

Tacoma Community History Project
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Narrator: Carrie Little

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Interviewed by: Jessica Dvorak

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Jessica Dvorak: So basically... my interest is community gardening and urban food security, but just because you're such a big part of that, really your story and how you got to that. ...Everywhere I go I'd hear your name and so I think, you have been really involved in that. So, kind of . . . a bigger story.

So I want know, what's your background, where you came from. What was it like when you were growing up? Were you involved with gardening?

Carrie Little: OK, OK. Well, basically, I grew up in suburbia Denver, actually, Littleton.

JD: Oh [laughs].

CL: Yeah. Before . . . Littleton was Littleton. And actually, now what was home for me is now called Centennial, which is really weird because what they call Littleton now is where Littleton became famous . . . and that didn't even exist when I grew up. So anyway, my connection to gardening begins with my dad, and hangin' out with my dad and my mom's there. We always had big gardens and my little brother and I, I just had a brother, and we would literally take the harvest and throw it in our little red wagon and

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go up and down the streets and sell it. I still have the original little flyer that I printed at age seven, that had cucumbers for-, and it was funny 'cuz I spelled . . . I had little ones . . . little ones, two for five cents. Middle ones, Meddle, M-E-D-D-L-E, meddle . . . five cents each. And then BIG ones, ten cents. That's just hilarious! So anyway, it's like, 'Ooh, you mean you can grow things, and make a nickel? Cool!'

And when . . . oh, next transitional moment for me probably would have been my seventh grade biology teacher, and he was really a nutcase because, he's the kind of guy who had his pants up to his underarms, and he's the biggest nerd of all. And when you're in seventh grade, anything remotely nerdy was just, I couldn't handle it. And he would have the gall to pack us up, and he lived nearby the school, and we'd walk to his house and go into his backyard and work in his garden. And he had this compost pile and he had beautiful, lush gardens. And everybody's like, 'Oh, my God, can you believe this?' And I'm secretly going, 'This is so COOL.' You know? [laughs]

So . . . fast forward to meeting my husband and having children and wherever we lived we had a garden to feed us. He's a union carpenter and . . . so we would go basically from state to state. We lived in a number of states before the kids were really-, well, before we moved here and they were probably seven and nine by the time we moved here. But it was really a case of: OK. This is where the work is. We were in Texas, we were in California, we were in Colorado, we were in Illinois, and then we finally came out here. We always had gardens. Some states we [inaudible] than others. But when I got here, and I had no idea, I'd never been to the Northwest. I was, Colorado but never came across at that, the [inaudible] states [inaudible]. And started learning about what

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you could grow here and how long the growing season was, and . . . and no poisonous snakes and spiders. I'm like, Wow.

JD: No bugs here at all.

CL: I know. I'm like, 'You've got to be kidding! Why are people growing limes?' I was like, 'Oh, this is insane.' So automatically just fell in love with the whole concept of gardening. We rented a house in Puyallup, and it had no space for a garden . . . so I was kind of on the hunt for a garden, to latch on to it. And we moved here in like . . . '92, summer of '92.

And the following spring, my husband, Ken, had learned about an event that had taken place, and he had kinda mentioned it, *To Live in Dignity*. And what that was, there was a gathering of the community in Tacoma, a hundred years prior, down at what's known as Fireman's Park. And basically, back then they were in the depths of a deep depression. It was overwhelming, the hunger and the homelessness and so forth. And . . . somebody spearheaded putting an event together down there at the park, and everybody gathered, and were like, 'You know, this is ridiculous, we can take care of each other. We can come together. Let's develop soup kitchens, let's get people to work, and let's get this momentum going.'

And it really kinda kicked things in gear, and it was really kind of the impetus for the start of the union movement in this region. Unions were starting to take hold on the east coast, but not so much here, and people were becoming aware of, 'Yeah, if we come together, we control a lot of power.'

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So that was a very pivotal moment to celebrate and Ken had learned about that and wanted to honor it with a hundredth anniversary...and we had never done stuff like this before. We were just raisin' our kids, and trying to survive. But he wanted to take on this project, and his goal was to reach out to all the unions, and get them to come and participate in some way. And he asked *me*, being somebody, and I'm just, bein' mom, but lookin' for work, and tryin' to figure out, where am I gonna garden? Ha!

He said, 'If you could go around and just find community organizations and invite them to participate in it, that would be cool.' So I was like, 'I can do that.' And you know, I would talk to people and kind of, everybody kind of kept pointing me in-, 'Go find Bill Bichsel. Go find Bill Bichsel,' And I don't know if you know him.

JD: I don't know him. I know *of* him, but I don't know him.

