

CECILIA GATUNGO & JAMILA NORMAN
Patchwork City Farms – Atlanta, Georgia

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Date: August 6, 2013

Location: Home of Cecilia Gatungo, West End, Atlanta, Georgia

Interviewer: Sara Wood

Transcription: Sara Wood

Length: One hour, forty-four minutes

Project: Women at Work in Georgia

[Begin Cecilia Gatungo & Jamila Norman Interview]

00:00:01

Sara Wood: So it's August 6, 2013. I'm sitting here in the West End of Atlanta, Georgia with Jamila Norman and Cecilia Gatungo, and wondering if you guys could go ahead and say hi and introduce yourselves. Tell me who you are and what you do.

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Cecilia Gatungo: Hello, my name is Cecilia, well Gathegu Cecilia Gatungo, and um, I am a farmer, I live in Southwest Atlanta, and I farm on, I own Patchwork City Farms, along with Jamila Norman.

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SW: And what is your birth date?

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CG: Oh, my birthdate. I was born September 11, 1973. And um, I um, wow. What more brought me. I have a family. I have a twenty-two-month-old son named Hodari Sefu, and one on the way, I'm eight months pregnant right now and baby's due September 30. And his name is Mwezi [Zahur Wandu Profit], which means moon. And I live here with um, Jossakeed [Crispin]. So.

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SW: And Jamila will you do the same thing?

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Jamila Norman: Hello, uh my name is Jamila Norman. And I am a farmer, and also owner of Patchwork City Farms. I also live in the West End. And I was born April 27, 1979. I am a mother of three boys: Naggee, Malik and Rahsaan, ages thirteen, eleven and nine. I am originally from New York, and um, Caribbean background. Trinidad and Jamaica. And um, so anyways, I farm in my off time, and I'm an engineer by day. [Laughs] So I work for the State of Georgia, environmental engineering. And uh. Yeah.

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CG: I also want to add [Laughs] that I'm originally from Kenya, I forgot about that important piece. And I emigrated to the US with my family, my parents and brothers and sisters in the 1980s.

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SW: And can you say the name of your parents and your siblings?

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CE: Yes I can. My father, uh my late father's Dr. Reverend Jotham Gatungo Wandu. And my mom, Grace Wandu. Nyambura Grace Wandu. My oldest sister is Wambaire Priscilla Gatungo, and I have two brother following me. The one right behind me is Josiah Wandu And then Leonard Chege Wandu. And uh, Gatungo. And the last born, who's born here in the US, she's an American citizen, her name is Sylvia Wambui Gatundo. So. That's our family.

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SW: A big family. Jamila, will you tell me the name of your parents?

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JN: Uh, yes. So um, I come from a family also of six total. Um my mom is Raabia Muhammad. Uh, my father Abdul Wadud Muhammad. And brothers and sisters, I'm the oldest, following me is my sister Waduda. And then there are my twin brothers Husaiyn and Hasan. Faaruwq, and then my youngest sister's Zayn. And that's my immediate. Um, brothers and sisters, and then there's some extras. Four others, Yuwil, Becky, Nadira, and Shayaa. And they live out in Seattle, Trinidad, and New York. So. Ten total from my dad, six from my mom. Big family.

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SW: I'm wondering if you could both talk a little bit about, you know, being you said you're from Caribbean lineage, and you grew up in Kenya and moved here with your family. Can you talk about the connection to land or growing, if there are farmers in your family or what is the culture is like compared to what it's like here in Atlanta.

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CG: Um, well. Kenya, well I'm Kikuyu. I'm from the Kikuyu people, of Kenya and our people have always farmed. We're very community, from as far as I can remember, I mean, before that would be hunter and gatherer, but. So my, I know that my father's parents owned, my grandfather, paternal grandfather had thirty acres of land in the area called Nyeri, which kind of, I consider it the foothills of Mount Kenya and um, it's a high country, crazy to get there. And he

farmed, my mom tells me, I don't really have much memory of him, I have a lot more, I remember spending time with my grandmother, my paternal grandmother. My grandfather had three wives, so my dad's mother was the first wife. So, they together well with his three wives, they worked thirty acres of land. And my father grew coffee on that land, and my grandfather bought lots of, I don't know how many acres, maybe tons of acres of coffee. And he also grew nuts, nut trees, fruit trees, there's avocados every where on the land. Gosh, he grew vegetables, he had reared animals. He had chickens, goats, my mom says he had you name it, my grandfather has his hand in it, you know.

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CG: Like I said, I don't remember this of my grandfather, I remember more of my grandmother working the land, and I would, when I would go visit her she would have the Harlan planted and we would play in the garden, that sort of thing. And my mom and dad also kept a garden throughout our lives, so my mom grew everything that we ate. And you know, on her side, my maternal grandfather and grandmother, they didn't have land because they were part of the, I guess the people who were considered land-less people, who left their area to go work for white settlers. So in a way they gave up, I guess it was kind of like by leaving they were giving up their right to their own land. But I know that my grandfather grew, always kept a garden for the people that he worked for, and um, I actually visited the area where he was the horticulturist, I guess they person, the ground's keeper. It's kind of funny because when I visited, my mom told me to ask the owner to give him his back pay [Laughs] that he owed them through the colonial time [Laughing]. I'm like, "Well, I think they're probably not the same owners." [Laughing]

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CG: So when I went there it was kind of like, interesting to just walk through this place, this lodge that used to be white British-only establishment, and to kind of feel the ghost of my grandfather who had kept the grounds, you know. So you know on both sides, I have a history of people who worked the land whether it was through ownership of the land or through um, squatting, I guess you could say, employment positions, you know. So, um I grew up around people who grew food and got their sustenance from the land and from the you know, from working the land. So I have that history and that connection. I think that's pretty much I get that energy, and that decided what I do. So.

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SW: And, your grandfather's name?

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CG: I have to think about that one. My grandfather is called Wandu. Um, his name is um, I just know his last name, Wandu. Like I said, I spent more time with my paternal grandmother, her name was Priscilla Wambaire Wandu, which is my sister, my eldest sister's named after my paternal grandmother, and I'm named after my maternal grandmother. And that's how it goes in naming, you're named in order honoring the paternal parents, and then maternal parents and then the uncles and aunts on down the line [Laughing]. So. My parents stopped at five children, so they got to name at least their parents and one sibling. So.

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CG: Um, my grandfather, he was known, actually my mom says that he was known as "the farmer." I guess it translates as "the farmer" because he was the first person in his area to grow coffee commercially and also to establish a commercial farm operation after, during or after

British colonial times. So he had quite an operation, he had a farmers' market, you know, he employed people. He was a like a farmer, entrepreneur, you know, like he just everything in those days and people looked up to him, you know, until this day if I go in that region, and I say my last name, most people in that area would know my family. On my dad's side. Like, they would know him for miles, you know, as "the farmer." And also, with my dad being the preacher coming out of that whole setting, you know, they both had a footing in the community, you know, through religion and through food production as so. Yeah.

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SW: Do you want to answer the same question, Jamila?

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JN: Um, so yeah, my family, don't really know a whole lot about my father's side except for that his mother, my paternal grandmother, she has land. So my father's from Trinidad which is pretty much right off the coast of South America so she has land both in Trinidad and in Venezuela. So we're actually planning a trip in 2014 to go investigate that [Laughing]. Yeah, my father left Trinidad under some pretty, um, challenging situations and came to, you know, the United States, came to of course a lot of immigrants go to New York to start the big city where you make your dreams happen.

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SW: Can you say why he left?

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JN: Um, so yeah I can say. So he actually left because his mother, um, had a business partner, she had a restaurant in Venezuela, supposedly a well-to-do restaurant, and you know, she kind of like um, you know, she had a lot of dignitaries and things like that coming through the restaurant,

so it's a pretty well-to-do restaurant. And she had a business partner, and I think the story is he poisoned her, and so my father left for fear of his life and came to the United States as, you know, as a young teenager. Well, I mean, no he wasn't young he was probably like eighteen, nineteen, came to the states. And yeah, so hasn't really gone back. And so we, as his children [Laughing] are like, "Daddy, you're in your sixties now, I think the threat is gone. We need to go see what's going on." And that's where my oldest sister is, Becky, he had a daughter he left behind. And um, so she's there. And so that's all we know about my father's side. And I've only met one of his aunts that lived up in Pennsylvania. And that's it.

