

Virginia, Prospect Heights Community Farm, Prospect Heights, Brooklyn  
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Rachel (00:00):

So will you tell me your name, where you grew up, where you live now?

Virginia (00:07):

Virginia, Blue Ridge Mountains, in between Mercersburg and Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Cal farm, horse farm, horse breeding farm, and we had three acres of vegetables, which it was my job to do all the weeding and the watering and all that.

Rachel (00:26):

And [inaudible 00:00:27].

Virginia (00:29):

I was the forced labor.

Rachel (00:31):

Wow.

Virginia (00:31):

That's why you have children on a farm.

Rachel (00:33):

Wow. When did you start-

Virginia (00:35):

[inaudible 00:00:35] say that.

Rachel (00:35):

When did you start working?

Virginia (00:36):

Oh, one of my earliest memories was being taught to weed.

Rachel (00:39):

Do you mind if I... I just don't want it to get caught in here. Here we go. And where do you live now?

Virginia (00:47):

I live here in Brooklyn, Washington Heights on Washington Avenue.

Rachel (00:52):

And how long have you lived here?

Virginia (00:54):

26 years. 26 years.

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Rachel (01:01):

So I'm going to ask you... Oh, and how long have you been a member of the Plastic Heights?

Virginia (01:06):

22 years.

Rachel (01:07):

22 years. What brought you here?

Virginia (01:09):

I needed to get... The farming came back. I needed to garden.

Rachel (01:13):

What does that feel like?

Virginia (01:15):

Oh, it's normal. You have to do it. I mean, gardening is key to one's peace of mind. I worked in a very superficial business, got very burned out and just to be able to grow and weed and it just... There's nothing better than growing. And it's a way of communicating with people. I'm very gregarious. I'm actually very shy, but you would never know that because I'm very gregarious and egregious, and so, it's a great way to get to know people. I originally came into the garden because I ran a reading group. I unfortunately helped gentrify, I've been feeling the guilt, wow, for the last four or five years, I was so naive. I kept coming into the garden. I ran a reading program for little kids and so I was called the reading lady. And then I began coming back more and more and so much work needed to be done and I had all this free time and I just...

They caught me at 2:00 in the morning, collecting bad bugs with a mining lamp on my head. I mean, I was way over at the top, but I also started to make all the tree wells prettier because I thought, "Oh, how nice, let's clean up the neighborhood. Let's get rid of the dirty bottles." And I couldn't understand why nobody was happy about that. I must not be very bright because it only just hit me like four or five years ago. I helped make the neighborhood more expensive. It never dawned on me that I was driving up the prices. So I just want to go on record saying, I feel terrible.

Rachel (03:09):

What made you have a new realization about your role in it?

Virginia (03:12):

It takes me longer to realize things because I was like, "Oh my God, this neighborhood." We moved here, my husband's from Africa. We moved here because we felt more at home here. Now, it's like all white people and if you see a black person it's un... I mean, I'm exaggerating a bit, but a lot of the old timers gone or they sold their buildings and then they become these high rises and it's just appalling and nobody is neighborly. I know everybody's name in this neighborhood. I used to be called the mayor of Washington Avenue. I know everybody, if anybody needs help, we all help each other. Now, you're beginning to see this cold shoulder, fancy Tesla driving, BMW, range Rover people, and they don't care about community, so that's upsetting.

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Rachel (04:13):

Yeah. I've noticed the neighborhood changing just the past 10 years.

Virginia (04:18):

Oh my God, it's just awful.

Rachel (04:19):

I mean, I was talking about... This is off topic, but I was over at, on Vanderbilt yesterday for their open street and I can't believe how white that open street is.

Virginia (04:29):

[inaudible 00:04:29].

Rachel (04:30):

It's so white and the city keeps saying, "Oh, Vanderbilt's the most successful open street program." And I'm like, "How is it so successful? It's so white. How are you saying it's so successful?"

Virginia (04:41):

And there are people that come in the garden and say, "Can I pay you to do my open hours?" So they want to be a member of the... They want a key, but they don't want to actually be a member of the community.

Rachel (04:53):

Wow.

Virginia (04:54):

Yeah.

Rachel (04:54):

That's insulting.

Virginia (04:55):

Yeah, I know.

Rachel (04:57):

That's insulting.

Virginia (04:58):

Yeah. Because we've always had a very open, everybody is welcome. And I got to say, and there're private schools here that try to co-op us, rich private schools that don't... They have no black children, no children of other religions. So I don't want to get co-op by them and be part of their \$9,000 a year curriculum, and so I'm very vocal at meetings and saying, "I do more op... Host more children in this garden at schools than anybody, period." There is absolutely no one can beat my record. I mean, even if they worked at it for 20 years, so they could... I'll do any public school. I know this makes me sound like

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a communist but... I'll do any public school, but as soon as I hear that they're a private school, they're welcome to come in and release butterflies and get the same event but if they continually try to come back, it's just like, screw you.

