

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

KIRTRINA BAXTER

Imagining Philadelphia's Energy Futures

Transcript of a Research Interview
Conducted by

Roger Eardley-Pryor

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

on

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(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This oral history is one in a series initiated by the Chemical Heritage Foundation in partnership with PennFuture, PennEnvironment, the Energy Coordinating Agency, Citizens Climate Lobby, and Planet Philadelphia on G-Town Radio. The series, titled “Imagining Philadelphia’s Energy Futures,” documents the personal perspectives of Philadelphia citizens interested in impacts on their city from energy use and climate change. The series records individual histories and then asks participants to imagine the future of Philadelphia, particularly with regard to energy production and use.

The “Imagining Philadelphia’s Energy Futures” project is made possible, in part, through funding from Philadelphia’s Climate and Urban Systems Partnership.

<http://www.cuspproject.org/>



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THE CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION
Center for Oral History
Release Form for Research Interview

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You, **Kirtrina Baxter**, are asked to participate in an interview with **Roger Eardley-Pryor**, representing the Chemical Heritage Foundation (CHF), on **July 27, 2017**. If you participate, your oral history interview will be made part of CHF's collections and will be available for educational, non-commercial use. This document is intended to inform you fully of what you are being asked to do and of your rights as an oral history participant. If you choose to participate, your recorded oral history interview will be transcribed and used in an educational workshop exploring storytelling, future visioning, and deliberation; possibly included in a local Philadelphia radio show and podcast featured on G-Town radio; and stored on a public website documenting the project, which will remain online as a model for local educators to host classroom workshops envisioning Philadelphia's energy futures.

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Kirtrina Baxter
(Date) 7/27/17

(Signature) 
Roger Eardley-Pryor
(Date) 7/27/17

(Signature of Parent/Guardian of Interviewee if under 18) _____
Parent/Guardian of Interviewee

(Date) _____

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INTERVIEWEE

Kirtrina Baxter was born in 1969 in New Brunswick, New Jersey. She grew up in a diverse neighborhood in Willingboro, New Jersey, where her parents are Evangelical pastors. Katrina spent childhood summers in Philadelphia visiting extended family. After her college years, she moved to Mt. Airy and then Northern Liberties in Philadelphia. Kirtrina's spiritual journey, from an evangelical upbringing through radical black cosmologies to earthly goddess readings, and especially the experience of becoming a mother, all inspired her deep relationship with nature. After living with her daughter in upstate New York for many years, Kirtrina returned to Philadelphia in the early 2000s to build coalitions with urban farmers, especially within Philadelphia's black community. Working out of The Law Center (formerly PILCOP), Kirtrina co-organizes the Soil Generation coalition. She also serves as a board member and farm manager with Urban Creators in North Philadelphia.

INTERVIEWER

Roger Eardley-Pryor is a historian of contemporary science, technology, and the environment. His work explores ways that twentieth and twenty-first-century scientists and engineers, culture-makers, and political actors have imagined, confronted, or cohered with nature at various scales, from the atomic to the planetary. Before earning his Ph.D. in 2014 from the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB), Roger was a National Science Foundation graduate fellow at UCSB's Center for Nanotechnology in Society. After earning his Ph.D., Roger taught courses at Portland State University, at Linfield College in Oregon, and at Washington State University in Vancouver, Washington. In Philadelphia, Roger accepted a postdoctoral research fellowship in the Center for Oral History at the Chemical Heritage Foundation (CHF). Roger co-designed, earned funding for, and managed this place-based oral history project titled "Imagining Philadelphia's Energy Futures."

PROJECT

"Imagining Philadelphia's Energy Futures" is an oral history and public education project about energy, climate change, and the future of Philadelphia. The project uses a narrative approach that encourages deliberation, storytelling, and creativity. It asks the following questions: As climate change reconditions our lives, city, and planet, how do Philadelphia citizens imagine using and producing energy in the year 2067, or 2140, or 2312? And how might the personal histories of these citizens shape the ways they imagine Philadelphia's energy futures?