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JN: Now on my mother's side, my mother talks for days and day and days about her family, and of course, I mean I grew up in New York with my mom and my grandmother, and you know, and they emigrated, my mom came to New York when she was in high school and um, her mother, my grandmother went to school in England, got a scholarship, once again, that colonial relationship, I guess England opened up and said, "OK, people from our former colonies can come to school." So grandmother went to school in England, she went to nursing school. And while she was in school my mom stayed in Jamaica and lived with her grandmother, so my great-grandmother. And that's where you know, great-grandmother and grandfather were farmers. And they're from the – Westmoreland is the name of parish in Jamaica, and from Porter's Mountain, which is a really small town.

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JN: And grandfather owned, I don't even know how many acres, lots and lots of acres, and of course the main crop was sugarcane, so he rented out his plots of land to other people and they would grow sugarcane and um, and then at the end of harvest season everyone would cut down their sugarcane and it'd all be collected and taken to the refineries to get processed or whatever into sugar. So, and great-grandmother, she grew all kinds of stuff. You know, up in Porter's Mountain is a mountainous region in Jamaica and so they terraced, you know, they grew into the side of mountain, had everything terraced, built rock walls all up along the sides, and they grew all kinds of stuff. And, you know, mother would talk about grandmother going to market, I mean, they grew corn and they would lay out the corn in the front and let it dry on tarp, and you know, she made her own coconut oil, so she was like, that was one of her biggest products was like, she made her own – grated coconut by hand, and my mom goes along these stories, "Grandmother would grate coconut butter by hand. And then she would boil it on the stove," and then skim the oil off the top, and then she would dye her coconut oil with a little bit of turmeric. So it had that yellow color, so everybody always knew, "Oh, this is" – Olga was her name. Olga McFarlane. And everybody would know, "Oh this is her oil," and she would go to market, you know, she would have to walk to market, it's like a two-day walk to market. And sell all her stuff, and so she had mango, coconut, you know, they grew sugarcane, and grandfather also raised bulls. And, you know, and so that's what they did.

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JN: And so my great-grandmother is still alive in Jamaica. She just turned 102 this year, and I went down with my family, so my children and my husband at the time, we all went down, and we got to see her when she turned 100. And so, this year 2013 she turned 102, and she's still

strong and still good, and so that's the background that I have you. And you know, my mother of course moved to New York and so that connection, she didn't farm, of course. Her mother didn't farm, but I always had a connection. I just always was just like into nature and the outdoors and to food, and so when I came to the West End, and I met Ceci, it was just kind of like, she was growing this amazing garden and I was like, "I want to find a plot of land and grow for my family," and then we just connected. And the rest is history, they say.

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CG: I wanted to add my grandfather's name, as he was known to the community was Mkuriama. Kuriama is like "to farm, to cultivate the land," Mkuriama, "M" is like, basically "one who farms." So, um, to get that nickname meant that he was, like, the farmer in the area, you know, the entire place is all farmland, so he definitely took it to the next level with his land. You know, by going commercial and again, starting a farmer's market where he would take all his, um, all his produce and animals, and so. You know, he would butcher whatever people wanted to buy. Um, and it's crazy 'cause I actually remember as a young kid, when you go to the grocery store here to buy meat, it's all like packaged and whatnot, and where my grandparents are from, you go in, it's a butchery and the meat's hanging from a hook [Laughing], and it's like, it was always like, you know, amazing to me to walk in and see like an animal, just like kind of hanging. And you know, you pick out the piece you want and the person would cut it for you and wrap it in wax paper, put tape on it and off you went. [Laughing] So that was it, you know?

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CG: And that was kind of the environment that I grew up, or my parents, with the chickens, my dad had a chicken coop, and peacocks and so forth, and so if we wanted to have meat, he would

just go in the yard and cut the chicken's neck. I was always fascinated, I mean, if they had you know, goats were eaten during celebration, so uh, birthdays, marriages, weddings, that sort of thing. Even in death, people would slaughter and I remember, it was always a man's, the man in the community would actually do the slaughtering, but I was always fascinated, so I would help my dad hold down the animal, or something like that. My sister and I had the duty of soaking the chickens in the hot, boiling water, and plucking the feathers. It was always our duty to pluck the feathers, or to remove the scale, the fish scales, you know, with a knife, so we were given a duty of cleaning an animal of cleaning the chickens and the fish, we didn't do the other meat. The men always cleaned the other meat. So it was very interesting [Laughing].

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CG: But you know, I remember the first time my parents did that in the US. Um, I guess they thought they could continue with their practices here. And we lived in the West End actually, and my dad he bought a goat, and he [Laughing] slaughtered, he had a big fire going in the backyard and he slaughtered. And the neighbors were like, "Oh my god!" And they called the cops, and the fire department showed up, and it was nuts. And they were like, "You can't do that here, Sir!" [Laughing] You know? So it was, and my mom kept a garden here and people were like, "You can't do that. You don't know what's in the soil, you don't know whether it's, whether the soil's toxic." And she kept a garden for almost a year until people kind of made her afraid of growing food in her own backyard.

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CG: And they probably were right, we don't know what was in that soil when we moved here, you know, it's in the city and, so you know, my parents tried to keep up with like our homesteading from their lives in Kenya and it didn't really work out that well [Laughing].

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SW: I'm wondering, can you tell briefly why did your family decide to move to Atlanta?

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CG: Um, they actually didn't decide to move. My father, like I said, he's a reverend, he's a preacher and he was sent here by the Presbyterian Church, East Africa, to continue his education with the plans he would return after finishing his studies. But then he decided to stay and pursue his doctorate degree and to see us through college. And with the plans of returning, which, no one ever returns. So he was sent here by the Presbyterian Church East Africa, which works with the um, the American Presbyterian Church, and so they were sponsored by the Presbyterian Church in Atlanta to come and study here, and that's how we ended up in Atlanta.

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SW: Jamila, how did you end up in Atlanta?

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JN: Oh, I ended up in Atlanta because my mother being a country girl from Jamaica got tired of the city and wanted to move somewhere where there was a little bit more fresh air and you know at that time I guess officially people were called the new migration South, you know, just a bunch of people were coming back from the North, coming South. So you know, it was, like, supposedly new opportunity in Atlanta, you know, and so we moved down. It like, “OK. Gonna try something new. Let’s go to Georgia.” Mmmm. [Laughing]

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SW: And so how did you two meet, and how did you decide to start a farm in the city? And what was people’s reactions to that. There’s like four questions in that.

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CG: We met because we were trying to save our neighborhood [Laughing] from itself. No. Honestly, we were trying to make our neighborhood a better place by cleaning it up and I don’t know. We were, I don’t know, I guess I volunteered to do a clean up at the park and Jamila was there, the main park, West End Park. And um, so through that we started talking about just living in a better community, really. You know, the things that we were doing through the conversation, I think we, I think I told Jamila that I was growing food in my front yard. And it just kind of sparked this conversation about agriculture and food. And then she told me, I think

you had told me that you're volunteering at Reverend Wright's garden, and I was like, "Oh!" And so, I ended up working with Jamila, going to visit the garden with Jamila. It's not on the same day, it didn't all happen on the same day, it just kind of, you know, she was already involved in some capacity in food production in the West End before I moved there. Moved there in 2008, so it just connected from talking about how we can make things better, our community better, you know?

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JN: Yeah, so when I um, so I was here, I moved to Atlanta, I was here for high school, and I would always come to the West End, just kind of a lot of cultural stuff, you know, they just had a lot African American cultural activities, you know, really good bookstores, things like that, so I always came here. And there was a plot of land that was adjacent to the park, West End Park, and that's the site of Good Shepard Community Church. And I would always drive by and in my head think, "If I ever move here, I'm gonna do a farm here." You know, I'm just gonna grow, I just saw a farm there. And, I mean, this is like years, years, you know before I even, like, had a family.

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JN: So when we um—

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SW: Why did you want to grow a farm?

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JN: I don't know, I was just like, "I'm moving here and I'm gonna put a farm here." It was just like, this idea I had in my mind. And so, when we, when my family, I went to UGA [University of Georgia, Athens] so I lived in Athens for quite a while, and then, you know, we came to Atlanta, um, really because just couldn't find any jobs in Athens, and it was just like, "Alright, come to Atlanta," you know, find some jobs. And my husband's family lived here, so we moved in with them, and then we decided to buy our own house, and I was like, "Buying a house in the West End," like, there was no other option. So, um, bought a house and the week we moved in, there was a, actually a farm, a garden summit being held at Good Shepherd Community Church. The same site that I'd been driving by and being like, "I'm going to move here and I'm going to build a farm here," I don't know why.