CL: OK. Sure. Well, he's a Jesuit priest that has been quite a . . . a star. A stellar star to organize people, to welcome people. And I called him up and he set a date and I show up, and I'm a little bit early for our appointment, and I'm to meet him on the side of the house where a garden was. I don't know, like-- this is serendipitous, you know? And I get there a little bit early, and . . . I'm just kinda going, ooh, they'd just tilled everything, and I'm like, 'Wow, I wonder if they could use some help.' And this black man . . . kind of confronts me. And he's like, 'Who *are* you?' And, 'What are you doin'?' And, 'Why are you here?' And this and that, and so I'm tryin' to answer his questions, and he's just really kinda-- I think he's. . . wondering, 'What's this white woman doin' in my

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neighborhood, scoutin' out the garden? What do you want with Bill Bichsel kinda thing, and I'm tryin' to reassure him. 'I'm just here to invite him to be a part of this and that.

This man and I become very good friends over it. His name is Kevin Putney and Bix finally shows and I tell him why I'm there, and he's like, 'Oh, my God. That is perfect. Yeah, we're all about that. This is who you need to connect with, that also would be good people to try and enlist.' And I'm like, 'Oh, and by the way, do you need help with this garden?' And he's just like, 'Here. Here you go.' And I'm like, 'Really?' And he's like, 'Yeah, we're kinda loose, community garden style. But yeah, fill in. Feel free.'

And so I did and it was, some place . . . and this is on the hilltop, and it during this period, I mean, you've got drug deals at every corner, and you've got drive-by shootings goin' on. It's just chaos. But in the midst of this little garden area, it's like heaven.

So I started bringin' my kids and we start bringin' seeds and tools and this and that and . . . and there were other folks that would come. There was a group of people, there's a mental health center just down below us, and they would bring small groups, and then there were other individuals from the neighborhoods, and they'd be pluggin' in their little square plot or whatever.

And another dear lady that I met, her name is Kareen Perrin and she was doin' stuff, and she was a gardener, too. Some of these others, I think they like to just, place seeds but she knew her stuff. So things start hummin' along. And pretty soon, when weeds start happening, I'm out there and Kareen Perrin [is] out there, but everybody else kinda disappears. Bix would intercede from time to time but he was a very-- he's a very busy

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man. And . . . lo and behold, it got to the point where it ended up, we were just caretaking for everything, yet kickin' out some serious food. I mean, it was just like, you plant one zucchini and you can feed the world, right?

JD: Mm-hmm. And until Bill and [inaudible]

CL: ... And we're looking at this abundance and . . . and I knew what the scoop was with Guadalupe House. I don't know if you're familiar with them, but they are a Catholic Worker community and they're all about helping homeless people and, God knows they could always use an extra, buck or two. And so . . .

JD And so were these-, there were the gardens, the Guadalupe gardens attached to the house?

CL: . . . This was just *a* garden. This is just the original.

JD: So, the first one, OK.

CL: And . . . so, there was discussion about, 'Let's head on down to the Farmers Market,' 'cuz there was this new formed Farmers Market. It was like two years old, down there in Tacoma, and we talked to them, and they were like, 'Oh, we would *love* it if you guys would come.' And so we would start bringin' some of our excess produce, and we were just the most, Beverly Hillbilly style conglomerate. I mean, we just slapped things in the back of the pickup. We didn't have a fancy canopy. But we had crazy hats, and my two crazy kids and Carrie would bring her banjo and Bix would come and sing. I mean, we were a show [laughs]. And we would just hustle, our produce and by the end of the

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season, I think we made 500 bucks, and we were like, 'We're *rich!* Oh, my God, this is awesome!'

So we gave it to Guadalupe House, to help pay for the water or whatever, and we did it again the next year, and again, invited people to participate in any way they could. And again, it was more or less boiled down to Carrie and Kareen and the kids and Bix and a couple other assorted folks. And . . . so that was kinda cool. But there was, again, you're this little island, but you got chaos surrounding you.

And we see all these vacant lots and we're like, 'You know? I wonder if the person that owns that land would mind if we took over their land.' And so the first one was an easy sell. It was actually owned by Hospitality Kitchen. And they were like, 'Oh, yeah.' You know, 'How 'bout it?' And so we poured the biggest load of chicken manure. Now, I don't know where we scored it, but you know, we scored chicken manure. And man, that was the ripest field . . . Ha! It was so funny, and everybody was just . . . mad as hell, but we're like, 'OK, but now it's gonna *grow* stuff.' And boy, did it ever. We had the most amazing garlic out of that.

And so that was cool. And that added to the collectiveness. So that second year, I think we maybe made like \$1500, and it was kinda goin' up exponentially. And again, we donated a bunch to the House, but then we bought seed. Now we gotta seed start. And we could kinda dabble into things that we've never tried before. And so it was really kind of a vehicle that . . . kind of experiment and learn and understand. I took classes on seed saving and that sort of thing.