Rachel (05:56):

Because they're taking resources.

Virginia (05:57):

Yeah, but also we've become part of their curriculum, like it's, "Oh, this is why your child is paying \$9,000 a year as we pick them up with our nannies." And then the nannies come babysit them in the garden. I was just like, "You know what? It's not what we're about."

Rachel (06:11):

No. So Virginia, I'm going to start the conversation by asking you the core question for this whole project, which is, when you think about global warming or the climate crisis, what do you think about and how do you feel?

Virginia (06:29):

I didn't have children. I've been thinking about climate change for a very long time. I specifically did not, I made a choice back when I was 30. So 30 years ago I was not going to have children because I'm not having my child die in a lava flow or a catastrophic event. I just didn't want to overpopulate the world. I thought the world was getting too hot. Big business is too bad, it's going to be worse and I was right.

Rachel (06:57):

You were thinking about this 30 years ago?

Virginia (06:59):

Oh my God, yes, absolutely. Well, my mother, thank bless my mother. My mother raised us to be normal, as we say in our family.

Rachel (07:10):

What's normal?

Virginia (07:11):

It's not called liberal. We're called normal. You should start co-opting that. Choice word. I am not part of the radical right. And yes, I know I'm sounding political, but...

Rachel (07:23):

I mean, it's all political, everything's political.

Virginia (07:25):

I got political six years ago.

Rachel (07:28):

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But I am like 30 years ago. Nobody has talked to me in such certain terms that 30 years ago they were making decisions about their future based on-

Virginia (07:43):

Oh, bye Grace. It was so good seeing you.

Rachel (07:44):

... The climate crisis. A lot of people have said, "Oh, 30 years ago I learned about it. It was something I was concerned about, I've always known about it." But you're the first person who said I had [inaudible 00:07:55] made the decision 30 years ago not to have children.

Virginia (07:57):

So I work for rich people for a living. I was over in the south of France 17 years ago and redoing a Chateau, redoing a park to a Chateau. And we went to the shore, the one that has all the salt, for the day. All the farmers were complaining that they were catching... All the fishermen were saying, "We catch nothing but African fish now, they've all moved up." This immediately confirms if they're getting fish that they have never gotten in any of their generations before, what is that saying? So there are all these little signs.

Rachel (08:40):

That you were seeing 30 years ago.

Virginia (08:42):

Oh yeah. That was 17 years ago, 18 years ago. But I was raised on a farm, so we already knew what was happening.

Rachel (08:50):

Tell me.

Virginia (08:52):

Crops that don't winter over are now wintering over. You're not getting the cold frost so we don't get certain... It's the same as here in this garden, you don't get the same blooms, you don't get the same fruit because they're not setting fruit in the... If they don't get a cold snap, it's like stratifying a seed. I'm part of the Penstemon Society and NARGS, the North American Rock Garden. You stratify the seeds, they have some need 18 days, some need six months of stratification. Some need burning like a forest fire in order to stratify. So to kick in, to tell them to grow, these things are no longer being told, nature is no longer telling them to grow. If you don't have a cold snap, then things don't go to sleep for the winter. Am I making sense?

Rachel (09:52):

Yeah.

Virginia (09:52):

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Okay. You can apply that if they're learning... My family's radical, right? Trump was appointed by God on the farm now. [inaudible 00:10:04] poor father is rolling in his grave. If they know it, think how it is for us who are more open minded or more observant.

Rachel (10:19):

So your family right now, who are Trump supporters are also talking about how there are changes.

Virginia (10:28):

The way they say it, it's like some fascist manifesto. So don't get too excited. They just apply more chemical fertilizer, but they won't let their children. The Creek I grew up in that had crayfish no longer have crayfish because of all the runoff, because of all the chemicals they use. And they're like, "Oh, that Creek is fine." But they won't let their children go swimming in it, which is, I was raised swimming in it. It was normal. They're all like, they all get brain cancer. They all get blood cancer. They all get liver cancer.

Rachel (11:06):

Oh my God.

Virginia (11:06):

And that whole area is just not to be believed. And you hear about them and you're thinking, well, "There's another." Because they're drinking well water. They're not drinking. So it's their immediately... Their soil is immediately affecting what's going into their body.

Rachel (11:23):

And don't they understand that?

Virginia (11:25):

No, they don't give a shit. Pardon my language. Because that would be some kind of admitting defeat or what can we do? I tried to sell it to them in terms of, get back to your forefathers, go back to what... Because our whole area's surrounded by upper river brethren. They don't have this issue because they're not using chemicals. Why is aunt Laura dying of brain cancer? Why did daddy die of brain cancer? Why did they all have blood cancer? Let's think about that.