The project consists of oral history interviews with a small but diverse set of Philadelphia citizens. The oral history interviewees were selected in collaboration with the project's partners: the Chemical Heritage Foundation, PennFuture, PennEnvironment, Energy Coordinating Agency, Citizens Climate Lobby, and Planet Philadelphia on G-Town Radio. The

majority of each oral history interview records a participant's personal history. Next, interviewees share their visions of energy use and production in Philadelphia by imagining three time periods in the future. The future time periods are the year 2067, fifty years from the present; the year 2140, nearly one hundred twenty five years from the present; and the year 2312, nearly three hundred years from the present.¹ Content from the oral history interviews then serve as the basis for further storytelling, future visioning, and deliberation in a public educational workshop held at the Chemical Heritage Foundation in October 2017.

"Imagining Philadelphia's Energy Futures" is based on the idea that discussing visions of the future can help individuals and groups construct and articulate meaningful stories about the current challenges they confront, identify potential solutions to those challenges, and reflect on how these might influence themselves and their community as a whole. Research on ways to enhance societal capacity for governing complex energy transitions reveals that narrative and storytelling helps facilitate improved engagement and decision-making among mixed groups. Stories and narratives enable the incorporation of contributions from different groups of people to build collective frames of reference. In light of our need to transition to renewable energy sources, narratives offer communication strategies and practices that can help promote broader engagement and participation in energy choices, more diverse kinds of policy information and input, and greater capacity to imagine and invent new energy futures.²

Imagining and discussing Philadelphia's energy futures allows city residents to imagine—and inhabit, in their minds—multiple, alternative visions of the future that may result from choices made today. Energy plays a powerful role in any city's techno-economic systems, yet energy use and production is also inseparable from a city's social systems and environmental relationships. When Philadelphians imagine renewable and distributed ways of using and producing sustainable energy in the future, they are not just imagining new techno-economic systems. They are also re-imagining the ways social relations and political power works in their lives. And they are re-imagining interrelationships to our local, regional, and global environments.

"Imagining Philadelphia's Energy Futures" was funded, in part, by Philadelphia's Climate and Urban Systems Partnership (CUSP). The CUSP approach to climate change education emphasizes local, relevant, and solutions-focused methodologies. The oral history interviews and public education workshop for "Imagining Philadelphia's Energy Futures" takes place in Philadelphia with local Philadelphians. The project is relevant in wake of the recent failures by Philadelphia's energy industry and the city's environmental activists to find any compromise on a vision and framework for Philadelphia's energy future.³ Collaboration to

¹ The years 2140 and 2312 were selected to complement Kim Stanley Robinson's science fiction novels. See Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140* (New York: Orbit, 2017); and Kim Stanley Robinson, *2312* (New York: Orbit, 2013).

² Clark A. Miller, Jason O'Leary, Elizabeth Graffy, Ellen B. Stechel, Gary Dirks, "Narrative Futures and the Governance of Energy Transitions," *Futures* 70 (2015): 65-74; Rob VanWynsberghe, Janet Moore, James Tansey, and Jeff Carmichael "Towards Community Engagement: Six Steps to Expert Learning for Future Scenario Development," *Futures* 35 (2003): 203-219; Jana-Axinja Paschen and Ray Ison, "Narrative Research in Climate Change Adaptation: Exploring a Complementary Paradigm for Research and Governance," *Research Policy* 43:6 (2014): 1083-1092.

³ Katie Colaneri, "Philadelphia Fails to Find Common Ground on 'Energy Hub,'" *StateImpact Pennsylvania*, March 11, 2016: <https://stateimpact.npr.org/pennsylvania/2016/03/11/philadelphia-fails-to-find-common-ground-on-energy-hub/>. See also the minutes of the meeting of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission Board

achieve Philadelphia's systemic energy transition to renewable sources must be broad-based and inclusive. This project seeks to produce and re-produce, on a small and manageable scale, efforts to build a shared vision of that renewable energy future, from the bottom up, with local Philadelphians. "Imagining Philadelphia's Energy Futures" is solutions-focused in that formulating and sharing visions of the future can help individuals and groups make meaning of contemporary challenges they confront; it can help determine possible solutions to those challenges; and it can help individuals and groups consider ways that certain solutions might impact their lives and their community as a whole.

INTERVIEWEE: Kirtrina Baxter
INTERVIEWER: Roger Eardley-Pryor
LOCATION: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
DATE: 27 July 2017

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Let's get us going here. This is Roger Eardley-Pryor conducting an oral history with Katrina Baxter. We are at the United Way building in Philadelphia on Benjamin Franklin Parkway. It is July 27, 2017. Katrina, could you spell your name for us?