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And then goin' into that third year . . . we had heard about a grant, and it was offered through . . . Urban Resources Partnership, U.R.P. It no longer exists, but it was kind of a coming together of the feds, the state and the county, pooling their money together, and making it available for groups to do environmental projects. And . . . Bix and I sat down and I said, 'You know? There are three more lots goin' that way that we should take over.' And he was like, 'You know? Let's *do* that.' And so we just threw together a grant, never written a grant in our lives. And submitted it. . . and we asked for the max, thirty grand . . . and we got it. Which was astonishing, Ha! And not only that, I mean, we weren't a 501 C3. You know, we're a bunch of gardeners. We had to get a bank account, and do things official.

But one of the concepts behind what we wanted to do, besides taking over the vacant lots, was to create employment opportunities for homeless people 'cuz again, we're in the midst of a lot of homelessness and . . . So we picked, about five people and assigned them each a garden, and we literally had to part 'em out. One particular lot, a man had died of a drug overdose, and it was really kind of an impetus to take over the neighborhood with gardens. And when that occurred, it was like, 'OK. So let's really make this happen.' And just to carve that out, it was like . . . twenty truckloads of beer bottles alone. It was insane. I mean, it was just a nightmare.

But we kept putting together work parties that involved a much greater outreach in the neighborhood. It was St. Leo's Church, but it was district courts, working with people who had to do community service. It was school groups in the area, and then I really tied in with PLU and UPS at the time. Just anybody and everybody.

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The City had some great departments that were really focused on neighborhood revitalization and so I took ‘em to task. You know, I even had the City Manager out there, pushin’ a wheelbarrow. I’m like, ‘Dude, you’re all talk. Let’s see what you’ve got.’

And so we ended up having by the end of ‘95, goin’ into ‘96, a total of six separate gardens. And . . . as you can imagine, by *this* time, if we had that much produce from the *first* garden, exponentially it was just going crazy. So we developed a CSA, and we had heard about the concept, and applied it here. But doing it in a way where again, the proceeds would go to employ homeless people. And it was really an amazing partnership between the garden project and then Guadalupe House because they’re about *housing* homeless people. We were about getting them some work, and revitalizing the neighborhood. So we would secure a room for them at Guadalupe. They had a place to live, they had work outside, and it just . . . transformed the community. It was just . . . from one point it was a scary place to go – to the next point, it’s just beauty. On both sides of the alley, goin’ into this lot, it’s just gorgeous. It was just, it’s incredible.

And the one point . . . where Bix lives *now*, he’s actually temporarily housed in a jail . . .

JD: Tennessee, or something, I think, yeah.

CL: The woman who lives in the house below Guadalupe House, Jean Shimoishumau, who had lived in that home since being returned from the internment camps from World War II. Very dear, dear human. Loved, just kinda loved, and raised her children there but because of how the neighborhood turned out, very fearful about going outside.

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And then the woman living next door to Guadalupe House, Little Eva, is what we called her. And both were about the same age. Both had raised children back in the '50s, into the '60s. Quite an active woman, and both of these women were in their 80s at that stage. And but again, fearful of what lurked outside the door. But there was a point and after the gardens were in, in that part of the neighborhood, I went and got both of 'em. Just, 'Do come. Come with me.' And then, 'Eva, come with me.' And we all walked in and then I said, 'I just want you to see the neighborhood right now.' And we're just walking up and down the alley there, and they're like, 'Oh, my God. ...'Look at this; there's grapes growin' on the fence.' [laughs] And, there's flowers in what was a parking lot.

The only site that we had that's . . . we had a partnership with U Dub at the time to soil test for us, to make sure everything was going to be OK. And one location that was *not* OK, one that had some heavy metals showed up. We only grew flowers there, and it was just, those metals make things grow good, apparently. Just abundance.

And so we walked that alleyway and then we turn around, we're slowly walking back, and here comes Bix, running, but just huge coming down the streets. And I'm like, 'What's wrong with you?' And he's like, 'I just can't believe the sight of the three of you walkin.'[crying].

JD: Wow. Was the City pretty supportive at that point? Or involved?

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CL: They *were*. And I would say the following year . . . Urban Resources Partnership had another opportunity for that grant to happen again. And I think the max we could go for that time was \$17,000. So we did it again. And they gave it to us. And we took on three more lots, going the other direction. And one lot in particular was half a block in size. And it's right below St. Joe's, ironically enough. And the owner of that lot was George Lagerquist. I don't know if that name rings a bell? But yeah, he and I ended up having a very unique friendship.

