:57):

Well, I would say in my own practice, which I've had for about 10 years now, 10 years now, I do residential and commercial.

Rachel (00:48:06):

And does global warming, has that affected how you design buildings?

Traci (00:48:13):

No, not really because I always had that philosophy strangely enough, good view, good sighting, good environment, kind of thing. I had the opportunity to take architecture as an elective in high school. And I noticed even then that was my perspective looking back and it's like I didn't necessarily have the words for that then, kind of thing, because I was just learning. That was my thought it's like you put the house... The project was X amount of square feet, I forget it was sort of small actually and it's on a hill. So it's like I cited my house so that it was interactive with the hill. It was two stories, so it was two rectangles that were slightly offset, one was a little bit further back.

And so you had a Pilotis like Le Corbusier, so you had stilts holding up one end of it, but that stilted area had porch use kind of thing. But you still had opportunities for different kinds of outdoor space, shelter space underneath the canopy that was made by the overhanging part of the building. You had deck space, for the space that was left after you shifted the two rectangles apart, and then the ordinary front yard and the woods, which it was supposed to be situated in. So I tried to make a use of lots of things like that. Now I didn't know about water harvesting, rainwater harvesting, stuff like that, that we do here. But there's also a thing there's a strategy in some architectural practice now as well depending on where it is, but rainwater capture for flushing, toilets, for instance, that kind of thing.

You can plumb your system separately and make that a viable option or using green roofs to absorb rain water before it overwhelms the sewer system, that kind of thing, the plants being things that suck up water. But if you had just a flat roof and even the cool roofs things, asphaltic bitumen roofs used to be black. So during the Bloomberg administration, they were doing this program of cool roofs where they were painting roofs silver. I used to fly a lot when I was a kid and I would see on the airplane coming home, and see the airplane is like all the roofs were black and some would be white because, "Oh, that's a metal roof." But every rooftop was black. Now every rooftop is white or silvery. And if you see a black rooftop, it's like what happened?

It's like who didn't do what, kind of thing. And now you also see green too because there's more green roofs. So it's interesting and a beautiful shift, I must say, but those things also make the environment cooler. So you're not having these heat islands or heat zones, because you're not sucking up heat with black roofs, you're reflecting heat. You're not absorbing it. And green roofs also make things cooler. If we had done more of that in general, just as a way of living, not necessarily as a strategy, a weather mitigation strategy, how different would our world be.

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Rachel (00:48:13):

So different.

Traci (00:51:21):

So I think about, I guess I was watching NOVA again that's a... Ow.

Rachel (00:51:30):

You got bit?

Traci (00:51:31):

Yeah. By something that was unusual looking or was trying to bite me, I guess was trying to figure me out, but I'm not lunch. Anyways it looks like a cat... not a caterpillar. Ow.

Rachel (00:51:47):

Ow.

Traci (00:51:49):

That's not fun. Sorry. It's a little... it's not stinging.

Rachel (00:51:55):

And you don't recognize it?

Traci (00:51:57):

It looked like a microscopic hedgehog actually.

Rachel (00:52:00):

Oh.

Traci (00:52:01):

It was that color and it just had a little bit of... Not so much of upward bristles, but sideways bristles, but it looked like the caterpillars that Virginia was just showing on the...

Rachel (00:52:12):

Maybe it was one of those Monarch caterpillars.

Traci (00:52:14):

Well, no, it was tan. Actually. The Monarch are always black and blue black.

Rachel (00:52:19):

I have gotten not bit because they're not biting me, but I've had a caterpillar moth fly on me.

Traci (00:52:26):

Okay. Yeah.

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Rachel (00:52:27):

What's all this yellow stuff?

Traci (00:52:29):

Pollen. It's all over my shirt.

Rachel (00:52:33):

Wow.

Traci (00:52:33):

You walked among the fennel, right?

Rachel (00:52:35):

Yeah.

Traci (00:52:36):

Yeah. Okay. I got it on my bosom-

Rachel (00:52:39):

Yeah. That's cool.

Traci (00:52:39):

... and then on my shoulder, so you've been painted too.

Rachel (00:52:42):

That's cool.

Traci (00:52:43):

Plants painted you.

Rachel (00:52:46):

I got caterpillar and I had a rash for weeks.

Traci (00:52:49):

Whoa. Okay. Wow. All right.