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JN: So, went to the garden summit, met the preacher. And, you know, I was like, "What are you guys doing? I see you're growing some stuff out here," and he was like, "Yeah." And I was like, "Can I just come out and start helping?" And I just starting going out there like once a week, and at first when I started going out there, there was a lady by the name of Miss Lizzy who's a member of the church and she also grew up on like a 200-acre farm in South Georgia

somewhere. And she was working out at the farm, pretty much by herself. And when I first started coming out there, she was just like, “Who is this little city girl and what does she think she know?” [Laughing] I’m like, “Miss Lizzy, I’m here to help!” She’s like, “Okay.” And yeah, I’d be like, “Okay, I’ve got about an hour or so,” and like four hours later, she’s still like, “Okay, we’re just going to do one more row of okra,” or something like that. So that’s kind of how I got connected with the church. And like, Ceci said, we met doing community work in the park, and I also joined, I was part of an organization, Friends of the West End Park, which is a you know, organization through Park Pride. And we were trying to clean up the park and just do some programming, and you know, doing stuff for children and we did this Autumnal Eve harvest festival where we brought in pumpkins and candy apples. And then we decided, “Oh, we can have a little garden in the park,” which was the most, you know, you think something so simple, “Oh, I’ll just put a little garden in a park,” and it was just like the most bureaucratic process to try to get through Park Pride, and “Oh my god, who’s going to maintain it? And what if they want to come cut the grass? And they can’t maneuver around the vegetables?” And it just became this big thing.

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JN: Then we met another organization, some people who were part of another organization called Creating Vibrant Communities. And, Ceci and I, I think we initially, no this is how we met through Jossakeed, through that conference call. And remember the conference call we had about CVC, and we were introducing, there were a couple of people on the conference call talking about, you know, farming in the West End. And they had started farming over at Brown Middle School. And they got a contract through Atlanta Public Schools to farm at Brown Middle

School, and so I was really excited, and they were looking for more people to join. And I was like, “Oh, sign me up! I want to join.” And then—

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CG: I think right at that time I, I came in right when that was dissolving.

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JN: Yeah, exactly. And so, was really excited about joining and then the organization fell apart and just dissolved. So we’re like—

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CG: And I was also, like, I think it was before we met, and I could be wrong, um, I was—I attended a meeting that was part of the NPU, which was the Neighborhood Planning Unit, in our neighborhood, the agriculture committee. Um, which was also active during the same time the CVC was active. And I wanted to join in and find out what they were doing, what their goals, and what their mission was. And I, and at the time, I was working in the woods, I’m a wilderness instructor, so I was like one week in the woods, one week home, this is before the kids and everything, and I would attend the meetings on my week off. And I think at some point, when I returned, that organization had fallen apart, too and everybody that was part of it had either moved out of the neighborhood or um, moved on to other things. And then, so there was the

CVC, and we learned about the Creating Vibrant Communities. And that's, as we were getting involved in that, that also fell apart [Laughing].

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CG: So, we decided, so I think out of that, we were still interested in working the land that they had previously worked, which was Brown Middle School, and Jamila and I and some other people who were interested, Jossakeed, and a couple other people in the community who were still committed to seeing agriculture happen in the West End, we had a meeting and we started another organization called Southwest Atlanta Grower's Cooperative. Um, whose mission is bring sustainable agriculture, healthy foods to our community and to support local growers like us. Um, and um, and that organization is still around, and initially when we started it we had the idea of growing collectively on the land at Brown Middle School that was previously farmed by CVC and, you know, after, being in the organization you're kind of working on seeing – you're trying to find a cohesive goal and mission, and keeping everybody on board, so. We started working the land, and soon found out that not everybody was interested in the physical aspect of growing, you know, they might have been interested in other aspects of um, sustainable and food security. Sustainable agriculture and food security, and so.

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CG: It turned out Jamila and I were the only ones showing up on Saturday [Laughing] to work the land to continue the CVC mission, and so. You know, we had to re-do some thinking. I guess Jamila can expand on that.

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JN: Yes, so yes as part developing um, Southwest Atlanta Grower's Co-op, we reached out to University of Georgia, because that's where I graduated and it's a big ag school. And I knew that they had a cooperative development center where they help people start co-ops. And so what we learned through that process, we invited um Tommy Holton, I think was his name, to come down from that – from UGA and he came down and sat with us in our meeting, and you know, he's listening to kind of like, you know, the idea that we had, which was really to farm collectively. And so, he's like, "Hold on, guys. Co-ops in Georgia don't work that way!" [Laughing] So a co-op in Georgia is more like individual farms coming together and seeing how they can you know what I mean, sharing resources, how they can come together and help to buy like maybe, tools or, things like that, that they can't do on their own. So, that's where we realized, "Okay."

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JN: And then on top of the fact that everyone in the organization wasn't necessarily interested in growing. Some people just wanted to help with paperwork, things like that. Some people were interested in just helping to make connections, grant writing, not everybody was interested in the work, so. There was still a need for the co-op, because there were other farms in the community, Good Shepherd Community Church, there was Sister Deborah has a garden, Atwood Community

Garden. And you know, Haylene Garden Queen. And so there were other farmers in the area that you know what I mean, we can still bring in as part of the co-op, so we realized, “Oh my god, we’ve gotta develop our own business!” And hence became the genesis of Patchwork City Farms [Laughing]. So, that’s how we became Patchwork City Farms, you know, we realized we needed to be our own entity. And then we’re members of the co-op, along with the other farmers named, the other farms named. So that’s kind of how it all came to be, rather.

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CG: I’m going to rewind a little bit, I just find interesting [Phone rings], when I um, just rewinding on my journey. [Phone ringing]. I just wanted to rewind um a couple of years, a few years back.

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CG: I um, it took me a while to finish my first degree, thank goodness before my dad passed.

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SW: What was the degree?

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CG: I—okay—I went in with the intentions of studying wilderness leadership and experience education. Which was is part of my degree. And because of a situation at the college I ended up changing my last semester into an integrated studies major, with the concentration of wilderness studies and experience education and environmental sciences. So it was like of like I put together my own degree. Which worked out well, because I was a nontraditional student with a lot of life experience, and you know, the college life really didn't suit me. So I had no idea, I actually went there because I wanted to be a wilderness instructor, I wanted to learn how to survive and work and help other people experience nature. It is always a place where I've enjoyed um, being from the time I was a little girl whether it was on the farm, or in the forest somewhere climbing a tree, it was, I could never be indoors. You know? I could never be happy indoors, so I decided, you know, "I'll give it a try." I enjoyed backpacking and outdoor sports, and so I figured why not do it for a living? And then, once I graduated and actually worked in the woods, I was like, "You know what? I don't want to do this!" [Laughing]. I enjoy it, but I don't want to do it for a living. And at the time, you know, I was in my late-thirties, really late thirties, and I was ready to start a family, you know? And it wasn't gonna work out with me working, you know, half the month away in the woods. But it was a great experience, you know?

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CG: But during my time at the college, um, I think you know, like I said, I already fulfilled so many of my courses from my previous years of attending multiple college and dropping out and starting again, so, um, I was um, I ended up taking an agro-ecology course with Dr. [Robert] Cabin at Brevard College, and that completely just changed my life, you know? Um, and it also just sparked my passion in you know. And actually, it reignited my connection to land, really

that's what it did. I was like, "Wow!" This was part of my life before I moved to this country, and you know, the class in every way just changed my life. Just looking at my relationship to food, where does, even asking myself where does the food come from that I eat, you know?

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CG: I remember at the time telling my professor that I was terrified of going grocery shopping. Why should you be terrified of going grocery shopping? And part of that was, you know, just hearing a lot about pesticides and all the horrible things that they do to our food, and so in the class we really explored modern agriculture, big ag, we visited a lot of little farms in North Carolina, bottom land, and talked about sustainable agriculture versus big ag, and also just following—I actually did a project where I followed the food in my kitchen to its, from its destination. I mean, from its origin to its destination. And from bananas in Costa Rica, to tomatoes in Mexico, it was crazy. So, I really never thought about it or, you know, you just eat and you don't think about the rest of it.

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CG: And then, after graduating from the school and from that course, I was like, "I gotta do something about this!" You know? And actually during that time, we started a garden. It was the first time the college has ever had a garden. And we had a bureaucratic process of having a small garden at a college, is just like trying have garden in a park. It sounds like a great idea until you take it the administration [Laughing]. And then they think you're crazy. Um, but we successfully the first garden at Brevard College, and I graduated and then Joss and I had, we started

composting and started reducing our waste and just re-thinking how we were living. And from there, we were like, “OK, we want to buy land, and we want to grow food.” We wanted to homestead and live off the grid, it was the dream. And then we started to look for land in North Carolina, in the Asheville area and learned very quickly that we couldn’t afford any land because, you know, a lot of that land was bought by wealthy people living in-between New York and Florida. And so, it drove up the property prices to the point where not even middle class in that area could afford to buy land. It was actually an issue.