Anyway . . . by the time we had a total of nine gardens and we have probably sixty members in our hillside. The City had an opportunity to go after an All-America City Award that they-- I guess they do annually. But anyway, they had invited us to be a part of the contingent going to present 'em in Mobile, Alabama. And so we went there, giving our piece. And it was really remarkable because they looked at it, the neighborhood councils were featured, the community gardens were featured, including Bix and I, and Neighbors Park. I mean, it was kinda like looking at all the good gardens that myself and Judy Quackenbush were asked to represent the garden element. But yeah, they were hugely supportive.

And then later, and I became a member of the New Tacoma Neighborhood Council, representing the gardens and Guadalupe House. And there was grant block funding available and that lot that George Lagerquist owned, there was a partnership with Mercy Housing, was buying the other half of the block. And because we had a great thing goin' on with Mercy Housing, the City . . . donated \$120,000 to *us* to buy that chunk of land. And it was really at a very pivotal time because if we would have waited a year, of course

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it wouldn't have been available, but probably ten times that amount is what you could have got for it.

So that was kind of cool, and at that point, and this is like late '90s into 2000, we developed a land trust to take ownership of that particular lot, and then one of the early gardens, the one that Hospitality Kitchen allowed us to use, they wanted to just *give* it to us, so then we could be an owning entity. And so that land trust was formed, and that still exists. It's still in-- those two exist.

JD: And is the leadership of that separate from the Guadalupe House? It's . . . the Guadalupe land trust . . .

CL: It is.

JD: . . . so that's . . .

CL: Yeah.

JD: . . . separately operated . . .

CL: It's a 501 C3 and it's whole mission is just to keep those gardens thriving, and they are now set up, [inaudible] style. I think, and then we call it the Gallucci Garden now. They're developing all kinds of new things with that so . . .

JD: Were the neighbors, during that time when it just started to take off, were the neighbors supportive and involved? I mean, aside from the two ladies, I mean, was it . . .

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CL: They *were*. They were, and the thing that was so fascinating about developing the gardens, it just brought people out. And there was no common language. None. I mean, there was like six languages, and I'm talkin' about from like 19th and G, all the way to 13th and [inaudible] and kind of like, that checkerboard pattern with the lots that we took care of, and so, like a six-block area, but I would say there's probably six distinct languages spoken. Korean, Cambodian, Vietnamese, English, . . . Spanish, and I would even add Russian or Ukrainian.

But anyway, we'd be out there workin' and people-- and they were so cute. 'Cuz I'm hustlin', haulin' out weeds, and they're just hustlin' right behind me, pickin' up my weeds. And I'm like, 'Really?' And they're like telling me, 'Yeah, dumb ass. Why have you been growing, whatever you think you're growin' when this is the good stuff?' And we would just laugh and laugh and laugh, and I'm just thinkin', 'I know what they're sayin'.' And they just had great smiles and they were just, right there. Even though they're not, helpin' us unload truckloads of compost, but they are the ones who were attending to those gardens now. Really.

JD: Did you live in the neighborhood at the time?

R: I did not. I commuted from . . . We bought a house in Tacoma but on the east side, kind of off Waller Road, in '97. Yeah

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JD: Have you been involved at all with some of the . . . I know, kind of like in the last couple of years, a lot of south Tacoma and east Tacoma have started a lot of garden projects and they have a Farmers Market now. I don't know if you . . . been involved in any of that?

CL: I have not. And it's not that I . . . don't want to be. It's just I physically can't be everywhere.

JD: It's kind of hard.

CL: Yeah, 'cuz I . . . I have another farm, too.

JD: So how did that transition take place?

CL: . . . at the end of the '90s, how that kind of evolved and worked into what it became, the land trust is developing. I also partnered with Tahoma Food System, which is *another* non-profit that was really looking at dealing with food security issues. And they wanted to support *me*. I needed a *job*. I was doin' all-- I was still goin' to school back in the '90s.

JD: Oh.

CL: And raising my kids, but at that point I really needed to start makin' money. And that seemed to be the best vehicle goin'. And together, we wrote *another* grant, and went after some funding from USDA, and we won . . . oh, gosh, I wanna say 120,000 [dollars] from that, which was awesome because that set me up with a salary for a couple of years . . . and benefits and things I had not had. Ha! Which was cool.

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But . . . that ended up fizzling out . . . when I . . . left, and it wasn't because it was a breach in anything. Their direction seemed to go more towards gleanings. And when the transition happened with me switching over to the gardeners who were-, and it was really kind of a collective that kind of came together, that was gonna continue things. And we worked for six months. I didn't just *leave* them. They had a six-month notice of sorts. But that was because David Ottey, the Director of the Emergency Food Network at the time, came to me and said, 'Look, this woman offered us a piece of land down in the Shaw [Puyallup] Valley to grow food for food banks. Would you be interested?' And I'm like, 'Well, you know, I'll go look at it.' And I went and looked at it and fell in love. I said, 'You've gotta be *kidding* me.' I was just like, 'One piece of land?' [laughs] Versus all these checkerboard things. Flat, soil that goes forever, and it's black [laughs]. No rocks? It was like, cool. And I just loved the idea of just growing for the hungry, that was just so exciting. So I just , 'This is what I'm gonna do, and this is how we're gonna transition.'