Rachel (00:52:53):

Hopefully, it's not going to be a big rash if it's was a small little thing.

Traci (00:52:58):

Fortunately, it was a pin prick kind of thing, but I'm not used to stuff biting me, so that caught my attention. But it was tan brown, maybe a little cream color. I'll have to look that up. But anyways, we were talking about cool roofs. I was saying I've watched on NOVA I think one time or some show. But

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anyways, they're talking about Atlanta and how they were actually, because of their heat island effects were actually creating their our own weather phenomenon.

Rachel (00:53:27):

What?

Traci (00:53:27):

Yes. And their tornado prone anyway. But because it was so hot, they were creating trornadic type weather and more extreme weather. So I was like kind of thing, so this was maybe in the late 90s, early two thousands, somewhere in that zone, it wasn't in my youth youth. Early on, I understood the concept of why this thing, heat island effects and stuff like that and why you should do cool roofs, it wasn't a hard convince for me. The trick with that though, is getting clients to do it. People were interested in LEAD, but nobody wanted to pay for the certification documentation of it. And they also perceived it to be more expensive, but there's many ways to calculate cost. It costs you time, money or both or resources in this case. So it's quicker to build something that's cheap and not necessarily sustainable, but does it cost more to operate it? Does it wear out quicker? So that's two financial costs that also affect the bottom line, if you're going to own the building. If you're flipping a building, building it for speculation purposes then maybe that's not your concern.

But that'll be the new owner's concern, but why wouldn't you build well, so that you're just contributing to the wellness of the world. Why would you make somebody have to go and retrofit a building, when you could have did it right the first time or halfway decent at least the first time, that kind of thing. So there's so many ways of costs, it's like it costs you more fuel, which costs more fuel delivery, which costs more theoretically oil wars, kind of thing. We didn't go to war, but we faced that concept in the 70s with the oil crisis, and the gasoline rationing and such, that kind of thing. So if you did things better or differently, would it have cost as much to heat houses with oil if they were better... Oh, I thought that was a butterfly, it's a bird.

If they were better insulated at that time, insulation wasn't even a concept. Well, I won't say that, it wasn't such a big thing, it became a thing though actually when people's oil bills were through the roof. And then that's why people started switching to natural gas, and then insulation started coming in and made the need for the resource less. But if they had done that in the first place, again, all from the industrial revolution, energy was cheap, things were bountiful plentiful, but people weren't thinking about replenishment and you can't replenish fossil fuels. You can replenish trees, but not if you take them all down and don't save the tree seeds, kind of thing, they take time.

Rachel (00:56:36):

Thinking about missed opportunities, what do you fear for the future?

Traci (00:56:55):

I don't exactly because there's ways to mitigate things, but it's also whether or not people choose to. So if they choose to, well, theoretically, I won't be here when the world burns up, kind of thing, from overheating. But on the same token at the rate things are going who knows, it's like people are living way longer and who knew it could be sooner than we think. I don't have a good beat on that one. I hadn't thought about it, honestly. I haven't thought far forward. And it's really ironic considering to think about the green roof kind of thing. I guess it's a holistic kind of concept. What I would fear is that people don't think holistically or stop beginning to think holistically.

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Because more and more people are beginning to think holistically. It used to be the way to think, kind of thing, when you're on a farm or even in a city and you only have X amount of resources, and you're not sure when you're going to get some more. And you do things a little bit differently than when they're in abundance, and you can just go to the store and get another, kind of thing, or more of, kind of thing. So again, it's back to conservation, but there's all sorts of conservation, all sorts of mitigation, all sorts of costs, kind of thing.

Rachel (00:58:40):

So what do you feel hopeful for? Have you thought about that?

Traci (00:58:45):

No, I hadn't gone so far as my mom, it's like, "It's too late now. I ain't doing it." Yeah. No. Do I feel hopeful? No, I really hadn't contemplated that part.

Rachel (00:59:03):

Cool.

Traci (00:59:05):

Well, let's look at it like this. That song Teach Your Children Well, kind of thing, that is true. And so if children are being taught and kids are always telling their parents something, so I told mine something it was like we shouldn't... Actually, it's funny because at the time there was this thing, you shouldn't eat butter, you shouldn't eat milk, stuff like that.

Rachel (00:59:31):

You should just eat margarine.