00:39:18

CG: So when we got online and started looking at Atlanta, and this how oblivious you are to the rest of the world when you’re in school, you’re like, tunnel vision, your goal was to graduate. And the rest of the world is like, going into crisis, so. We looked in Atlanta, and we saw the houses were just really affordable, and we’re like, “what in the world is going on?” And it turns out, you know, the whole country was going through like this whole, like, housing crisis [Laughing]. We didn’t know, we were like tucked away in the Blue Ridge Mountains in a little college town. Everything’s great, happy, you know, you’re doing your little thing. Until you get online, and you’re just like, “Wow. OK. There’s a crisis.” So.

00:40:04

CG: And, we didn’t really, get the really, like the full prospective of it until we moved to Atlanta, and um, when we bought this house. And we were looking for a house where we could grow food. Our intention was to buy a house that faced the South or the East, you know, our

purchase was like intentional, you know? And we had a goal of growing food and living off the grid in the city [Laughing]. And it seemed to be affordable, and so we ended up in the West End, you know, we looked around in different neighborhoods and we decided this is where we wanted to stay, the houses were affordable. It looked like we might not have to deal with neighborhood associations and that sort of thing. And it kind of turned out that way, so.

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CG: And then, we moved in and we kind of started our little movement, Food Not Bombs, and um, and then got our neighborhood kids to help transform our front yard into a food oasis, and they were pretty excited about that. And the older people were like, well the parents, not the older people, the parents, were pretty much, “You guys are crazy.” That’s all they would say, “Y’all crazy!” [Laughing] And then the kids would be really excited, they would come everyday and eventually, when they saw that we were serious they joined in, the older, the adults joined in to help transform the front yard. And then the old folks who grew up on farms, and actually a lot of the neighbors over here had goats and chickens. I can’t even imagine, back you know, in I don’t know if it’s the ‘60s [1960s] maybe? People kept you know animals in their backyard, it was a normal thing, garden, everything. You know? And then the next generation completely like divorced from that experience, and so, you know, reuniting that in my community was really cool, it was great to see it be a part of. And you know, we would have, like, Miss Pearl would come up here and she would tell us so many stories about growing up on the farm, or having chickens in her backyard. Just, you know, random neighbors come by and talk about their experiences with food and whatnot.

00:42:15

CG: I think that's like the mindset that brings two people together. You know, we were traveling in the same, um, path, like you know, with the similar goals to grow food, you know? And to take care of our families and to live healthy lives. And so, I think it's only natural that our paths collided. I just, yeah. I just think it's an interesting journey, you know?

00:42:50

SW: I have a couple more questions. You just talked about how the older generation was used to these things, and the next was divorced. Was it like for both of you to bring this back for people because this sort of how we all started. We had a connection before, and then we moved away from it, so to do something like this seems strange now. So I'm just wondering what that was like for you guys. Or what it's like to, you could have just had your garden and kept to yourself but you opened this up to the community, and I wonder that's important for both of you.

00:43:36

JN: Well, um I think definitely for me the reason why I see it as important, is I think when we started trying to do sort of like the collective growing, we were like, "Oh, a bunch of families come together," and you realize, especially coming to the West End, a community of you know, sort of like, African Americans, you know people are like, busy. You know, they're just trying to sort of make it ends meet. And so, you realize like, well, you know, we're full of excitement and energy, and not necessarily everyone is excited and energetic and will actually go and do the work. But, then it doesn't necessarily mean for me that they shouldn't have access to that produce, to healthy produce. And then also looking at sort of the health problems, I mean it was

definitely a cultural shock, just moving from New York to the South. You know, just to see how people cooked their food and just, I mean, I was just like. We're just a little bit amazed at how many, you know what I mean, you know overweight people we saw. But New York is a, you're walking all the time, you're busy, it's just, you know. It has its own problems, because I'm sure everybody there has got like, mad high blood pressure and like, stress, so you know, it's not necessarily one thing is better than the other.

00:45:00

JN: But, the food-related illnesses that I saw when I came down here, you know, with diabetes, heart disease and all that, it was just like, "We've got to do something about this." And then, with my background in environmental engineering, I just see the effects directly of, you know, I deal with this all time, you know, pesticides and herbicides, and just kind of like toxins in the soil. And just knowing that, you know, really, you know when I entered environmental engineering, I thought I was going into a field where I was going to be using engineering to solve the world's problems, you know, I'm all like wide-eyed, bushy-tailed, like, "Oh, I'm going to be like an environmentalist!" Not really. So, environmental engineering is like, "How can I engineer the environment to work for me," so I realized engineers were actually part of the problem.

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JN: And so, being like, I think at the core I'm always like a problem solver, you know, so I'm like, "Okay, what can I do that would address a lot of these things, that can address the health issues, that can address you know, making sure we're getting sure we're getting good, you know, the access to that good food, and can address like, just fresh air and diversity and all that stuff." I mean, it's like so simple: grow food. Grow food naturally, grow food organically. And, you know, and if I can, I will. So I decided, you know, I'm gonna do it. You know, if I can't trust what I'm buying at the grocery store and I can't afford whole paycheck Whole Foods [Laughing]. So, let me create some access in my community, where I'm living for the people that need it that can't, you know, they can't grow for themselves, I can grow for them. So if you can't grow, we're here growing for you, if you want to, you can come out and join us.

00:46:52

JN: So you know, so that was really what just sort of sparked me to take it beyond myself. 'Cause for me, it's never enough it just say, "I'm just going to take care of me and my family." I feel like I have a duty to community and you know, at-large, because the community, you know, in some ways, they provide for me. People are, you know, looking, you know, we got teachers that are teaching my kids, we got police officers that are taking care, and you know, you got all these community members that are providing services, so you know, if I'm going to try and do something and provide a service, you know, I'm going to not just do it for myself and my family, I'm going to do it for my community. So that was really important for me to be here and to be in the West End, and to do this work. You know, because the people that live in this community, you know, they represent me and they represent sort of like, my journey and I want to see us be part of that movement, you know what I mean, because, you know, 'cause sometimes—

00:47:45

JN: And I think that's part of like what's hard about doing this work because, you know, growing, it's so crazy because we meet a lot of people in the comm—just like Ceci said, I have you know, I have neighbors on my street who are like you know, there was a time where everyone in the West End, they all farmed in their backyards. And you know, neighbors shared food with each other. And you know, you didn't go to the grocery store for a whole lot. And you know, of course, their children, I mean, it kind of became, "You don't need to farm anymore," and there's that people are totally divorced from the land, go to the big city, get a real job. So like, the whole idea of farming just became this, "You're backwards, you're slow. You're this, you're that." And um, you know, "Go, don't toil so hard." But there's, you know, there's a long history and story and sort of like how, you know black farmers were treated on their land and farming and cut out from resources, so you know, there's a lot to understand what came to generate those thoughts in people's minds and why they would send their children off and be like, "Don't try to live this hard life that I've lived."

00:48:54

JN: But, you know, it's had its detrimental effects in terms of, you know, not having access and not having control of the food you eat. So, um. So yeah, so you know, neighbors, they talk about growing, you know, growing that food, and so, you know, so it was really important for me to connect, you know, connect those dots and just kinda like, bring it back and say, "Okay, you know what? I see a problem and I can be part of the solution." So this is my way of being part of

that solution. And um, you know, providing that access and making sure that you know, our community that, you know, I mean, we were the laborers on the farms for, you know, many years, forced labor and then you know, Jim Crow-era labor and now, you know. And so, you know, now just want to make sure we're part of that movement and to say, "We care also about our communities," and you know. Ceci and I, for the most part we go places and we're the only African American farmers and then, part of not many female farmers that are there.

00:50:06

JN: And so, you know, people all were surprised to see us. And one of the main questions we get at market are, "Are you guys a community garden?" And we're like, "Well, no. We're a real farm." [Laughing] But, you know, we've got some community garden stuff that we do, too. But yeah, so you know. Um, so it's been interesting. So just want to make that we don't get left behind in the process and in the movement and do just, we care about our people, and we care about the food that we eat and, you know, we're just as viable and able and all that. So it's real important, yeah.