Rachel (11:55):

That is so scary.

Virginia (11:56):

Yeah. But heaven forbid because it would make them seem normal to do anything about it. That's how tied to their beliefs they are.

Rachel (12:11):

So it's not like a survival thing. It's not like if we weren't using these chemicals, we wouldn't be able to grow food. We wouldn't be able to sell our food. We wouldn't be able to survive. It's like a macho thing.

Virginia (12:24):

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It's a total macho thing because women don't stand for much, that's why I left the farm very early on and didn't go back because I was like, "I'm a woman, I don't count."

Rachel (12:38):

So I want to come back to like, when did you first started noticing change? And what did you notice?

Virginia (12:46):

When I first joined this garden, Catherine [Orrick 00:12:50], who is my mentor here said, "Well, we're going up to zone 7." Because I was like, "I have these penstemon. I'm growing them on the roof. Penstemon Society didn't believe me because they're all out in Arizona and New Mexico and whatnot. I was like, "Look, they're growing." I took photographs.

Rachel (13:11):

This was 22 years ago?

Virginia (13:13):

Yeah. And I brought them into the garden and everyone said, "Oh they're not going to grow. They're not going to grow, a lot of penstemon aren't long lived." But they all lived. So I was like, I had a rock garden over there that defied, I had things that were only from California. I bought from Siskiyou Rare Plant Nursery. I bought from California Rock Garden Nurseries. Everyone said, "It's not going to last, it's not going to last." It's totally fine.

Rachel (13:44):

What made you think that they would grow?

Virginia (13:45):

Because I knew it was hotter.

Rachel (13:47):

You could feel it?

Virginia (13:48):

I'm a farmer, so you know when things... I should go back to the original if it's not getting cold, cold in winter. I had tomatoes December 18th. That's not normal. This is 22 years ago.

Rachel (14:04):

22 years ago, you had tomatoes, December 18th.

Virginia (14:07):

Uh-huh (affirmative). I have not repeated that, I have to say, all fairness. There's not been a repetition, but I was like, "Oh, I'm still getting tomatoes." And I kept bragging to everybody in the garden, "I'm still getting tomatoes, what about you?" Now I only grow flowers because I think we're getting more [inaudible 00:14:29] we're getting more... Oh this is another good point. Most bad nematodes only exist down in the south. The joke is you can see a good nematode, you can't see a bad nematode. Bad

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nematodes are making it up here. So that should be an immediate indication that it's not getting cold enough in winter, and then it's too hot in the summer.

Rachel (14:57):

What did it feel like when you started to notice these changes?

Virginia (15:02):

Once again, I'm a bad person to ask because my mother raised me thinking, silent spring.

Rachel (15:12):

You've always been prepared for environmental destruction is what you're telling me.

Virginia (15:18):

Right.

Rachel (15:18):

None of this surprised you.

Virginia (15:20):

The plants tell me what they want to do. So if something's not working, it's not, I switch it up. So like talking about, I think now we should have a Caper Bush. I worked in the south of France, had a fabulous Caper Bush, God, they're beautiful, but they're definitely zone 10 or 11. I mean, they have a winner there, but not enough to kill the olive trees that are there. Hard frost, they all rush out and put blankets over all the olive trees. When I was there 17 years ago, they had a horrific frost and they were all rushing out putting over the olive trees, and they lost a ton of olive trees. They lost a ton. And these are hundreds of year old. I mean they're passed down from generations to generation, these old trees. So they're all freaking out. But the Caper, the Caper lifts, I'm thinking now we could have a Caper Bush here, so that's what I mean is you acclimate.

Rachel (16:32):

So what I hear from you actually, rather than anxiety or-

Virginia (16:37):

Oh my God, it keeps me up at night. I'm being nice to you because I'm talking to you.

Rachel (16:41):

Okay.

Virginia (16:42):

Are you kidding?

Rachel (16:43):

Because I was going to say, it sounds like you've got a perspective of [crosstalk 00:16:48].

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Virginia (16:48):

If I chose not to have children, which is a huge void in one's life, because I think we're all on this earth to propagate and pass on our knowledge. If I made a choice not to have children because I thought they're all going to die in 130 degree heat, I would say that I have adapted to the idea. I feel better because I don't have children. I'm 60. I'm going to die in the next decade or two. It's on me, it doesn't mean it doesn't keep me up at night.

Rachel (17:30):

And what does, what keeps you up at night exactly?

Virginia (17:33):

That Trump could come back into power. That we could have a fascist society. That all these chemicals are getting dumped into streams. That dolphins are suffocating in red hook, they swim into that canal, they're gannets. I mean, this is big business rules the world. They have fed everybody. They have used all of their resources and all of their money to poison America into thinking how my brothers think. They did a good job. My area in Pennsylvania did not use to be like that. And then all of a sudden, they got Uber Religious and with religion became political. And now, they drank the [Kool-Aid 00:18:23].