Traci (00:59:33):

And non-dairy creamer. And so we were learning in school and it was also a logical point too, it's like, that's okay, but that's natural, the non-dairy creamer is synthetic. Margarine is synthetic. Butter is real. Why are we eating margarine? It's not real. It's taking the place of butter, but it's not real butter. And I told my mom about the non-dairy creamer and she's like, "You know what, I'm throwing all this out." And I'm like, "Well, you don't have to do that," because it's good if you don't have milk. It is a dry alternative. But it's like why should that be your first go-to. Not necessarily, it's good... She realized, "You know what, you're right." It's like, "Why am I eating this? It's synthetic." And she was really big into health. I always say she was a granola nut before the Californians were granola nuts.

Because she was really into health and good nutrition and things like that when I was born, which is also another reason why I took the cracker, not the cookie. But she wanted to lose baby weight and so she took out all the sugar out of the house so it wouldn't be tempting, so much so that she had to go borrow some sugar from a neighbor to serve a friend tea, who would come to visit. So it's like, "Oh, I don't have any sugar. I got the tea, but I don't have any sugar." And she went over to borrow some from somebody. I was a baby at that time but it was a funny story, but she was really into serving making sure that we were healthy. She wanted to do it right by her family.

She wanted to have a healthy family. And then years later when I got to be like 10 years old, it was like, "Why are you drinking the non-dairy creamer?" And she's like, "You know what? I don't know why I'm drinking this crap." We went back to eating butter and it was like, okay, you don't knock

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yourself out, slather everything in butter, but you eat the real stuff, you just eat in moderation. Same thing. Well, she wasn't a milk drinker anyway, but the same principle. So we just paid attention to... we paid attention to that. Unfortunately, sugar did come into the picture, but they weren't excessive actually. There was a time where I wouldn't eat cookies and stuff like that.

Again, my mom got so mad at dad when he showed me the gumball machine and it wasn't so much of the candy, but it was like, "Why did you show her this?" I really wasn't interested in the gumball, it's just like I wanted to turn the thing and get something out and that was the thing. When I had a choice I wasn't going for the candy, I was going for the toy ones, that was why. Well, and mom was like, she was like, "I can't believe you just did this." Because it's like I was not set on the path of sugar in my life.

I wasn't always hitting gumball machines, she didn't have a problem with that. But when I did want something it's like I would give them the candy and I wanted to get something out. But when the toy ones came, when you could get something, a toy out of the machine, it was like, "Oh, hey, I'll do that one instead. Can I have a quarter instead of a nickel?" Chiclets were good though.

Rachel (01:02:57):

Chiclets were good.

Traci (01:02:58):

Yeah. I did enjoy Chiclets.

Rachel (01:03:00):

Yep. Me too.

Traci (01:03:00):

Yeah. Then Pix Stix and SweetTarts and Spree, but that was older. And my cousin would go through her candy, mine would last for two, three weeks, so still indicative. Anyways, that's not climate related, but it is perspective related. And lower sugar has lower costs too actually. So fortunately, I haven't ever been overweight because I was eating too much of... too much sugar anyway, not because of eating too much, but I was eating too much of everything, not just sugary stuff. Anyways, it's all interrelated.

Rachel (01:03:45):

It is. It really is.

Traci (01:03:46):

It's all interconnected.

Rachel (01:03:48):

I just have a couple more questions for you.

Traci (01:03:48):

Sure.

Rachel (01:03:49):

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Do you think there's a relationship or a role for-

Traci (01:03:56):

Excuse me.

Rachel (01:03:57):

... these community garden spaces in terms of building resiliency for the future? In New York, as we move forward with global warming, what's the role of these spaces and what can they do for the community and to ensure a livable future?

Traci (01:04:17):

Right. That I have multiple answers.

Rachel (01:04:19):

Great.

Traci (01:04:20):

We are good at showing people that yes you can grow something in a small space because we have all sorts of spaces. We have 4' x 8's, we've got 4' x 4's, we have pots. "I didn't know I could grow a tomato in a pot." Yeah. You can. "I didn't know I could grow a squash on a pot." Yeah. You can. As long as nobody steps on it, you're fine, those kind of things. It's also a good respite because on some of those 90 degree days sitting here underneath the trees it felt like it was about 10 degrees cooler, which even without a breeze was really more than tolerable. It was quite downright pleasant, I think it was quite pleasant and people were making a point to not stand out in the sun.