BAXTER: Yes. It's K-I-R-T-R-I-N-A—Baxter—B-A-X-T-E-R.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Great, and when were you born?

BAXTER: Nineteen sixty-nine.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Nineteen sixty-nine is a good year.

BAXTER: Good year, right?

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Where were you born?

BAXTER: I was born in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Yes. I don't think my family lived there long. So, we were there for maybe a year and a half. No, longer than that, because my sister underneath me is about—she and I are about fourteen months apart, and she was born there too, and then moved after her. So, maybe when I was three we moved Willingboro, New Jersey, because I don't remember New Brunswick at all. [laughter]

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Yeah. What do you remember about Willingboro?

BAXTER: Well, I was in Willingboro all of my childhood. So, I lived and grew up there, and so I remember a lot about Willingboro. [laughter]

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Tell me a little bit about your family. You mentioned you have a sister. What's her name?

BAXTER: Yes. I have three sisters. Yes, and they're Tracy, Trisha, and Tramaine. We're all "Tr's", well, except for, by extension, some of us. There was three of us growing up, though. My little, younger sister wasn't born until we were in high school. So, she didn't really grow up with us per se. So, we were three girls growing up in Willingboro, New Jersey, which at the time, in the seventies, was majority white, and it was right after red lining had sort of been squashed. So, we were able to move into this suburb area, into this nice neighborhood, supposedly.

So, it was really—actually, I call it a charmed experience, because my block was very unique in that the neighbors across the street were Seventh Day Adventist, and they were people of color. And the neighbors next door were Jewish. Our neighbors on the other side were Catholic. We had an Italian family, and a family from Haiti, and some Puerto Ricans, a male nurse. We had a lot of diversity just on our block. And as you know, as a child, everything is about your block, right?

So, my whole life was the block, and the black church. So, my dad's a pastor. My parents now co-pastor. At the time, he was just a pastor, and so we always had a black community of support all my life, because of the black church. So, when I think back on my childhood, I've always had this support of black folks around me, right? No matter—even though we lived in this majority, white community, and my block was very diverse. So I hadn't—I don't think we thought about or experienced a whole lot of—well, I didn't experience a whole lot of racism growing up, that I took and understood as racism. I don't think I had—my first experience—I knew about it, because we talked about it. It was very much a part of what our conversations were at home, the experience of black folks in this society.

My dad was a black, radical preacher, very much so. Akin to the conversation or the sermons that you would hear, that they talked about a lot, with Obama's first preacher—that he had to distance himself from because of all the stuff that he would talk about on the pulpit, which for me was a very regular thing in the black pulpit. The conversations that he was having, that people took offense to, were conversations that we curr—that we kind of still have in our community, because it's important, and they need to be told [laughter]. So my childhood was sort of one that included resistance and included understanding, and a political—a political understanding of our place in society.

And also being girls—all of us girls—my dad—my parents were very much about, "You can do whatever you want." You know what I'm saying? So, we didn't have a huge patriarchal, sort of, "this is what girls do" type thing. My sisters were ball players. My dad was a coach, and he didn't have any boys. So he didn't have no choice but to expose us to [laughter]—to do whatever we wanted to do. And in the church you do—the patriarchy in the church is really—is real, right? And a lot of religious institutions. When I think back, though, on my parents'

relationship, and also see it now, it's—and what it is that—although the onus of having the man, the male, be the leader or the head of the household, my parents were always in a shared space of decision-making. My mother's voice and word was always heard, and always valued.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Can you tell me a little bit more about your parents? They sound wonderful.

BAXTER: Yes. They're pretty awesome. [laughter]

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What are their names?

BAXTER: So, Lily and Kirk Baxter. They're still married, fifty-something years now. So they're pretty—and best friends, which is really an amazing feat. [laughter]

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Yes, and so my parents are as well. And in some ways it's intimidating, right? <T: 05 min> Because, you're like, "They did it. They found it. They made it work."