Rachel (18:23):

When did this happen?

Virginia (18:24):

It happened over the span of the last 20 years.

Rachel (18:27):

Jesus Christ.

Virginia (18:28):

It's like their working... It's like somebody in some closet said, "Okay, we're going to do this." Nudge, nudge, wink, wink. And I mean, I really do. This is not some weird conspiracy theory. I think it's real.

Rachel (18:41):

It's absolutely real.

Virginia (18:43):

And I think it's working and I think it worked. And I think we're about to find out the next election how well it worked. I mean, look, they're oppressing the vote. I mean, no. I'm not saying Democrats are great either but democracy is better than anything else. It's not perfect. It's like how we run everything in this garden, we run it transparently. So it takes forever to get anything done. But we do it, our garden is so joyful and loving and you walk in here and you're like, "Ah." Well there's a reason why it's ah, because we don't have a lot of horrific fighting. When I first joined this garden, somebody didn't like you, they pulled up your plants and they put dog poop in your bag. There was a lot of pulling-

Rachel (19:29):

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Did that happen to you?

Virginia (19:30):

Yes. There was a lot of bullying. Well, I was very like, "Let's open the garden. This is for everybody." So a lot of people didn't... Because we're stewards, we don't own. I don't even like people having boxes. I think that we should have one asparagus box. And that's another asparagus, it's harder to grow now because it doesn't get cold, it has to die in winter, and then it has to have a rebirth. But if it's not dying in the winter, then you're going to have a crappy.

Rachel (20:02):

When's the last time you had a good asparagus crop.

Virginia (20:05):

Well, I haven't here because I can't convince everybody to have one big box of asparagus. And if you just try to grow asparagus in your box, it doesn't quite work out.

Rachel (20:16):

So you were saying that now you're mostly doing horticulture and you're not growing vegetables anymore.

Virginia (20:21):

Correct.

Rachel (20:22):

But why is that?

Virginia (20:26):

Because you're seeing a lot more fungus's and blight. We make a concerted effort to have our garden be more shady. My box isn't in full sun. I'm fine with that, I don't care. There are other people that do care. I like a lot of bees. I like to draw good bugs. So it's fun. And also, we have a lot of lead in our garden, so a lot of people are going to say, that's not soil, it's totally true.

Rachel (21:00):

Don't you bring in outside soil?

Virginia (21:02):

Yes we do. And we compost, but even the compost has lead in it.

Rachel (21:06):

Really?

Virginia (21:06):

Yeah.

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Rachel (21:07):

Do you think that's the same way with all of the city gardens?

Virginia (21:10):

Yeah. Earth moves. Lead is heavy. It's true, lead is heavy, but still. We were built on buildings that burned down, so all the chemicals from the burn buildings are still in the soil. You dig down deep enough, you are going to find that. And earth moves, it shifts.

Rachel (21:31):

To where do you get your food from?

Virginia (21:38):

Well, I only cook for David. I eat a very bizarre diet. I eat on sugar. I got a granola that's small batch made by [inaudible 00:21:53], it's all organic, she even does vegan, but she does a no sugar granola, no dates, no figs in it, no raisins. And then I have plain [inaudible 00:22:04] for... I have a very weird diet, you're asking the wrong person. I eat [inaudible 00:22:10].

Rachel (22:10):

You're not even eating vegetables.

Virginia (22:15):

Well, the vegetables have to be... I'll eat them in season. This was for me from France. I mean, I started going to France when I was a child. You eat things that are in season. And I will eat things from the garden, and if someone gives me a tomato, boy, do I eat that tomato? I used to never leave this garden and I kept radishes growing in my box and I was here for like eight hour stints and I would just pull them out and eat them. If somebody had piece of char, I'd just snap it off and eat it. Farm girl.

Rachel (22:48):

Yeah. But it just got too hard to grow the vegetables?

Virginia (22:53):

Right.

Rachel (22:53):

And it felt like growing the flowers is more pleasurable?

Virginia (22:57):

Yeah. And it draws more bugs but nobody seems to be that concerned, they are now. Look, we've got little beehives for all the mason and the carpenter bees. I'm dead set against honeybees because I'm the one that'll end up having to give them the sugar water twice a day and I'm not doing that, I'm too old now. Same reason with the chickens, I don't want chickens here because I'm going to be the one whose my job as a child to feed water the chickens, I mean, the hundreds and hundreds of chickens. They're here to pick up all the dead bodies and I'm not doing that again.

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Rachel (23:31):

Oh God.

Virginia (23:32):

Well that's the pecking order. That phrase, that idiom, that adage. No, idiom-

Rachel (23:37):

Idiom.