I stayed with the Board for Guadalupe Land Trust for about another year, and then I resigned from that. And things have kind of morphed in the way things do, but, yeah, I think, for the most part . . . were good.

JD: Was the transition from kind of that gardener sort of collective mentality to farming a big change? Or . . .

CL: It *was* and it wasn't. The basics remained true. And . . . and it was nice to see even that follow-through here. There's still that hands-on, take the time to make a difference, with

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even a square foot, even though you've got 500 million of those square feet out here. I think all that matters. Everything worth *doing* takes time and *matters*. What I *learned* from all those experiences was how to invite others to join me. And I think *that's* what I'm good at. I'm not necessarily good at remembering everything. How to grow things, and I have to re-learn it every year. But I'm pretty good at being the Tom Sawyer of gardeners. I'm having too much fun. Why don't you come out?

JD: And organizing, I would imagine it's probably a pretty, monumental effort, too. 'Cuz there's . . . if I understand correctly, it's mostly volunteers, so there's a lot of the . . .

CL: It *is* all volunteers. It's bout 800 people a year to do Mother Earth.

JD: Wow, that's why I would assume that's a . . . full time job.

CL: It is. It's really another full time job, yeah.

JD: What's the organizational structure? How is it managed?

CL: As loose as possible. We are a project of Emergency Food Network, and again, when I partner with David Ottey on that, the woman who owns the land, Doreen Johnson and myself, we all came together and said 'Look, you know, this is what we can do. This is what it'll take to pull it off.' And we decided to kind of break things up. Doreen would just kind of get out of the way, but we would always keep her informed on how things were developing. David would raise the money to pull off what I needed to do. And I said, 'I need seven years.' Even though, gorgeous piece of land, it had been over-farmed

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for decades. And when I first went out there and took a shovel, I could not find a single earthworm.

And that's kind of another piece to the work that we do down there. You have some of the most gorgeous topsoil on the *planet*, here. But it's unloved. It's so unappreciated, and so that, I feel is like one of the most important key features of the project now. Yeah, we're growin' a lot of food that feeds a lot of people. But it's plugging [in] those volunteers who perhaps have never gardened in their lives. In fact, I had a whole bunch of 'em yesterday, about 50 people out there yesterday. And they're like, 'Really?' You know, 'That's what rhubarb is?' Ha. It's like, Oh, wow.

But that's so important. They don't *get* that, and they don't realize what it takes to grow food, and . . . and then, to see something accomplished at the end of the day. So many of us don't have that ability to see something done. And when people can stand back and go, 'Wow, I did that?' And I'm like, 'Yeah, and then you're gonna be back in a month and you're gonna help weed that. And then you're gonna be back in a month and you're gonna help harvest that, and *then* you're gonna say what?' Because that's . . . the circle, right there.

JD: Is Doreen very involved in the farm at all?

CL: She's not. She's in her 80s and has health issues. But I know she's very jazzed about what's occurred. And she's an interesting person on so many levels, but she was actually *born* on that property. She grew up on that land. And the reason it's named Mother Earth Farm is because the land had been passed down through the generations, through

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the women. The women always out-survived the men, and it was grandmother to mother to daughter, and now will go to the granddaughters. And it's just really powerful.

She's very suspicious of non-profits. Interesting. Her reason for partnering with EFN was because of David. David's gone now. There's another person in that place and I feel very strongly that she's very suspicious of this person, as well. Not that she was suspicious of David. She loved David, but this one, you gotta kinda watch. And . . . I have seen other non-profits and I know she has. She was really quite involved in salmon restoration work. Where land is turned over to a non-profit and then sold to support other causes or whatever. So she's *not* at all interested in entertaining going into a land trust or anything of that nature. . . . *But* she renewed, we have a ten-year renewable lease, and she did renew it. And she just *loves* what we're doing so . . .

JD: And so what has been the outcome? I've heard in different news stories, of course, have different things. How successful has it been as far as producing food? Do you know offhand any . . .

CL: Oh, I do. Remember that seven-year mark? It took five. But, you know, even that first year we produced 60,000 some odd . . .

JD: Wow.