It like we were shade hopping from tree to tree or clumps of shade to clumps of shade, kind of thing. It's like, "I want to go home, I want to lay down, but I really don't want to walk in the sun, so I'm staying here for a little while," it made that kind of difference. Actually, just yesterday somebody came in for respite from the sun actually coming home from market. Actually, he just needed to take a break, going home, it was hot and humid and blazing sun. So he came in and he sat beneath the tree, took a load off, kind of thing, and I offered him a few berries and he got some little bit of energy, sugar, energy kind of thing to make it the rest of the way and cooled off. And he had his water, but he relaxed.

So it's not just good for respite, for people passing by, but it's also good for respite as people knowing some other place that they can go, that may not be as overcrowded or crowded as Prospect Park or the playground, which is more sun than not. They can teach their children things or they can learn themselves or both, I've seen both. It's like some adults have asked questions about, "Oh, what's that?" And it's like, "No, it's not this it's something else." So the adults learn and then they show their children and stuff like that or a kid will show their parent, "Mom look or dad look, this is a so and so," or whatever, because they learned it in school and they saw it in real life, kind of thing.

And so they're like me dragging their parents along, it's like, "Come see," kind of thing. So it has the opportunity and then there's the physical as well for water mitigation, it's open land, so that's one less paved area is a suck up water. We also collect rain water from our neighbors off of their roofs. So that water isn't going into the sewer system and overflowing we're in the Gowanus watershed, so it's not overflowing the canal. Every little bit helps kind of thing. If everybody had a green roof, I wonder how much more that would be. Because that would be equal planted space for all the paved space that we have, then we would just have the sidewalk and the roadways instead of all the roofs too, so that

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would be interesting. I'm sure somebody's run the numbers just hasn't been me. So I don't know where that would be, but it would be an interesting query. Oh, I didn't see him come. I answered one question about how do these-

Rachel (01:07:42):

How do these spaces serve as we move forward into an uncertain and chaotic future?

Traci (01:07:49):

Oh, depends on the nature of the chaos. Right now, and actually last year we were fortunate enough to have the foresight to grow surplus produce, to give away to people who might have been food insecure. Which is also another interesting problem, because we always had a problem of people letting stuff rot on the vines or not rot, but get too far gone and actually tomatoes. Some tomatoes looked like they were, "Oh, that's pickable," and then when you touched it it went splat because it was over ripe, kind of thing. You almost blow on it, touch it kind of thing and it would be, it's like, "That didn't have to-" Because there are other members who don't have boxes who would've appreciated having it. Or you could put it on the table and say free produce whether you're in need or not. It's like who wouldn't like a nice tomato-

Rachel (01:08:41):

Oh my gosh. Yeah.

Traci (01:08:42):

... kind of thing. But the pandemic has made people more conscientious, members haven't let stuff waste last year and they're sharing this year too. So we wondered or perhaps I more than others wonder how long is that going to last? How long are people going to be conscientious to not let their crops waste?

Rachel (01:09:10):

How long do you think it will last?

Traci (01:09:13):

I don't know. And that's the thing because it's like it'd be nice that people would think of other people. And that's just thinking of your fellow man kind of thing versus crisis mode.

Rachel (01:09:25):

Right.

Traci (01:09:30):

And while we are almost seemingly maybe out of crisis, last pandemic took two years to resolve too. So technically, no we're not out of crisis, but we feel a lot better about it. But are we going to go back to normal? Probably not. And I was thinking about this in general when the pandemic started, when I grew up and I know a lot of people prior when I was born, the rule was is wash your hands before you eat dinner, wash your face, go wash up before dinner. Everybody said that income, racial, geographical, northerner and southerners it's like, "Go wash up before dinner." So it means wash your hands and your face, come to the table clean. That had long fallen out of flavor as I became an adult and don't cover

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your mouth when you sneeze, don't cough out into the air, which used to be a thing, a subway signage back in the turn of the century. No spitting, no talking, not no talking, no spitting, no eating, no radio playing used to be the signage sticker in the '70s.

And you don't see those stickers anymore and people start doing these things. And so all the things that we knew before like the sod houses and conserving energy. All the things we knew before people tend to forget, and then there's a crisis that makes it change or reminds you to do something. So people now wash their hands before they eat food, or at least they eat it with a napkin or stuff like that. In 2019, that wasn't the case, 2020, that became a thing. Oh man, I forgot where I was going. What's the question again, sorry?