Virginia (23:39):

... Is there for a reason because they peck each other's heads till they die. So you have to go in and pick up all the dead bodies, blah blah, blah.

Rachel (23:47):

Oh, gosh. Wow. It's so intense that you didn't have... Do you think you would've had children in a different situation?

Virginia (23:57):

Oh, absolutely. I would've been a great mother. I would've been a fantastic mother.

Rachel (24:08):

I'm going to tell you something. I am pregnant, really early, and it was a big decision. All of my work. I'm an artist. All of my work is about climate crisis. I'm so knee deep in this subject, I'm not like-

Virginia (24:22):

Well move up to Maine.

Rachel (24:23):

... pretending. Yeah. And it was a big decision and I eventually had to decide I can't live in a world where there's so little hope that I don't do this thing that I want so badly.

Virginia (24:39):

But plus you'd be raising a child, hopefully that won't rebel and become a Trump freak like my brothers. You'll be raising another child to fight the fight. My mother raised me to fight the fight, and for some reason it worked, I rebelled, not in healthy proper ways, but I rebelled, but my political stance, never. I mean, my ethics, my morals never changed.

Rachel (25:08):

I guess, we keep saying that. But I think by the time my kid is old enough to fight the fight, the fight will have been lost. I mean, I see my child-

Virginia (25:21):

I don't see this going well, do you?

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Rachel (25:23):

No.

Virginia (25:24):

This is not going to end well.

Rachel (25:27):

But I do see an opportunity for rebuilding and I do see-

Virginia (25:34):

Really, I think it will be too late by then, don't you?

Rachel (25:36):

I see an opportunity.

Virginia (25:38):

How do you uncook all the muscles that just got cooked over in Washington State, like 600 billion muscles, oysters, starfish, all got cooked. The tides are literally changing. I mean, we deserve this. Sorry. I mean, we do.

Rachel (26:00):

You think so?

Virginia (26:00):

Yeah. I'm going down a [inaudible 00:26:07].

Rachel (26:08):

What about all of the people who didn't do anything to contribute?

Virginia (26:15):

I think that we're collateral damage, don't you? Don't you think big business is going to win? I don't see Jeff Bezos... Look at these guys going to space for 10 minutes when they could have helped. I know, even Stephen Colbert's pro space, but you know what? [crosstalk 00:26:34] I can see it as breaking another rip in the ozone, it's a total asshole move.

Rachel (26:37):

It's a total asshole move.

Virginia (26:39):

When people really are starving and people are about to get evicted, there's going to be homeless... We're going back into the 1930s again. We just had a pandemic that killed almost as many people as the... The Spanish flu is the only way I know to save the Spanish flu.

Rachel (26:55):

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I think it was more people.

Virginia (26:56):

675,000 for the Spanish flu. And of course there's some people that weren't counted back then, but we're at 625 and there really were people not counted. Look even in the United States, I'm very, very sure. So it's 120 years late. It's a hundred years later and we have done no better. God forbid, I mean, no one's talking about polio, no one's talking about smallpox. Those vaccinations worked. I mean, oh my God, you idiots, they're already following you on your cell phone, who gives a crap.

Rachel (27:43):

So where do you find joy and peace?

Virginia (27:45):

In the garden and it's my community. I mean, Tracy and I fight like cats and dogs, but I'm the first one there if somebody tries to go for her, I'm definitely protect her. I mean, they're my family members. The garden is my place of joy. Gardening is a joy. I mean, I've had skin cancer three times and malignant melanoma and advanced squamous internodal, and then advanced basal here and I still can't keep me under the garden. I mean, this is how I'm going to go. My mother got buried. When she died, there was a preserve down in Florida that buries you in the preserve, it has to be a 16 foot. No machinery is allowed on the property. You have to walk. We had to walk her in on a wagon. She was wrapped up like a mummy, no chemicals and buried 16 feet down and that's how she wanted to go. No marker, nothing. So from earth to earth.

So maybe they'll do that with me. Don't tell people to get cremated because those are more chemicals going back into the sea or on some mountain top, that's a horrible idea. So what else can I tell you? I wish I could think of specific... I have a bad back. Tracy wanted to do an experiment. We were digging up all the dahlias and it was winter, you wait till there's a frost. So it was after Thanksgiving, before the first good frost.

Rachel (29:33):

When did it usually come, the frost?

Virginia (29:36):

Well, I don't actually remember, but they're definitely later and later and later, because you'll have a bad frost and then you should really wait until a second frost before you prune the roses or dig up the dahlias or harvest the Jerusalem artichoke. Now you'll get a frost, but then it'll be 80 degrees for three weeks and then you get another frost, so that's very sloppy.

Rachel (30:01):

What does that do?