00:50:47

CG: Um, I think, you know, just to jump on the community part, you know, from a very young age, my parents instilled a duty to community. Um, in all of us kids. And I don't think that there's ever been a part of my life where I didn't ask myself, "What can I do for the community?" Like, even at a young age, it's all expected. And um, and so I grew up in that environment and I guess naturally, into my, like, young adult life I became an activist, you know,

grass root activist, whether it was dealing with issues of police brutality, anti-war, you know war issues, you know poverty. Dealing with gender issues. I mean, I was pretty, I have been pretty active throughout my life in trying to change the world to a better place, you know. [Laughing] It's not always like, um, how do you say, instant gratification. It's like, hard work, you know? And but it's you know, but it's part of who I am, and part of my, like, I guess my family. My family history, so. Naturally, um, when I started gardening it wasn't just for myself, I wanted to just, I actually, when we put in a garden, we wanted to do it not just for us, but for the kids on the block. And um, and the reason why is because, I remember as a child loving just being outside exploring and just being happy being outside. And not coming in to the house for anything, not even food, you know, we would forage. Like, we were like little foragers, you know, we'd get passion fruits, climb and get guava. You know, whatever, Kenya's full of, it's on the equator, so you grow a lot of things. You know, we grow—we get palm nuts and all kind of nuts, and we never came home to eat until dinner, you know? We're just gone.

00:53:09

CG: And um, and so, I wanted to have that here. I wanted to have the kids to go out when they go outside, they can run in grab something off a tree or off a vine or whatever, and eat it, and be connected to that experience. And so, for me, it was really important to get the kids engaged and to have that kind of safe haven, and I also, like in our community, especially on my street, a lot of the kids, I realize when I moved in, a lot of the kids on my street are left at home alone. And so, I really, my garden became a safe haven for them, to come hang out I knew like, I could keep an eye on them, when they're out on the streets by themselves, I don't know, it just became like a—I don't know, what would you call it?

00:54:02

JN: A safe haven.

CG: A safe haven. I said, “No fighting, no dissing each other in my garden. This is a happy place, you know?” And so, since we started in 2008, they’ve come back every year, they know when the fruits are ready, you know, they know when the muscadines are here, and they know when the strawberries are here. I used to have blueberries but they’re all dead now. I’m not really good and growing blueberries.

00:54:27

CG: But also, you know, Jamila talked about the health aspect of it. You know, like my family is, it’s crazy because obesity and all these other diseases that kind of plague the black community, are almost absent, you know, where we’re from. Like, you don’t see obese people in Kenya. And if you do, they’re probably, from another country. So, you know, when we moved here, my parents, everybody started to develop all these diseases: diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol from the diet, from the sedentary lifestyle. And as part of like, living in the South. You know, the increase in meat consumption. I mean, the South, it just took a toll on my family, and so, um, growing food in my garden and starting a farm was my way of fighting back, saying that I can make the choice to change my situation and demonstrate to others that they also have the power to do it. You know, that you have a piece of property, whether it’s square feet, whether it’s acres, you know, you can do something to change your circumstance. And it’s true, because

when we started I was just like, we can't afford—and still, I go to Whole Foods and I go to all these other places and we spend hundreds of dollars on food. And um, when we were—when our garden was in full bloom, we didn't buy anything other than condiments. You know? And that was great. And that felt, for the first time I felt comfortable, I felt like, “Wow. I feel OK eating this thing. Eating this food. And I want other people to experience that. And to give people that access and that opportunity to eat fresh, safe, delicious foods.

00:56:40

CG: And so that's why the farm happened, you know. It's because we—we don't have that in this neighborhood, you know? We just don't. Now, we have opportunity, not just us but people like Reverend Wright, who grow food, who are giving people in our community the opportunity to come and buy fresh and safe foods. You know. And so, I think the bigger piece here is that we are invested in seeing our communities grow, uh, and be connected to this experience. Reconnect to this experience, you know. You know, we can't have our kids, you know, running from chickens. And calling goats dogs. And asking us whether we can grow cheese in the soil, it's just—you know, we sent our kids to schools, and they come back home and they don't know what a carrot looks like, you know, before it lands in the store. They can't identify corn, you know, and corn goes in everything, you know?

00:57:57

CG: And it's like, and also just not knowing that like we're demonstrating to them that, they're seeing their parents struggling with all these diseases. And they're being told, like, "Okay, here are all these drugs that can help your parents. But then we're the other voice that's saying, "No. It's what you're eating, and you can change that by choosing to eat fresher and better food," you know. And we're showing that you can do it. And it's interesting because, you know, you would think that it would be this really simple thing, but people get really excited, like my neighbor came up, she said, "Miss Ceci, I grew my first tomatoes!" And I was just like, "You have tomatoes this year? I don't even have any." She's like, "I'm so proud of myself! I'm not going to be asking you for tomatoes anymore!" [Laughing] So she was like really proud of herself, and then the kids come and tell me the stories about how they grew, you know, their parents bought them a little plant, uh little pots for them to plant, tomatoes or peppers. And they update on how their plants are doing.

00:59:10

CG: I don't know, I just think it's you know, we're not touching everybody in the community, but you can see like that what we're doing has an effect on people. And their connection to the land and to the food that they're eating. And just kinda rethinking everything, you know? And I don't know. And I think that's, I mean that's why I do it. It's 'cause it makes people happy, you know. Um, yeah.

00:59:43

SW: Do you think there's an inherent quality to women where they have something that men—you go to a farmers' market and many people expect to see a white man with a beard and a hat, you know? Somehow that's what our idea of a farmer has become from the years. So, in your experience, you talked about being females and African Americans, what are people's reaction to you, and what do you think women bring to the table to farming that maybe men don't.

01:00:35

CG: We get so many mixed reactions, uh for a long time, people would say, “Man, y'all some hard-working women!” [Laughing] That's what we get all the time.

01:00:47

JN: Men, sitting down, sitting around, looking at us working. “Wow, y'all some hard-working women!” [Laughing] And then, and so those are not the men who are involved in the farm movement, right? And then you have the men that we come across that are involved in the farming movement, and you know, at first, they don't really take us seriously, they're just kinda like, “Okay, what are y'all doing?” You know, like.

01:01:10

CG: Are you here to learn from me? Basically, kind of—

JN: “So you guys are farming?” You know, ‘cause um, we’re not burly women [Laughing] you know?

CG: We’re tiny women. Jamila’s—

JN: I’m tiny, Ceci’s short, and she’s been pregnant pretty much her whole farming experience [Laughing] She’s been with child, big belly out there, and they’re like, “What are y’all doing?” Like, you know and then men come over to the farm and they’re just like, “Okay, come one, a man’s coming in here to do some real work!”

01:01:41

JN: And you know, we have to show them out a little bit. And we do, and then they, you know, I think we’ve definitely earned our respect, you know? You know, I think guys have kind of come around and they’ve been like, “Wow. Okay, you guys are really serious, it’s not just a little garden or something, you guys are out here really farming.” And we’re like, “Yeah, we really are.” And um, just in terms, I think women probably bring more of the, you know we bring a little bit more nurturing and a little bit more, I feel like guys want to go out there and they want tractors, they want to tear it up, they just want to—

01:02:20

CG: And they want to wear the crown.

JN: Yeah, they do want to wear the crown. They do want to wear the crown, they want to be like, you know, “I’m the man,” and you know. We’re doing all the work around here. I mean, we’ve had people that we’ve sat down with in meetings who were like, so, they want us to come work for them [Laughing] And we’re like, “Well what would happen to Patchwork if we got absorbed into your operation?” Well, you know, that’s not really, “What y’all doing over there.” Well, we’re farming and we’re farmers. But you know, you look at the history of farming and you look at a lot of cultures, I mean, you know, women do a lot of the work on the farm, you know what I mean? They’re the ones that do a lot of the planting of the seed and in some cultures, I mean, it’s almost taboo for men to, you know, women are the ones who are like planting the seed—

01:03:06

CG: It’s not like, taboo, it IS taboo.

JN: It is taboo for men. Men do a little bit more of the heavy lifting and you know, the laying and clearing, but women are the ones that you know, put the seed in the ground and you know, so. So it’s just really interesting to now be in a space where it’s like, farming is like this man thing, and like, learn your history, dude.