Rachel (01:11:34):

The question was about how these community spaces serve a chaotic future, and you were saying-

Traci (01:11:41):

Yes.

Rachel (01:11:42):

... it depends on the chaos.

Traci (01:11:43):

Right it depends on the chaos and whether or not things go back to remember "normal", like 2019. I don't think they will, but I don't know exactly what that'll look like. Yes, people still remember to wash their hands, but will they still remember to share or will they think about it? That's a kind of MO similar to mine, but I don't know if it's going to be a casual passing thought as it had been in the past. I don't know if it'll stick more now or if it'll be ephemeral, TBD, TBD, to be determined, we'll see how that all shakes out. I think people will probably remind other people, but it depends on how hardcore they want to be about it. I don't know. We'll see. We'll see. Hopefully, people will be conscientious and kindly to another, that's why we have the golden rule, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. But people seem to have forgotten that one too, actually, otherwise they wouldn't be doing some of the things they used to do.

Rachel (01:12:59):

That's true.

Traci (01:13:02):

I don't know. That's another thing too, I've sort of noticed it's the 1950s out of the war, everything was about conformity or at least that was general perceived general idea. Everybody didn't conform, but that was the attitude. It's like, "No, you should do this. You shouldn't do that," kind of thing. And then the generation after me is like, "I don't care what you think I'm going to do so and so and so." And that's okay for self confidence. But when it turns to malignancy, when you're being flippant or saying that in a negative sense then that's where things become a problem. And we've heard a lot of that for some years and that's altered society. I was going to say it made a mess of society, but not necessarily, it's just different. But it does seem to have made a mess because people don't think... aren't so reluctant to shoot somebody or knife somebody, people used to knife people, now they shoot people.

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You can survive a knifing if they don't hit you in the right place, it's hard to survive a shooting, unless you get shot in flesh and not, kind of thing, there's so much more collateral damage. And I'm sure a doctor is saying, "Try stitching up a knifing." And he's like, "I'm not so sure about that." I don't know, but it seems that that's the case. And then people weren't so quick to hurt somebody either, a knife fight was a big deal. Now a knife fight is like, "Oh, that ain't nothing." It's like, "Oh really?" Yeah. It's like somebody shot somebody, that's almost nothing too, it's still wrong. It's all wrong, but the magnitude of distress over such a thing seems have gone down.

It's like, "Man, that's sad." Versus like, "Oh my God, that happened." That used to be the responses, but it's not now. Of course, it is, but it's not as rare. Sort of like a mass shooting thing, now because they're almost every day, it's sort of like if it didn't happen, it's like, "I'm glad somebody didn't go crazy, but what happened that somebody didn't go crazy."

Rachel (01:13:02):

I know.

Traci (01:15:30):

It's almost expected, kind of thing.

Rachel (01:15:32):

Absolutely.

Traci (01:15:35):

That's unfortunate. I don't know. Hopefully, people will remember all of this and use it as a steering force for positive in their world, in their ethos and stuff like that. And I don't know, I really don't know. I'm not optimistic or pessimistic.

Rachel (01:16:07):

You're open.

Traci (01:16:09):

I'm very neutral on that one. We'll see how this all shakes out.

Rachel (01:16:14):

Well, Traci, I feel like we talked about everything.

Traci (01:16:17):

Yeah. Under the sun.

Rachel (01:16:19):

Are there any questions I didn't ask you that you expected me to ask you or that you'd like me to ask you?

Traci (01:16:26):

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No. I had no preconceived notions on this one, again, that's a scientist thing, I did read your website ahead of time. And actually I meant to fill out the form, which is this interview. So I thought when I did see that and now that you said that, it's like, "Oh yeah, that's right, she did ask that." And that was an interesting question. No, I can't think of anything because I talked a lot, and gave a lot of opportunity for you to ask questions and figure out something, if you needed to pivot or something like that. So I don't think you didn't ask me something that you should have had.

Rachel (01:17:09):

Are there any questions you're asking yourself right now, that do or don't have answers?

Traci (01:17:15):

I'm curious to see how this grand experiment of societal reset works out.

Rachel (01:17:19):

What do you mean societal reset?