Virginia (30:03):

With the Jerusalem artichokes, it affects the flavor. With the dahlias, they don't know what the hell to do so they don't set eyes because the whole point of a few good hard frosts for the dahlias is they need to set eyes, that's what tells them to start production for next year. I go back to what I was telling you, plants don't... They need to be told the nature. The weather tells them what to do. And so if they don't

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know, "Oh, am I still supposed to be producing flowers? Or am I supposed to be making eyes for next year?" So you get less and less eyes on the dahlias, but dahlias are zone 11, they do get dug up. But Tracy said, "Okay, let's leave some in the soil and see what happens." And I thought, "Well, she's an idiot, but I'll do it." Okay, Tracy. And lo and behold spring, I don't think any of them actually grew, but they all were still alive, I have to give her that.

Rachel (31:05):

Wow.

Virginia (31:05):

Yeah. It affects the flavor. You know how you go to grocery stores and vegetables just taste like plastic?

Rachel (31:18):

Yeah.

Virginia (31:18):

It's because they're being grown in plastic conditions, they have no flavor. Going through the proper stages is what creates a good plum. What creates a good apple? Did anyone show you the apple tree?

Rachel (31:37):

Yeah.

Virginia (31:38):

Oh, apple tree sucks.

Rachel (31:40):

Yeah, I heard.

Virginia (31:40):

It's gross.

Rachel (31:40):

I heard.

Virginia (31:41):

Codling moth, we got rust, but it doesn't know what it's doing. In its defense, it wasn't prune properly, blah, blah, blah.

Rachel (31:48):

Did it used to be better?

Virginia (31:49):

No.

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Rachel (31:50):

Okay.

Virginia (31:52):

But we did for a few years get good plums, because crazy Ginny. I took lime and put organic lime around. You make a big belt and so there's a plum carousel, which is like a [inaudible 00:32:08] that crawls back up the tree. But if you have a good pruning and some kind of reclamation of the insect population, you do get a good flavored plum. Plum tree doesn't know what to do. The nectarine tree that grows a block away from here, it hasn't had nectarines in two years because it no longer knows what to do. So if you walk up to Washington Avenue, you should be seeing nectarines. You won't because grew the blossoms in spring hit 80 degrees, got too hot then suddenly dropped down again 30 degrees, killed all the blossoms, there goes your crop.

Rachel (32:58):

And also just the past two years have been very weird. I think weirder than the past five years.

Virginia (33:06):

Well, maybe five years, but it was that we actually had a reckoning 20 years ago here. We had some really weird years in the garden. It's why we put water harvesting in because we had such horrific droughts.

Rachel (33:20):

20 years ago is when things really started to change and you needed to do some big infrastructure changes?

Virginia (33:27):

Yeah. Yeah.

Rachel (33:30):

20 years ago is a long time. People talk to me about like 10 years ago.

Virginia (33:37):

Oh I think it was 20. Catherine definitely when I first joined the garden talked to me that we were going up a zone [crosstalk 00:33:46]. Catherine Orrick is who you should be talking to.

Rachel (33:48):

Is she still a member of the garden?

Virginia (33:50):

Oh yeah, yeah.

Rachel (33:51):

Yeah. I would love to talk to her. So are we still in zone 7, because didn't we just go up a zone recently?

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Virginia (33:57):

We went from six to seven.

Rachel (33:59):

Okay. But you were talking about moving up to seven, 20 years ago.

Virginia (34:02):

Oh, yeah. But once again, big business. Didn't move up a zone because they didn't want. I think that they didn't say, they had to make sure that it was zone 7 before they moved it to zone 7 but we already knew it was zone 7, 20 years ago.

Rachel (34:02):

You knew?

Virginia (34:22):

Yeah. I mean you shouldn't. Rosemary shouldn't be living, that's a 20 year... Did you see the Rosemary?

Rachel (34:30):

Yes.

Virginia (34:31):

It's a 20 year old Rosemary.

Rachel (34:35):

That Rosemary has been over wintering for 20 years?

Virginia (34:38):

Yes. Look at the bark, it's a trunk.

Rachel (34:44):

What should it have been doing?

Virginia (34:46):

Dying every year.

Rachel (34:47):

That Rosemary has been growing for 20 years?

Virginia (34:51):

Yeah. And it's Catherine's Rosemary.

Rachel (34:55):

So there's this interesting thing that I was talk... I was trying to...

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Virginia (35:01):

You should take photographs of it because that's actually really good proof, and you should talk to Catherine about... You would have to come back to this garden to meet her. She's not here this weekend. She's never here on weekends, but she's well spoken. She was a landscaper-

Rachel (35:17):

I want to talk to Catherine.

Virginia (35:18):

... for 25 years. She's smarter than me, but who isn't? And she's very well spoken and she remembers distinct, I'm bad at remembering, I'll think of things that I should have told you three days from now or 1:00 in the morning when I'm up worrying.