01:03:29

CG: Yeah, why are you surprised that we’re farming, we’re black women farming and especially with our backgrounds, you know, we’re Caribbean and African women. We come

from that. Those communities of people who grow everything that they eat. And you know, and are connected to the process even from butchering meat to processing oils, you know, making, milling your own grains and you know, I mean. It's a full day's work, you know? Making a fire, feeding the kids. Bathing them, making food for your husband! You know, the day never ends for a woman! I'm telling them, never! So, it should be no surprise that we can farm, too! And do everything else that we do. I mean, heck, Jamila would be leaving sometimes it gets so hot out there we'll be there until nine, ten o'clock at night. Still gotta go home, feed the kids, you know. Homework and bathing them and putting them to bed. You know, clean the house, all that. So, even with all that, you still get people, "What are y'all doing?" [Laughing] You know, like. Or, you know, "You run the community garden?" I'm like, "Does this look like a garden to you?" Like seriously? So I don't think that at a farmers' market, that people that people go to white farmers more, go to white male farmers and go, "Are you running a community garden?" They don't—I don't think, I can bet you that I could walk and ask each farmer and see if they've been asked that question. I'm sure the answer would be no. [Laughing] I'm like, "Seriously? It says Patchwork City Farms on the sign," so there's nothing that implies that it's a community garden. We do have a community garden that's part of our operation.

01:05:20

JN: But it's just not being taken seriously. As an operation, as someone who's trying to make their livelihood off of farming, you know? We're working on that.

01:05:36

CG: I also think the women in general are the cultivators of community. You know, there's a saying in my family that, in my culture that women are the ones who instill in children the commitment to community, like you know. And a really—even though I may not necessarily agree with the whole idea of it, is that women are judged by the role that their children play whether they're, you know, they're children who show compassion and caring for others. And who are committed to helping other people around them, and so if you're a mother and your kids do not show this quality, then you're judged as a bad mommy. You know, and so what I'm saying is like, we are the builders of community, you know, through what we do. So we could have just had Patchwork City Farms, but it's turned out to be a community gathering space, you know. It's turned out to be this much bigger thing than we intended it to be, you know? And I think that's amazing. That we're bringing people together, in ways that people used to come together, you know. Where people can connect in a real process, you know, they can work together, they can get to know each other. And you know, what happened to those communities, you know? And I think that farms do that. You know. Farms create a space where people can come and just connect. You know. And Patchwork City Farms is a peaceful place. We have all sorts of people come through there.

01:07:39

CG: And I think women in general are just powerful. And because we don't beat at our chest, and we don't—we don't sound the um the horn and say, “We're here,” you know, we just do things and in doing things, you know, there's a ripple effect. People come to us because they like

the beauty that we're creating, you know? And we're thoughtful and creative. And I don't know. And resourceful. Very resourceful! I don't know, I get, yeah. A great example of this [Laughing] and you know, this cracks me up every time. We, 'cause when we started this farm, I mean, we're reaching into our pockets, it was like sweat equity and savings. You know. And so, we would um, hear about free stuff, we'd go get it if it works for what we need. And I don't know, Jamila and I just started accumulating a lot of stuff, and um. And it all worked out. And then um, and I remember the first year we planted tomatoes. And we had to trellis them, Lord have mercy, trellising tomatoes. And so, we would go and harvest bamboo. We found, I knew of a little bamboo patch in the neighborhood that I lived in. And I went over there and asked the neighbor if we could go harvest the bamboo and he said, "Sure. I don't see why not."

01:09:15

CG: And so, we would go there, we're quiet. We have our truck, Jamila's van. We get our handsaws, you know, it's a nice, pretty bamboo forest. We make a whole day of it. And then um, one of our farmer friends. Men. They're like, "Oh, we need some bamboo." And um, we're like, okay, we told them where our source was located. And so I go over there to meet them and they have chainsaws! [Laughing] And I'm like, "What are you doing? You can't, what do you need chainsaws for?" He's like, "No, no. We got to do this with a chainsaw. This is faster." I mean, mind you, it takes like, a few seconds to cut through bamboo with a handsaw. It's hollow, and it doesn't create the noise for the neighbors.

01:10:07

CG: So they go on, despite the fact that I asked them not to go in there with the chainsaws, they went in there with the chainsaws and they started cutting the bamboo. And uh, that was all.

JN: It sounded like they were logging a forest, I mean, and so.

CG: [Makes chainsaw noises]

JN: And the neighbor on the other side came out, and she's like, "What are you all doing?" And they're like, "We're cutting bamboo." [Laughing] And, it actually happened to be her land. And she's like, "You cannot be here." So, we won't say who was there, but they were able to talk to her and let her know what was going on. So she's like, "Okay." So that's a woman, you know, understanding. "Okay, you can continue to cut." Well her husband came home. And he was like, "No. Get off my land. Leave the bamboo." They couldn't even take what they cut. "And if you come back, I'm calling the police." So there went our bamboo source. Because of men.

[Laughing]

01:11:12

CG: Because of men and they're machines. [Laughing] And an inability to just be discreet and just, just---considerate and whatever. And so anyways, yeah, over the top. That's a good way to describe that. So you know, we walk gently onto the soil, and they ride up on their machines.

[Laughing]

01:11:45

SW: Can you talk a little bit about what you grow on the farm, how many acres you farm on and who you grow for?

01:11:53

JN: Okay, so Patchwork City Farm is, you know, once again like we said, it's at Brown Middle School. It's an Atlanta Public School, it's a middle school, um, and we have a contract with Atlanta Public School for five years. So it's a lease agreement. And it's an acre of land. And we will expanding—currently right now we have a half an acre under production and we're gonna expand to about three-quarters. And then the rest of the quarter acre is dedicated to a community garden space and a student garden space. And so, we decided to keep a community element just to be able to have people come in and see what's going on. And we've got a fruit orchard that's um, planted around the community garden space. We grow baby greens, so um, lettuces, arugula, tomatoes, heirloom tomatoes. Um, flowers. Lots of herbs, basil. Parsley, dill, cilantro. Rosemary. Thyme. Just all kinds of stuff. We have Ceci's front yard is also part of the farm operation, um, mainly we get a lot of herbs and muscadines from that site.

01:13:18

JN: And um, you know, we grow very intensively and we are using a growing system, or sort of like really a farm management system, so it's called Spin Small Plot Intensive Urban Farming. And it's a method that was developed by some people up in Canada, and it was studied by the

University of Pennsylvania as an economically viable method for small farmers. And it just kind of lays out a farm configuration and it helps you figure out what plants to grow, so we grow a lot of things that grow quickly and that you can harvest quickly. So not long season, short season crops. So a lot of our baby greens, you know, they're seed-to-market in about thirty days. Um, herbs, you know, they're about sixty days, but then you can continually harvest them.

01:14:17

JN: And a lot of greens, you know. The base of our operation is like baby greens and large greens: kale, Swiss chard, rainbow chard. Beets. Baby carrots. Um, radishes, radishes, radishes, radishes. And spring onions. Who knew people would go crazy for radishes at market? But it grows pretty quickly, it's about thirty days to, you know, to harvest and I mean, I think because it's just so beautiful, you know. Like. A radish. It looks like candy on the table, so people are like, "I'll have that."

01:14:58

CG: Yeah, you should tell them about your little Halloween story. With the kids.

JN: Oh, okay! Beautiful. Okay, so talking about radishes and people loving radishes, so you know, we're—at the Grant Park Farmers' Market, so we're set up and I didn't get the memo that on Halloween we're supposed to have goodies to pass out, you know, for the kids, you know, they're gonna kinda do a little Trick or Treat. And, I'm at the tent and I'm like, "Oh, crap." You know, I see other farmers dressed up, they've got little bags of stuff, and I'm like, "Oh boy, what

am I going to do?” So I look at the table and we had radishes. And they’re the French Breakfast radishes, so they kind of look like fingers with the red and like, icicles, like red with the white, red tip and a little bit of white. So I decided, earth pops! [Laughing]

01:15:52

JN: And so, I just came up with the name, and I’m like, “Hey!” Kids come by. I’m like, “Would you like an earth pop?” It’s a radish turned upside down, holding the leafy part. And they’re like, “Yeah, I will some earth pops!” So, it was just my little ingenious idea. Anyway, Katie the market manager thought it was just like absolutely cute. And so, I was, “Yeah, we can have earth pops! Radishes. Carrots. You know. Anything that comes out of the Earth. And kids were like literally eating them and coming back and being like, “Can I have another Earth pop?” And so, the following year, there were kids who came back looking for Earth pops. [Laughing] I thought that was pretty funny. So that’s the story of radishes. [Phone rings]

01:16:37

JN: And it’s so funny with kids, because we’ve had children in the neighborhood, we had a um—a fall festival at the farm and just kind of invited the neighborhood out and a bunch of people came out, and you know, we brought the goats over. And so, we were pulling some radishes and feeding the goats, and the kids were like, “Oh, can we have some radishes, too?” And I’m like, “Yeah.” And so, the kids went and they pulled their own radishes, they kind of wiped them off and they just started eating them. And then they were like, “Can we have some more radishes?” And their parents were like, “What? My kids don’t eat vegetables at all.” But I

think just the fact that they pulled it themselves, they were like, “I just pulled this out of the ground and I’m eating it,” and they were all over those radishes. It was like, best thing, and I’m like, “I don’t even really like radishes like that.” But, yeah, radishes have been quite a surprise. Yeah. So, children love ‘em. Goats love ‘em. Adults love ‘em. They make great Halloween treats. Earth pops.