CL: . . . Our average, in the last five years, is probably 150,000 pounds a year. A . . . a piece of land qualifies to be a farm if they can show receipts for goods sold in the value of \$200

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per year per acre. Not that we *sell* things, and we actually had to go get a law *changed* to recognize us as a farm.

Because before Doreen and her brother, they had to fight it out, who got what piece of land after their mom died. But during that period, it had fallen into the zoning qualification of housing. So it was property taxes was like \$3,000 a year back then. And it's now \$500.

JD: Wow.

CL: Yeah.

JD: Big difference.

CL: Big difference. Let's see, what was the other problem I wanted to go to? [pause]

JD: That's all right. Well, is it because it's agricultural . . . assessed at agricultural land rates?

CL: The potential of that land, so \$200 per year per acre. If we're selling even whatever for a dollar a pound, we're well over that. And we-- all we had to show was \$1600 for it? Yeah. \$1600 for it, so we're at the \$150,000 mark, if you go a dollar a pound. But there's nothing a dollar a pound.

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Also, if you look in like soil surveys in conservation districts data and that sort of thing, a very productive farm can average maybe 8,000 pounds per acre. So even *that*, we're way off the charts on that.

But it's because of the way we grow. We're very intensive planted. We're totally organic. And in some areas, I'm getting three crops out of an area per year. Some, just one. But everything goes back in the cover crop in the Fall. So it's rejuvenated and the love is given back to the soil. And I'm happy to report, you can go *anywhere* on that land now and take a shovel and find a worm [laughs].

JD: Wow. So what are your plans as far as continuing? Doing other things? What?

CL: Well . . . the coming together of *this* farm [her own farm, not Mother Earth farm] was really, seeing a dream come true. That would be the ultimate, I could buy my own farm. And it happened because the state and the county came together and bought the development rights to this land. And it was a 100-acre farm altogether. We're only thirty five acres, but there's two other farms associated with the original piece. And because that allowed poor folks like us, to buy a piece of land, it happened. And . . . long term? This is where I will *die*. I will never move again. I can safely report that [laughs]. 'Cuz moving's awful. This is where I will, finish my growing up days and continue growing.

I would suspect I will be transitioning out of Mother Earth at some point in the future. It's not right now. But we're getting to that point where that will probably happen in the next couple of years. And my *son*, interestingly enough, looks like he's gonna be the one taking over the reins.

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CL: He's been my assistant for . . . the last two years and has just really enjoyed learning everything. He . . . graduated from Western with a Business degree, and then went to U Dub and got an Environmental studies Degree. Couldn't find work, at all, and I needed an assistant and he's like, 'I would *love* to apply for the job.' And we're like, 'OK.' My boss really struggled with it, 'Well, you know, it's just, nepotism, blah, blah, blah.' I'm like, but you know, 'This is somebody who can learn it and wants to learn it, and I really can't think of a better candidate.' And so it's just worked out so great.

Plus, what's so exciting is that, this is his farm [again referring to the family farm, not Mother Earth farm]. He'll end up with this farm. And he's getting all that knowledge base to understand how to put things together and what works, what doesn't, and so that right there is like . . . icing on the cake [laughs].

JD: Mm-hmm, that's so exciting.

CL: Yeah.

JD: What do you think, as far as . . . one of the things I think is really interesting about this farm and it's certainly a different approach, I think, than we kind of traditionally take in the setting, as far as how to feed people or how to provide for that need. And what do you think? that's the route we should be taking?

CL: I *do*. Because the way that the overall food system is, is very corporate oriented. We all need to eat . . . more fruits and vegetables. That husband of mine, who eats organic all

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the time, that's all we eat, has a heart attack. So, there we go. We, we're all on that verge of a health crisis. And . . . to be closer to the earth to be more involved with what it takes to grow the food, to nurture the soil, to absorb the food comin' out of it, and to teach people that it's really OK to get dirt under your nails, I think is . . . is how we're gonna survive as a species.

The other piece to everything else that's going on besides the corporatism and the ownership of DNA and all of that chaotic nonsense . . . We've got a big scare with bees that nobody is really paying attention to. I just lost half my hives over the winter. I lost more than half last year. And . . . unless we figure out what's really goin' on with them, we lose honeybees? We, as a species, have five years. So we've got to get people reconnected to the earth, to rediscover that you don't need to add ketchup. We don't need to add sugar. We don't need to add . . . corn syrup. You can just eat food, fresh, and it's so good for you.

JD: Normal food?

CL: Yeah. So I think, being a part of that, to provide that fresh produce . . . is monumental as far as addressing, not just hunger, but . . . malnutrition on a scale that, handing people a bunch of carrots at the food bank. Yeah, that's groovy. But it was also cool havin' people *weed* those carrots and to get a sense of: Oh, OK. That's why this is so important and maybe, if I could have some seeds, I'll take 'em home and plant them. So I love having those kind of exchanges and . . . and continue spreading that concept and idea out there.