BAXTER: I think it's a generational thing, though. I totally look at it like, "You know what? Everyone's not going to have that." A lot of folks in their generation have that, and were able to hold on to that, and I'm thankful that they were example of what could be. My mom used to say to me, "Why do you have such a bad view of marriage? Because it doesn't come from us." I was like, "You're right. This comes from everyone else around us. We are in this isolated island of protective families, in a way. And loving and encouraging families." So my parents—so my dad very much was the disciplinary—well, I wouldn't say that. Because my mom very— [laughter]—my mom is a strong, a very strong woman.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: How did they meet?

BAXTER: They met at a church. They met in church. So my dad is a second-generation, maybe third-generation pastor. He's been preaching, and preaching, and preaching in their family forever. My mother grew up in Philadelphia. So she's from here. All her family is from here, for most of the part, they came up—migrated from Virginia. They have a very strong— she has twelve siblings.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: That's a big family.

BAXTER: Yeah. It's a big family. My father only has four, but [my mom,] they have 12 in their family. And all the women in my mom's family are really strong women and presences in my life throughout. So they [my parents] met in high school—when she was in the twelfth grade, I think—at a conference here in Philadelphia, at the church conference, or something. He lived Coatesville, which is a little country place outside of town. And to her, he was totally country, because she's from—this big girl from the city, from this huge family that's—my uncles are badasses. [laughter] So when he'd come to visit her, he would tell people, "I'm going to see Jazz's sister," and they would leave him alone, because my uncles were in gangs.

So, they're pretty interesting, [my parents.] They came from two different walks of life. My grandmother was a single parent. Her husband passed away—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Which grandmother? On your mom or dad's —

BAXTER: My mother—my mother's mother. She—her husband passed away when my mother was young. So she raised the children on her own. Right. Well, not completely, because, she has an extended family who would help at times. So my uncles were raised up down south. She raised most of the girls. And most of the guys, actually—just two of them grew up down south. [laughter] But, you know, they had help. So, everything within our families, for a long time, was very integrated. The raising of children was something that everyone participated in.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Takes a village, right?

BAXTER: Yeah, definitely. So my grandmother lived to be ninety-four. She was pretty present in my life for a long [time.] My dad's mother is still living. She's one hundred-and-three, and she's still in Coatesville, Pennsylvania.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Wow. So, when you're growing up in—what, Williamsburg?

BAXTER: Willingboro.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Willingboro. So you're coming to visit Philadelphia, and you're seeing all this family, what were your memories of those experiences, being in Philly as a little girl?

BAXTER: Oh, man, we had lots of fun. This is where you come and do all the things that you couldn't really do in the suburbs. But we played the same games, really. It was just a lot more

dangerous, right? More cars going by [laughter]. You know, jumping rope. Crossing the street was a big deal. Being able to stay out, because you're visiting your cousins. So, that doesn't really matter where we were. When you get all the cousins together, you just get into things that you wouldn't normally get into. Summers were spent with our cousins here in the city.

I think about that now, about how people used to—when my mom was growing up, they would spend summers in the south. And after years progress, we have been so removed from the south. Folks who moved up to the suburbs spent the summers in the cities, which is a very interesting contrast that I've been pondering lately.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What do you think about it?

BAXTER: I'm thinking about wanting to know other people's experience about that. And to see what we lost from not going down to the country, but going to the city—the difference between going—they were sent out to the country before. If a child wasn't manageable, the punishment was, you know, “we'll send you down south.” But when you go down south, you had this real visceral experience with the environment, right? And nature, and maybe fishing, depending on where your family lived. And definitely farming where your family lived, and so it's picking food. Having those experiences grounded a lot of people, in the generations before me. And then those of us who didn't have that experience by going to the south, we were going to the city—a very different grounding, right? A very different experience of kinship, but one not really attached to the land. And because you know my work is around land and the environment, I think always about when were the times that we were able to reach out and touch the land in certain ways.

Like when we were kids in Philadelphia, my cousins and I would catch bees. [laughter] Our thing was catching lumber—no, those carpenter bees. Like the big, fat ones. So mean, <T: 10 min> and I don't why we did that! Put them in jars, kept them in our cabinet. Along with lightning bugs, of course. Everyone caught lightning bugs. But every now and then I talk about how we used to take off the bug, you know, the little glowy part, and put them on as a ring on your fingers. And people would be like, “Ew! I can't believe you did that,” and I was just like, “I thought everyone did that!” [laughter]

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Yeah, everyone did that!