01:17:47

SW: Is there anything else either one of you want to add that I didn’t ask you.

CG: I feel like there was something else I was thinking of and I can’t wrap my head around it right now.

01:17:56

CG: Yes, I think what we need to talk about it is the reality of, the realities of farming and our struggles. And it’s not all like, um, you know, people come and you know they are really pleased with what we’re doing, but the other side of that is they don’t know what the struggles are for small and young farmers, small farm operations and also young farmers who are coming into this profession. And, you know, it’s been like a struggle really. Like it’s um, from the first day, in fact, I don’t know that we even, we decided to have a business farm operation, but we had no idea what we were getting ourselves into, you know. We learned the business by doing, by doing it, just jumping in and just doing it. You know, everything from growing to marketing, to getting all the resources we need to do what we do, and it’s been like, and especially working within the

school system which is actually kind of slows down even more because of the bureaucracy of the school system.

01:19:13

CG: So that was a lesson in itself. And so, um it's been really challenging to run an operation for three years without water. We didn't have a cooler to cool down our produce out of the field until this year. Um, our shed, maybe we shouldn't even talk about that [Laughing] You know, even just storage. I mean, when we started this operation we were running it from Jamila's porch, my porch, and the farm. We were running around like chickens with our heads cut off. Literally. And you know, we're doing this and we have our families, and Jamila was working full time and I was a full time mom and it was, you know, it was not an easy process. And I don't think that starting any small business is an easy process. You know, um I think the first five years are really challenging. You know, in many ways. Financially. And physically, emotionally. Um, and especially if you have family. Um, you know, that's going to have an effect on that.

01:20:25

CG: And we stayed with it, and we still have a lot to learn. We're still young yet in our experience as farmers. And we're dedicated to the process but, I think people really need to understand that growing food and growing healthy food, because we're not pulling out all the weapons to make it easy. Um, that it's difficult work. People often ask, "Why is your food so expensive?" I'm like, "Food shouldn't be cheap, really." When you think about the economic side of food, and who's getting subsidized, um. How is it that big ag can deliver cheap food, it's

based on them accessing cheap land overseas, cheap labor. You know, there's this whole other side of big food production versus like growing food sustainably. You know, um small farmers want to stay alive and to do that, we have to price our food according to what it cost to produce it. Right? And um, and so—I think that it's important for people if they're wanting to understand where their food comes from, to like, take one day and go help a farmer. You know, take one day go help a farmer and experience what they're experiencing. And to know, like, what exactly that it is: the energy and the time, and you know. That it goes into growing a seed to—seeing a seed through its maturation, you know. To market. And so, I think that's lacking. I think people are understanding, are beginning to understand by supporting local markets and you know, and actually, we have a lot of volunteers that come out and they're like, “Oh my gosh, this is hard work,” you know?

01:22:45

CG: Um, and then they understand through that process, but also you know to also know that a lot of our, um, how do you say, our counterparts, fellow farmers that are our age, young farmers, are struggling with the same things. Like we need support. Like, we need people supporting our farms, we need people supporting young people financially, who are trying to do this. If they're serious about creating sustainable agriculture in our community. Um, we need to realize that we can't do it alone, you know. And that's part of the reason why a lot of small farmers died out. You know, and so I don't know if Jamila wants to say anything more about that, but you know, it's just been a journey. You know, we didn't acquire land and find all this stuff waiting for us. You know. Um, which sometimes we learn about like other farmers who just kind of fall into situations like that and it's kind of like, okay. [Laughing] But I mean it also makes us appreciate

the journey, you know, even though it would have been nice to just, go and find some land with a barn and a shed, a refrigerator and electricity and water. And a pond, and everything's there ready to operate. And the government throwing in some money for you to just chill and not grow anything.

01:24:20

CG: No, I'm just kidding. But then we all know, what that leads up to, right? Yeah. But I don't know.

01:24:31

JN: Yeah, I definitely do want to say that, you know, like Ceci said, we have had some struggles. We financed our operation all by ourselves. And you know, I think, definitely the Federal government, the USDA, they're realizing that you know small farmers need help, a lot of their policies were directed towards big ag and you know, small farmers weren't able to tap into the resources that were available. So, you know, all of that drives up the cost when you have to finance an operation yourself, but we've been able to work with our local, um, NRCS representative, National Resource Conservation Association representative, so we've gotten some grants. So, you know, we're just learning along the way and connecting to other people so we've gotten a grant to install a well, and also to get a hoop house, so that we can extend our growing season. And I mean, there's definitely some things, while we've had some struggles and it's just been like, the end of last year, I just think we were kinda like, "What the hell are we doing?"

01:25:46

JN: You know, when you're like, in the middle of the summer and the heat is just on you, you're just like, "What? Who signs up for this?" And it's just crazy. But then you get to the wintertime and it gets cool, and things get nicer, and then you kinda get—the dream comes back in and it's spring, and everything's alive. It's just like nature has this little process all built in like suck you back in again. But um, I think I'll definitely say that I'm very proud of the fact that you know, where we are right now, we have absolutely, you know, we have no debt. You know what I mean, we have absolutely no debt. You know, going to the market, people and their energy and their excitement about local food and you know, seeing farmers and all that, you know, they're just – you feel like a superstar sometimes, you know, "Oh my god, you're here with your baby greens!" And they tell you all about what they did with it and what they cooked for dinner, and it's the most amazing thing. So that definitely makes it like, you know, it kinda gives you the motivation to like, keep going, even with all of the struggles.

01:26:54

JN: And um, you know, and it's just – I started off and my friends are like, "You're a what?" Like, of my close girlfriends, I think one person has come out to my farm [Laughing] You know, and they're just like, "Okay, Jamila. That's your thing." But now amongst my friends, people are like, "Oh, can you help me put a little garden in at my—" and people are like interested, and you have to just, you just have to keep doing what you're doing. And then, your actions will inspire them, 'cause definitely just talking to people.

01:27:27

CG: They go beyond thinking that you're just nuts, to like, wanting to be part of the process, you know. And wanting to learn more. About how they can do it themselves and I definitely do think that going to market, I mean. Even though I'm not doing all that much right now, it's so very rewarding. And people really do get excited. It's a great experience, if you haven't visited a farmer's market just do. And I even encourage people, when you travel, you know just, you know you go where everything else is, where is the museum? Google "Where is the local farmers' market." You know, and just go do your shopping there first, you know? And just support farmers wherever you go, because, you know, we can't do what we do without people coming to see us and buying and supporting what we're doing.

01:28:20

CG: And you know, it makes you really happy, I mean, we have people—if we don't have what they normally get from us they're like, "Oh my goodness, you don't have it, when are you gonna have it?" And we feel so bad! Because we've had this struggle with water so we're like—we have these stories like, "You know, we want to get it to you, but you know, we're working on it." And then when we do get it back, they're really excited. You know, they're not mad at us, they're just happy to have it. They're like, "Oh, the baby greens are back!" Or—

01:28:55

JN: So I think people definitely get educated and they see the struggles that we go through, you know, we're thinking, "Okay, we've had all this rain this year," so you're like, "Oh, it should be a great season!" Well no, not really. Because too much rain is problem, too, and we've ended up having to pull up like, we tripled how much kale we were—we grew this year based on the sales last year, and of course, kale is like the thing. And you know, it's a great product, and then we ended up having to pull it all early because it got disease because all the rain it just kept things wet and then that's how the disease spreads, and so we ended up having to pull that crop earlier than what we had planned. And then, that leaves a space open. And so, as we're going to market and people are like, "Oh my god, this is not here anymore." Then it's like a little education. "Okay, so this what's going on." And they're like, "Oh, okay. I didn't even know." And so, that interaction between the consumer and the farmer is what is bringing the awareness, and then people get connected to the struggles, and then they might see, "Oh, it's important to support this," and maybe get involved in the politics and, "How can I support you, and what do you guys need?" And everybody doesn't have to come out to the farm and do labor, you know, there's so many other ways, you know, you can support: promote the market, you know, help with legislation, work on our web site. You know, advocate for farmers and farm rights, and things like that. So, um – so yeah, I think, I cannot imagine—growing out in the middle of nowhere, and just shipping my food to a warehouse or middle man and not knowing, you know what I mean? That connection, I think that's detrimental, and I can see where that can create an isolation to where you would say to your kids, "Don't do this," you know, "Go do something else." Because, you've lost that reward, that feedback, where you used to be able to be in a community and you bring your wares and everybody like buys your stuff and you go back and

you do it all over again. You know, you need that connection to the people just as much you're connected to the land. You know, it needs to be a full circle. There needs to be that full circle

01:31:02

CG: That community need to be there, that's the important piece. And um, I actually remember designing, when I was in college in my agro-ecology course, our professor told us to design our dream farm. And my farm was in a center of a city. [Laughing] And it was surrounded by homes and churches and municipal buildings, and that was just was going to be my farm. And I had chickens and goats and not that I even knew that that was going to happen. It was just like my dream, you know? And without that piece, your just, I don't know, you're just out there growing for the middle man. You know? Yeah, you don't have that connection, and it's sad to me it feels lonely and sad.