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JD: What do you enjoy most about as far as working at the farm? What parts of that are most enjoyable to you?

CL: Hmm [pause] Weeding.

JD: [laughs]

CL: I know that's really crazy. But I love doing it.

JD: There's always lots of that.

CL: I know! I do. I'm crazy about weeding. I am *not* crazy about planting, and I'm not crazy about harvesting. I love weeding.

I love seeing wildlife embrace what we're doing. All the birds, it's awesome. The interchanges with the insects, very cool. I actually have a pest problem here, called 'elk', but I try to work it out with them, too. So, this place is magical, to be able to be here after, graduating from Guadalupe to Mother Earth to here.

JD: Was that a scary transition?

CL: No.

JD: I mean, was it uncertain at all?

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CL: Not at all. Not at all, no. I like working with my hands, but I also like . . . jumpin' on a tractor, too. So . . . yeah. It's all good. . . . you can get overwhelmed if you . . . want to. But I don't go there. It's like, 'OK. What can we do now? Well, have we fed the chickens? Well, we better go do that. Got it. OK. So do these guys need watering? No, they're fine. OK, cool. You wanna go squeeze a lamb? Yeah. I really need a lamb fix.' So it's not overwhelming. It *could be*, I guess, but you just look at it as, you're one person, and you know what needs to get covered, and you just go to the next. And if you don't get it all done today, there's tomorrow.

JD: That's true [laughs].

CL: [laughs]

JD: I also, so I know that there was, it was 2009, there was like a nomination for White House . . .

CL: True.

JD: . . . Gardner.

CL: Right.

JD: And you were . . .

CL: Number two.

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JD: . . . somewhere up at the top.

CL: Yeah.

JD: So what hap-- do you know how that started?

CL: I *do*. It was kind of an inspiration . . . a family in Illinois put together a website, putting a call out for who could be the White House farmer. And it was after Michael Pollan had put out an op-ed piece about: Wouldn't it be cool if when Obama goes into office that he says, just put in a farm. Let's get rid of this White House lawn. [Phone rings: Hey, Ken, Good Can I call you back? Things are good, but I'll you right back, OK? Love you, bye.]

. . . the idea of nominating a person to do that, I wasn't looking to do that. My old boss, David Ottey put me into the-- he partnered with Ken [Carrie's husband] and David's like, 'You know, I'm gonna write somethin' and submit it.' And . . . so they got it in and they had some nominees, and people could vote. And . . . during that voting period, it was from . . . it was January after Obama had won his election. And . . . I had a very tough year that year with . . . well, my mom died the year before. And it was after a real fast battle with cancer. My dad had pulled more with Alzheimer's, so I'm trying to deal with getting him situated, and to keep him safe. And then like right after New Year's Day, I got a call about my uncle, my mom's youngest brother, and apparently he had brain tumors, and he's the same age as my husband. And . . . he's in Denver. And I'm like, 'OK. What can I do? What do we need to do?' And we're workin' with family and

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trying to figure stuff out. And as I'm about ready to get there, he dies. Blood clot. So I need to go and help with all that, and that was when the voting started happening. So I'm totally detached from any of that.

And I think Ken and then he has a series of friends that are computer geeks and they just really started getting the word out. So I was really more about, 'Oh, let's get the vote out, da-da-da-da-da.' Meanwhile, some of the top runners-up, we get together and were like, 'Let's put out a statement.' Because, it was getting a lot of air play. And . . . we wrote a letter to the Obamas and then with that big emphasis on 'here's what the movement is about. This is what we're hoping to ignite with putting in a garden.' My big push, of course, was to include *everybody*. Prisoners and school children and, Supreme Court justices. Mix 'em up. And get 'em all out there workin' and . . . and everybody else had other pieces that they kind of threw in.

And we really didn't get any response. But all of a sudden, Michelle [Obama] declares she's putting in a garden. So we can't help but feel that it just kind of helps...

JD: Well, so if they had had a garden, would you . . .

CL: Would I have taken that job?

JD: Yeah?

CL: Perhaps. I've *lived* in Washington, D.C. When I had lived in Colorado, we actually moved in my junior year of high school, to Washington, D.C. And my dad took over a

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car warranty company. And I *resented* that move, being in high school and that sort of thing. . . . but I fell in love with the area. I ended up working for a talent agency, of all things, for those years that I was there, before I moved back to Colorado, found my husband, blah, blah, blah. So I had this whole other life and spent those five years in D.C. and *knew* that town. Knew that town well. Climate-wise? Bug-wise? Would I wanna go? NO!

But to tear things up and to get people excited about growin' food, oh, I'd do that. I would have been all over that. But funny how things happen.