Rachel (35:39):

Well, I think people have been experiencing weird weather for a long time, but they weren't talking about it in the news or the media and people were feeling like, "I'm having this weird feeling that like the seasons have shifted, but nobody else is talking about it. How do I understand that?" And I hear you talking about that in terms of moving up in zones 20 years ago, you were seeing this, you had this knowledge because you were experiencing it, but official channels weren't unfolding that into the new reality. We're having this really-

Virginia (36:21):

But they did the same thing with the pandemic, which is why you can't get [inaudible 00:36:26] or the CDC, because how much do we tell the public? How sure are we because they get so mad nowadays, they cancel you. It was a new thing in the paper, you can get it outside. You can't get it outside. They just said, "You can't get it outside." Yet a thousand people in Belgium just got it at a rock concert, an outdoor rock concert. So you have to be very careful what you tell people, so I do see their conundrum but on the other hand, I wonder how much of it, I wonder.

Rachel (37:03):

So I have another question for you that's... We've gone way off of my list of things.

Virginia (37:03):

I know. I'm sorry.

Rachel (37:09):

No, no, this is good, but it's good because I haven't talked to a lot of people who have this long and in-depth knowledge about the change. But I do want to ask you, how do you contextualize this moment in terms of, how did we get here from the perspective of history and where are we right now in this moment? How would you define where we are?

Virginia (37:41):

Let's see, I think we've passed the point of no return. I think by the time people realize how bad it is that is a fascism gets its way.

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Rachel (37:54):

Which it probably will.

Virginia (37:56):

Then it's too late. It's too late because they have America convinced. I said this to you before, they have America convinced that this is fake. I worked in Palm beach and the dog walker, the dog trainer for the rich lady I worked for had the most... I couldn't even debate it with him because he said it was all star al... I mean, he was so knowledgeable. He was listening to, who's the man that just died of lung cancer that...

Rachel (38:33):

Oh, what's his face?

Virginia (38:34):

Rush Limbaugh.

Rachel (38:34):

Yeah.

Virginia (38:36):

All these talking points, they memorize Rush Limbaugh and you got to admit, "Wow, good. Can't argue because I don't actually know those facts that they seem to know." I know they're wrong but I don't have any kind of rebuttal and it sure seems like the democratic party hasn't figured that point out either.

Rachel (38:59):

Oh no, they haven't done anything. Or they haven't just taken the opportunity to just make decisions and take care of things. I mean, actually the scary thing that I've been recently hearing about is there are large white national fascistic groups of people across the globe who are starting to talk about climate change, and then it's an opportunity for them to talk about closing the borders, making sure people aren't migrating up into their countries. There is this white nationalism combined with climate awareness.

Virginia (39:49):

Oh, you just made me like them a little bit.

Rachel (39:51):

Oh, God. No, no, because it's an opportunity for them. It's an opportunity for them.

Virginia (39:57):

Yes, but if they convince people that climate change is real, then what else were they wrong about? If the public is listening to them and you think everything, they think everything Matt Gaetz says, or some [Lynnwood 00:40:13] or whatever says. If Lynnwood were to actually come out and say, "Well, climate change is real." Then what else did Lynnwood tell them that was wrong? I mean, the zeitgeist has to come to the realization that they're being played. And in order for that to happen, somebody's going to

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have to say something that gets spread all over the United States to make Joe Smith think, "Well, what else were they lying about?" Because they're eating this up, man. I mean, they are eating this up. They drank the Kool-Aid.

Rachel (41:01):

But I also see the problem as not necessarily climate deniers, but just people who accept climate change and are complacent, which is most. I think most of the people in this country who accept the reality, but aren't necessarily willing to live in the reality of the new world. They're living as if they're in another world.

Virginia (41:28):

It's too fearful for them. They're too scared. They don't have the fiber to have a backbone about it. It's easier to say I hate black people and climate change isn't real.

Rachel (41:43):

But what about people who do accept the climate crisis, but continue to live in the same way that they have been as if the earth will continue to exist in a way that they expect it to because I think there's so many more people.

Virginia (42:04):

I truly hate those people, but there are. It's Joe Smith in the Midwest, there's people here in New York, they don't give a crap.

Rachel (42:13):

I think it's most people. And I think they do give a crap, they just don't know what to do and they feel paralyzed and the reality is so uncomfortable.

Virginia (42:21):

And also they did get... You have to give the government props for getting everybody to recycle and to set up a structure where there's a infrastructure for recycling. But then people find out, well, actually most of it's getting thrown out. Most of it, because most of it isn't actually recyclable and we can't afford to. So there are huge setbacks because even I, my husband and I go through all the garbage.