01:31:53

CG: But so, I guess that would be, probably the difference between urban farms and rural farms, maybe. But then, rural farms have their small communities that they connect to. So maybe it's the different between big ag and small farm operations. Whether they're connecting directly to their consumer, they're selling to a distribution.

01:32:18

JN: And another thing about that connection, is that I mean, so of course from the human connection perspective, it's kind of like instant gratification. For me, we talk about video games being instant gratification, but you plant a seed, and thirty days later, you have a whole crop, that's crazy! You know, I'm like, "That tomato seed is so tiny, and now I have this huge plant full of tomatoes and I get to feed people with it," that's you know, you can't tell me anything happens faster than that. But um, but also just from an economic standpoint, you know, you're able to get the most amount of money for your product when you're dealing directly with the consumer, you're getting full retail as opposed to growing to sell to a middle man that's selling to the cheapest price to take it to the store that wants it cheaply enough that they can do their mark-up, so you've lost so much along the way. And by being able to grow food, and sell it directly to the consumer, you also reduce the land base that you need to grow and to support yourself. You know, 'cause people keep expanding because they're like, "I've got to grow more," 'cause now the price of corn is less, and if I want to make and break even, I've got to grow however many thousands—it reduces so much, you know, it reduces so much in terms of resources. So like, I had a person ask me, this guy, I went to this Hammond's House, I was volunteering for this art exhibit, just you know, helping out.

01:33:53

JN: And um, there was a guy there, I forgot his name, but he's a storyteller, and he's like, "I grew up on a farm," 'cause I told him I was a farmer, and he said, "I grew up on a farm," you know, but you know, he grew up in rural Georgia, South Georgia. And he's like, "I'm trying to

understand this whole urban farming piece, because we had large acres.” And he’s like, “I want to understand how is it that you think that growing in the city is gonna feed all these people?” And I said to him, “For me, it’s not so much about growing in the city is going to replace or provide all the food that the city needs or that communities need,” I said, “But it’s a way to for me, growing here brings awareness to the importance of supporting, you know, farmers and farm rights and to you know, bring farmers and—wherever they are—urban and suburban and rural to the forefront to show there are people out here that are doing this work.” So it’s about creating a space where people can see that connection and know that it’s important to support farmers wherever they are.

01:35:10

JN: So he was like, “That’s it! No one’s ever said that! Now, let’s talk. I want to come out to your farm.” I was like, “Thank you. Thank you very much.” That’s from a woman to a man.
[Laughing]

01:35:28

CG: Yeah, and also decentralizing farming is important. Especially with the change in climate, I mean, you know, if we’re relying on food to come from one destination and that area gets hit by whatever climate change we’re experiencing, whether it’s like, you know, the flooding in Mississippi with sweet potatoes, and you’re not getting that crop. Or devastation in Iowa with the corn, or whatever. You know. You know, I think there’s this whole tomato war, too. With Florida growers and Mexico. And you know, so it’s kind of like look at how communities can be

more sustainable. You don't need, you know, large acres of land. You just need a lot of small farms—to support communities. And um, and also just people growing on their own and in their homes to supplement what farmers are bringing to the market. So it's kind of looking at a different way of—different ways of growing food for the masses of people. Not just big ag, you know.

JN: It's really just going back to the way it used to be. I mean.

CG: People ate, right, without big agriculture. You know, without big—

JN: Agriculture's been around for thousands of years, it's only like within the last hundred years that we've like totally destroyed our soils and environment with this industrialized agricultural system, so you know. Civilizations all over the world were supported by small farmer with you know, the most kind of tool they has was an ox and a plow, and that was it, you know, we don't need tractors and all that stuff. And you think about even from—you think about how many people it took to actually farm a space, now you get rid of that type of farming, you're getting rid of all of those people in providing um, jobs for them. And now all of these people are moving to cities and we're creating all of these problems within cities and people looking for jobs and all that, so you've essentially removed and taken away, you know, millions of jobs like in Mexico, when we decided with the free trade agreement, flooded their markets with cheap corn, you put all those farmers out of business. So now, you know, all those people who used to sustain their families, that happened here, that happens anywhere that great ag – Haiti. Haiti—oh my god.

01:38:08

CG: Haiti, you know, we're like, "Oh, poor Haitian people." No, not poor Haitian people. Haitian people were out in the rural areas of Haiti, growing food, living off the land and it wasn't until we destroyed, the US single handedly destroyed their agricultural system that you had millions of people flooding into Port-au-Prince into the city concentrated in masses. And when the earthquake hit, all these people were you know, died and were devastated, by that occurrence. And so we look at Haiti and we're, like, "Oh these are people who don't have food, they don't have infrastructure, they don't have—" "But then look at the history. What created that situation, you know? Um, so I think we definitely like need delve deeper into history to look at where we've come from and where we are. You know, how has big ag destroyed our food industry? You know, how have we gone from growing healthy food to like, poisoning our families? What does it mean to—for big ag to grow, for us to get seeds that select for um, for transportation and storage instead of nutrition and flavor, you know?"

01:39:42

CG: Who does that? How do we relinquish our powers to these people and sleep at night, and think that we're safe? You know, you're talking about things that are growing faster than they should, and then you're expecting to get a good product at the end. I mean, you know, stories—that's what they do, they pump your food full of water so it looks big and plump and juicy, but you're not getting the full value of like, the nutrition and—that you're body needs. We're in a health crisis and it's all due to what we're putting in our mouths. It's crazy!

JN: It's so crazy and so simple, but it's just like so many obstacles in the way to just get to what's essentially the most simple thing. I mean, now it's a radical thing to grow food. Insane! I mean, people have been growing food for thousands of years and now it's radical to grow food. But, you know, but hey, if that's what it needs to be right now, then let's be radical, let's grow food, and let's make some changes.

CG: Yeah, it's radical to say that we don't want your drugs anymore, you poison our food and then you create drugs to solve that problem. You know, it's like come, when does the madness end, you know? And it's not until we, consumers stand our ground and say, "We don't want this anymore," this change really happens. Change always happens in the streets. When people take action, it doesn't happen from those who are creating you know, the people who are creating the problems are not going to bring the solution. You know, we have to be the ones demanding that change and demonstrating in our actions. I just think it's just, you know, this is just amazing. You have a nation in crisis and it's all due to our you know our choices. All the choices we do have, you know. It's just mind-blowing sometimes.

01:42:12

CG: And so, when you can start to, I mean I'm not saying it's the solution. I'm not saying small farms, you know, but it's a beginning, you know. It's what we have right now that can counter what the big ag is doing, you know. It's a more thoughtful process. And um, yeah.

SW: Is there anything else you want to add before I turn the tape off?

01:43:00

CG: Who's this for again?

SW: The Southern Foodways Alliance.

CB: Oh yeah, the Southern Foodways Alliance. They put on the benefit that celebrated the farmers. That was a great celebration. It was so nice to be celebrated. Yeah, it was really nice to be celebrated.

SW: Well thank you for doing this, you guys. I appreciate.

JN: Well thank you for recognizing women farmers and turning on the light.

CG: I don't think I have anything else. The only thing I might add is don't choose land that has Bermuda grass. [Laughing] Make sure you don't have any invasive species growing on your soil. Where is that land? It's up North in the glacier country, probably.

[End Cecilia Gatungo and Jamila Norman]