JD: Yeah.

CL: Now, here I am with my own farm. I would not be here if I went and did that 'cuz that, it was just no way. . . . I know that.

JD: Looking back, when you first started, you say you kind of just saw this opportunity of volun-, do you expect that this is where it would go? Or has it just been kind of a . . .

CL: You know... Yeah, I've always had kind of this . . . underground feeling that . . . this is what I'm supposed to do. I think I've probably done it in the past. That's why a lot of things just . . . second nature. I didn't go to school for this. I studied anthropology. But a lot of this is innate for me. And . . . I'm supposed to be here, and I'm supposed to help this piece of land and I will always grow extra food and give away to food banks. That's a given. And to invite people to become more aware, of the value of whatever the plant may be. I do a lot of medicinal herbs, too, and don't need the medicine cabinet, we *don't*.

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We can rely on a lot of things that grow. So if I can pass that along, to kind of help collect that knowledge and share that with as many people as I can, then I've done my job.

JD: What is the driving force for you? The motivation? From the early stages of wanting to get involved, what is it that . . . compels you to do that?

CL: I really think . . . if we're gonna survive as a species, and not take down the planet with us, this is the only way we're gonna make it. That's the bottom line. You end up-- do you have kids?

JD: I don't, no.

CL: OK. Once you have kids, then you get that.

JD: I will say I don't have kids, but the idea is kind of scary, the things we just continue to do. I mean, the whole idea . . .

CL: Yeah.

JD: . . . it's a little . . .

CL: Yeah.

JD: . . . frightening and it's easy, I think, to kind of insulate yourself from it but . . .

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CL: Sure.

JD: I garden a lot and I have wonderful neighbors, but sometimes I'm like, 'Can you stop spraying stuff over here?'

CL: Right.

JD: . . . you don't need to kill everything.

CL: Right.

JD: But they don't, you know, they don't know.

CL: Right.

JD: They don't know.

CL: They *don't* know. And we have to figure out ways to bridge those differences. That's our job. I find my toughest sell . . . and it's always Republicans. I don't know why. But it's like I'm tryin' to do this. How can we bridge our differences? And it's surprising what does that. It may be, with one particular neighbor I have at Mother Earth, and this guy, has his flags flying everywhere and I'm like, 'Hey, but you know what? You've got a big pile of horse manure there. You need some help with that?' Oh, God, yeah. I don't know what do to do with this.' I'm like, 'I *do*.' And so we've entered this exchange, for

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years, and we're good friends now. And he gets the fact that I work with all sorts of people, including women in prison, and he's just like, fired up, always checkin' in on us, 'You guys need anything?' So once you develop that connection, then you got 'em.
[laughs]

You've got 'em, literally . . . eating out of your hands. Yeah.

JD: As far as I know, Father Bichsel is really involved in activism, as well, and activism for homeless people in Tacoma, and obviously, all sorts of other things, too. Is that something you were involved in, as well?

CL: I was. But more from the environmental perspective. And I would say now more of my thing, even though I'm helping feed those in need, I'm really about educating people about GMOs, about the importance of seed saving, the importance of . . . being reliant on a safe way to provide what you need, kind of being self-reliant. But do it in a way that's not independent. Like I'm in a box but to reach out to those neighbors. That's more of what my activism is. Is to try to encourage those kind of things.

I used to be a protestor.

JD: . . . are you just more mod- . . . a what?

CL: And I-, I used to be a protestor . . .

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JD: [laughs]

CL: . . . and I was at WTO, and I was *beaten* at WTO.

It was bizarre. It was really bizarre.

JD: Is that something you are . . . mostly not involved in now, just time-wise? I mean, I think it's probably a little bit of both.

CL: It's time-wise and . . . looking at efficiency. What is gonna be the most effective way to make change? Is it holding up a sign and shuttin' down a street? Sometimes. I was very active, pre-Iraq war. I had a big photo of the famous painting called *The Scream*? And that was what I would hold and I would stand on the bridge over I-5, holding that. But I think it's a little more effective being on the ground. Literally [laughs] Doin' stuff.

JD: In the dirt.

CL: Yeah. So, I'm not really, protest much these days. But they have their place.

JD: . . . competing-, competing interests, I'm sure.

CL: Yeah. And we were only one person. There's only so many hours in a day.

JD: So what do you think, looking back, your legacy will be and what do you want?

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CL: Well, if anything, you know . . . if people could look at a purple beans and red Russian-, black Russian tomatoes and . . . red, outrageous lettuce, and say: 'Carrie gave me those seeds, and I've been savin' 'em and I'm sharin' 'em,' then that's perfect.

[JD thanks CL for the interview and asks if there is anything else that should be included.]

END OF RECORDING