Even I sit there and stare, because even if it has a triangle, doesn't mean it's recyclable and I don't want them throwing out the whole bag. Somebody has to do it at a sorting center. I don't want them throwing out the whole bag and some whale swallowing it just because I put a triangular plastic thing in and recycle, that created the situation where it gets thrown out and ends up in a whale stomach and killing a whale. Oh my God. My husband isn't allowed to buy anything, you want to see me go totally Joan Crawford. He's not allowed to buy the plastic rings. He's not supposed to buy soda period, but I have to sit there and chop it all up.

Rachel (43:45):

Yeah, of course. Virginia, were there any questions I didn't ask you that you wish I had asked you?

Virginia (43:56):

No, I'll think of these things like three days from now.

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Rachel (43:59):

Okay.

Virginia (44:00):

So if you come back, I will have thought of other points. I told you, I wouldn't be a good interview.

Rachel (44:05):

You're a horrible interviewee. I didn't get anything from this conversation.

Virginia (44:10):

I go off topic because I think it's all interchangeable. I mean, it's all connected. I think fascism climate change is helping fascism.

Rachel (44:28):

Absolutely.

Virginia (44:30):

All these things aren't go hand in hand.

Rachel (44:34):

So what is required of us in this moment?

Virginia (44:39):

We have to vote because-

Rachel (44:41):

That's it?

Virginia (44:42):

... Donald Trump isn't going to wake up tomorrow and tell people to recycle and to-

Rachel (44:46):

But that's it? All we do is vote?

Virginia (44:49):

What? Oh, I see, okay.

Rachel (44:54):

Everyone keeps saying that, "Oh you just go out and vote." I'm like, "That can't possibly be enough."

Virginia (45:03):

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Maybe this is why people feel like they don't have a voice and they don't have hands because what do we do? What steps do we take to make sure that recycle actually gets recycled? How do we weed out that corruption? How do we-

Rachel (45:25):

Demand the end of fossil fuels?

Virginia (45:28):

How do we do that?

Rachel (45:29):

How do we do that?

Virginia (45:31):

We see, but nobody has come up with, this is how we do it.

Rachel (45:35):

I was hoping you would have an answer. I'm desperate. I am desperate to know

Virginia (45:42):

Because the windmill, the solar panels... Well, my aunt, see, I come from such a cool family. My aunt bought a farm in Scottsville and she spent 80,000 in solar panels. She lives totally off grid, but she had 80,000 to spend. She said, "I'll never see that money back in my lifetime." The windmills, the solar windmills, Offshore.

Rachel (46:26):

Offshore windmills?

Virginia (46:28):

Oh, they're called offshore windmills?

Rachel (46:30):

Yeah. Wind farms.

Virginia (46:34):

Even look at Tesla. You've got lithium batteries that when they catch fire, it takes an entire reservoir to put out that one car.

Rachel (46:46):

Right. And also somehow the [crosstalk 00:46:49] that you need to get to make those lithium batteries is so destructive.

Virginia (46:53):

Yeah. Somehow it made it through. They're allowed to be sold.

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Rachel (46:56):

Right. So you don't have an answer?

Virginia (47:02):

No, I do not. In fact, I've got more questions now than answers.

Rachel (47:06):

What are your questions?

Virginia (47:08):

Well, I'm super pissed about the lithium batteries. How do we not rely? My father was the United States Commissioner of the [inaudible 00:47:22], so he was in charge of all those nuclear power plants that were all the way up through New York State. Nuclear power plants are not the answer because once again, like lithium battery, when they blow, they blow. Three Mile Island incident to be exact. So, how is it we can send rich people up to the space for 10 minutes yet we haven't come up with any of these answers.

Rachel (47:53):

Yeah. Right? Why not?

Virginia (47:57):

I think that's the main takeaway of what you should be because I would love to... Where are all these brilliant people, it must be generating so much money that not answering it is not actually the goal.

Rachel (48:23):

Right. That not answering it is the goal

Virginia (48:28):

That not answering it is the goal.

Rachel (48:30):

Right. What's another question you're asking?

Virginia (48:37):

Why aren't you moving to Canada?

Rachel (48:39):

Canada's on fire too, not Eastern Canada.

Virginia (48:45):

I would go if I were younger, I would be living up in Canada because even Maine has their issues now. Well, this is totally depressing now. Oh, and it's a shame that we used to have the most beautiful flowers here that we can't grow anymore because it gets too hot.

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Rachel (49:12):

Which flowers?

Virginia (49:13):

I'm trying to think of... Oh, can't grow Primroses. Well for penstemon, doesn't get cold enough in winter. We really like to be able to grow Primrose again. There are a ton of flowers. I just can't think of them. Oh [inaudible 00:49:37] was super pretty. Wallflower, you call it wallflower. Can't grow those anymore. I used to have a whole field of them up front. They look really pretty for people.