BAXTER: And people are like, “That was so mean,” and I was like, “You're right! It was mean. We were cruel kids!” [laughter] So we did things like that in the city.

We didn't go to public pools much, that was something that—we had a lot of pools in the suburbs—we spent all summer long at the pool. And so in the city, it was one of those things you couldn't do. So we didn't like to come [to the city] for long periods of time, because that

meant that we couldn't swim, because you didn't go to public pools in Philly, apparently. Now they do, apparently. I don't know what it was for, back in the day, but my parents, my family was like, "Yeah, no—no going to the public pool." So, most of my cousins in the city couldn't swim. They didn't know how to swim. So we would do different things. But we'd go to the beach every summer with my family. We'd go to the south, down to Virginia.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Where in the south?

BAXTER: To Virginia. We'd have family reunions every year when we were children growing up. And it's interesting how we lose—we don't do that anymore. They still have them, apparently, but we don't do them anymore.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Where in Virginia do you remember being?

BAXTER: We were in Goochland. So we're—my family—is from Goochland, Virginia, which is about forty-five minutes outside of Richmond—east of Richmond. Then we would always stop through Virginia Beach on the way home, right? We'd go to the beach for a day or two on the way home—me and my cousins, and my aunts and uncles—and it was fun. So that was our summers. We didn't get into too much trouble, just kid stuff.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Yeah. When you were a little girl, and you have these three sisters that similar in age, and playing together, and these cousins in the city—what were the kinds of things you imagined, that you dreamed about? What were your childhood visions?

BAXTER: Yeah. Well, I think if you talked to my sisters, they would tell you that I was always a dreamer. [laughter] I think as a middle child, right? My head is always in books, and always in the stars, right? Of what could be. And so I was always very much into the multicultural experience, I think, when I was a kid. So, I had a menagerie of friends that I would bring to the house, and my family would be like, "Who and how did you meet these people?" Always. All my life. So I remember that, as a very young child, bringing people home, people who were—because I was pretty popular, I've always been likable, right? Not popular, but likeable. So, I found that I always had a tendency to want to befriend the underdog. So those people in my classes that other people didn't want to play with, or something like that, would be my friends. And because I was likeable, that allowed them a certain amount of security.

You know, kids stuff, they do mean to each other, and I was always the one, sort of like, "No! Don't mess with her. She's my friend!" [laughter] So funny. Or one time, I brought home this young man from school who said that his family was hitting him and beating him. My dad was like, "What do you want me to do?" And I was like, "He can't go back home, Dad! You've

got to do something!” Because he couldn’t—I don’t even remember how that ended up. But I—I think that I’ve always had a sense of fairness. So in my childhood, it just made sense to me that everyone should be able to treat everyone a certain way.

And I think that had a lot to do, also, with my upbringing in the Christian church. Because before you become a pubescent, and before you become an adolescent, they teach about Jesus’ love, right? For your first few—during your childhood, all you learn about is how Christ was so loving, and all these things that he did for these different people who were pariah of society. So that’s what I grew up with, the stories I grew up on. I really embodied that and understood that we should be treating each other a certain way, and that certain things were unfair. Because that’s the only place I could remember getting that from, or imagine.

Also my parents. So, my parents, as pastors and just really kind people, were always taking people in. We had families that lived with us at certain times. A lot of my cousins stayed with us through periods of time when there were struggles in their families. Different military men used to stay at the house. I think about that all the time—how many young men grew up with us. I had a lot of play brothers. [laughter] They were all way older than we are, but they were there for us as young girls in the house. And super respectful to my father. So there was never, at the time, any issue around sexuality. And when I think back, [it] was a really interesting thing. But not interesting, because my dad commands that kind of respect. Because that’s how respectful he is to others. He would never put us in harm’s way, in that sense. So were blessed to have this really safe community growing up, that I feel like a lot of people—that I’ve realized now is a blessing—that a lot of people didn’t have. <T: 15 min>

And what came along with that, also, was the ability for us as young people to have friendships across gender lines. That as I got older, the more I would hear young people say, “Oh, I don’t have any—any—boys and girls can’t be friends. Guys and girls can’t be friends.” And that’s the most absurd thing I’ve ever heard, because I’ve had friends all my life that are not of the same gender as mine. And my cousins and I—play cousins, of course—at some point were talking about that a few years ago, and they’re like, “That’s because we had really safe spaces that adults made sure it was safe for us—for us to be able to interact in a way that was comfortable.”