Traci (01:17:25):

COVID. We had a societal reset after 9/11 too actually. It's funny because at that time I was wondering, it's like, "Do we need all of this excess? And why is this such a dog eat dog world, sadly?" 9/11 made it not so much so, people were helping each other, people were kindly to one another, people weren't so stereotypical hardcore New York kind of thing, which is a thing. I don't think we're as mean as our stereotype across once you leave New York, the rest of the country, I don't think it's as bad as that. But there is some aspect of nose to the grindstone, kind of thing. But people were particularly nice and more empathetic, and then it evolved into something else. People weren't not nice, it just wasn't as we're-in-it-together kind of thing.

And so again, that reset our behavior toward one another, societal reset. And then again COVID did the same thing and ironically, same thing with New York versus the rest of the country. And it's like tri-state area where we've rightly so flipped out because it's like people are dying right and left.

Rachel (01:18:55):

Right.

Traci (01:18:57):

And it seems like other people it's like, "Oh, that's just New York." No, it's happening to your country too because people are traveling. Hello. Kind of thing. It's not a ship away, it used to be, it's a airplane a way.

Rachel (01:18:57):

It's like six hours.

Traci (01:19:11):

And two hours. Exactly. So it's like you could get sick this afternoon depending on the flight. So you could be okay this morning and be sick by dinner. That mindset astounded me, but that's a whole nother lack of public health understanding that I do not understand, why people don't understand, but that's a whole nother thing. But I'll leave that alone. I'll leave that alone. So what else would you, should have, might have asked me? I will ask you a question.

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Rachel (01:19:56):

Great.

Traci (01:19:56):

How did you come to this project?

Rachel (01:19:59):

Good question. So I've been making work about this subject climate crisis and specifically eco anxiety for years. I've had a lot of anxiety about climate crisis for years and years. Way before it was being talked about in mainstream. I would experience unseasonable and have this feeling of dread and everyone around me didn't want to talk about it.

Traci (01:20:31):

Oh, head in the sand or-

Rachel (01:20:33):

Head in the sand it wasn't something-

Traci (01:20:33):

... didn't notice?

Rachel (01:20:36):

... people were talking about. Even in the early 2000s, people weren't freaked out like I was.

Traci (01:20:36):

Gotcha.

Rachel (01:20:46):

It still felt like it was something in the future.

Traci (01:20:48):

Right.

Rachel (01:20:49):

But for me it felt like something very-

Traci (01:20:50):

The future is tomorrow.

Rachel (01:20:53):

... urgent. And I had been making art that tried to unpack how I was feeling for a long time, because I didn't feel like I had a language to talk about the feelings that-

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Traci (01:21:04):

So you had to learn.

Rachel (01:21:04):

... I was having.

Traci (01:21:05):

Right. I understand you.

Rachel (01:21:05):

I understand had to learn it exactly.

Traci (01:21:07):

I understand what you mean with that.

Rachel (01:21:08):

So I've done a lot of projects where I investigate myself and then this project was the next logical investigation, which is after talking to myself, I figured out how to talk to other people about this topic.

Traci (01:21:27):

Gotcha. That makes sense. It's sort of like each one teach one kind of thing. You taught yourself or you learned yourself and now you're extrapolating to others or... I understand what you're saying, that's a wacky analogy in this case.

Rachel (01:21:43):

No, it's cool though. I like that analogy. And of course this project has changed so much even since I started it in 2018, both because I think the world is different, things have changed a lot from 2018 to 2021. And also the questions that I'm asking myself and that I'm curious about are different, they've evolved.

Traci (01:22:06):

Okay.

Rachel (01:22:08):

So everything's constantly evolving and I'm just constantly trying to have these conversations, so I can try to answer some of these questions that I don't know-

Traci (01:22:20):

What do you think?

Rachel (01:22:20):

... if I have the answers.

Traci (01:22:24):

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Kind of thing. Sort of a self reflective but investigate. I hear you. Okay.

Rachel (01:22:31):

And so part of it, part of what I'm asking, it's been cool to talk to you and Virginia. Because part of what I'm investigating is how do people feel emotionally about this experience of change? What does it feel like and how does it affect the way they move through the present and their future? But I'm also really interested in keeping a record of what people have noticed around change. What changes have people noticed in their local landscapes and talking to you and talking to Virginia, and getting a sort of a longer perspective on literally what you can grow now and what you can't grow.

Traci (01:23:14):

I'm sure you didn't expect to hear about the '50s, the '40s and the '50s.

Rachel (01:23:17):

And I think that is really valuable. I don't know if people are recording that kind of change from a personal perspective. There's a lot of data-

Traci (01:23:32):

But what does that interpret to exactly.

Rachel (01:23:33):

Yeah. What are people noticing on the ground, I think is something that hasn't been recorded necessarily. So that's the other part of this project is taking down that information and recording it.

Traci (01:23:53):

One thing I forgot and is sitting right here in front of me, the things, I couldn't remember, one crop that I couldn't remember, greens that they used to grow. But it's interesting that made me think about it because it's like the generational change, people used to grow greens all the time and they still do, but you can't grow stuff because it's too dang hot now.

Rachel (01:24:15):

Like what?

Traci (01:24:17):

Like greens, like collards in the south.

Rachel (01:24:20):

You can't collards in the south anymore?

Traci (01:24:22):

Well, you can, but you run the risk of it being too hot and burning them up, actually, not fire burning, but drought burning or lack of water. Or you got to keep watering them a little bit more than you might would've when, say when my mom was a kid, kind of thing. You expected it to rain, it's going to rain, it's

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going to be fine. If it doesn't rain, you go out and water it, but you didn't have to do that all the time. Now it runs 90 easily, that's not good collard weather.

Rachel (01:24:50):

Right.

Traci (01:24:51):

And some other stuff too. Now they've had to be a little bit more flexible because it's like you can't plant everything. The people who are planting now, can't plant like they did when they were kids or like their parents did. So there's adaptability in that regard too, maybe they're planting something that's further tropical. Actually, we were all talking about that, it's like everything is shifted one zone north, kind of thing. So Alabama might have been zone seven or eight, but maybe it's nine or 10 now, which used to be south-

Rachel (01:25:27):

And worse on seven now.

Traci (01:25:29):

Which we used to be six.

Rachel (01:25:30):

Right.

Traci (01:25:31):

When we started out here in the garden we were six, a soft seven maybe borderline, kind of thing, if you're lucky. Not anymore. I know Virginia to be seven, so that's a couple of states movement kind of thing, Maryland and Jersey. Oh, pretty butterfly.

Rachel (01:25:56):

That's just a huge change.

Traci (01:26:06):

No. I was looking at the clouds to see if that was a storm cloud or not. Yesterday we were out here and we thought we were... It was bright and sunny like it is right now and we thought we heard a truck go by, but it didn't sound quite right, it was distant thunder, but it was big thunder.

Rachel (01:26:20):

I heard that out in Red Hook.

Traci (01:26:23):

But it was South Florida thunder like out on the horizon, it was like, "Oh." And then it was like, "Okay. Whatever." And then another one came and it was like, "Okay. We need to hurry up and go now."

Rachel (01:26:34):

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And then it started getting windy.

Traci (01:26:35):

Yep. Yeah. Yeah. It was a little crazy yesterday, but today it doesn't look quite like that.

Rachel (01:26:35):

I don't more don't think it's...

Traci (01:26:48):

As my mother would say that my grandma would say, "There's enough blue in the sky to make a cat a pair of britches."

Rachel (01:26:54):

Oh, okay.

Traci (01:26:56):

When she first said that I'm like, "What?" Then she repeated it and then I was like, "Yeah. Okay." But I understood and I finally got good at it and understood what she was talking about.

Rachel (01:27:13):

What are you looking at?

Traci (01:27:14):

Not a bird. I didn't have my glasses on, so I don't know what animal I saw walk by. But it wasn't a bird sadly, wish it was, but it ain't.

Rachel (01:27:28):

Aw.

Traci (01:27:30):

Oh, well.

Rachel (01:27:31):

Well, Traci, thanks for taking this time to talk to me.

Traci (01:27:34):

You're most welcome.

Rachel (01:27:35):

I'm really grateful. And you've been really generous with your time and all of your thoughts and stories.

Traci (01:27:40):

You're most welcome, Rachel.

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Rachel (01:27:41):

Yeah. I really appreciate it.

Traci (01:27:44):

I do tend to ramble at times.

Rachel (01:27:46):

It's great.

Traci (01:27:46):

I'm sorry, but I'm glad that it was of use.

Rachel (01:27:49):

Yeah, it's great. It's great. Your stories are awesome.

Traci (01:27:52):

Oh, thank you. Thanks.

Rachel (01:27:56):

I can take your microphone. Thank you.

Traci (01:28:00):

Got it. Thank you.