So we were always in these situations within the church, and within our church family, where boys and girls were together, and adults were around us, but letting us do our thing. So we were able to be friends to each other. Friendship between the genders is not something that’s challenging to me. It’s something that comes easily. I think it’s something that’s natural, and that when it’s cultivated in your community, that it’s something that is really beneficial for all of us. The concept around women and men not being able to be friends is just bizarre. It’s ridiculous.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What were some of your memories of schooling? I mean, you have this amazing social sphere, this network of support, and love, and opportunity, and just a really neat place to grow up as a child. What was, then, school life like?

BAXTER: Yeah. What was school life? Huh. School sucked. [laughter] I wasn't a huge—I was really smart, but not really into school, right? I'm a middle kid. So I say, I did anything that I—I did what I had to do, just so I could pass. I never really was aspiring to do any—I wasn't competitive at all. I just wanted to read books.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What kind of books did you like reading?

BAXTER: Kid books. Like Judy Blume, back in the day—I'm dating myself, but I did tell you already how old I was. [laughter] So, Judy Blume and things like that. Green worms or—*How to Eat Fried Worms*. You know, just stuff. Fun kid stuff. And so I'd find a little bit of fantasy, I've always read fantasy books—and that stopped, of course, when I started liking boys. [laughter] So all the reading stopped in junior high school, until college. So school was something that was just there. I think that for me—because when I think back, I can't even remember teachers' names. It was not really a huge part of my life.

What I do remember most is that one of my best friend's father was a teacher, and they were black—there was a black family. It was a big deal that we had a black teacher in the second grade and also in the fourth grade. At the time, in the suburbs as it was, they were both really present in the school for those of us who were black students. And so I never felt a lot of tension in my school with regards to race because we had these really strong black figures in the elementary school that I went to.

Junior high school was more of a mix. Because in the suburb where I lived at, we have little community groups. These are like a section, we have sections of towns. So in Willingboro, people live in Buckingham, Twin Halls, Pennypacker—that kind of thing. And each section had their own elementary school. So folks from those elementary schools went to the same—they sort of intermixed and went to junior—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: They all funneled into junior high.

BAXTER: Right. So then at junior high, everything changes, right? Then your world opens up. It's no longer just you're block, it's all these other people. And then things definitely got crazy.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: How?

BAXTER: Friendships, I think. With wanting to—with people that I hang out with who were different, and wanting to find new social groups. And then feeling bad about leaving these other

social groups. Junior high school—that period of growth that young people are going through during that time—is about identity, right? So just trying to find myself in this large group of people that are new in my life was interesting. And also being able to make friendships with people that I had just peripherally known through social activities around town. Then, “Oh, now I can be friends with”

So my best friend—my very best friend now—I met in the fourth grade through my elementary school friend. Then we became solid best friends in sixth grade, in junior high, when we were able to spend more time together, because we were in school together. Outside of school, you’re still just hanging on your block and folks who were in your church. You don’t get to go out. So it was a time when we were able to start riding our bikes and go to other parts of the city—the town, not a city—and experience other people and what was happening in their lives around there.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What did that experience do for you?

BAXTER: I think that opened up the possibilities of what I feel like I could attain, right? Even just riding the bike—being able to ride your bike off of the block was a big deal. Your whole world opened up. My whole world opened up. The possibilities of where I could go, and what I could do for my three hours after school before I had to be back home, was a whole lot more adventurous than it was when I had to just be on the block for those three hours. So I think it gave us a sense of adventure. <T: 20 min> My sisters and I, we rode our bikes. My younger sister and I were closer, and so we did everything together. We had to—our family just made us do everything together anyhow. So everything we did, anything we did, we couldn’t do alone. We had to do it en masse. So, if it wasn’t me and my sisters, it was me and my sisters and my cousins, and we just had to do everything. And that stayed with us until we graduated high school. Everything was done in group situations. So I’ve been working in collectives, I feel like, my entire life, because we had to do things in groups.

Fortunately my daughter, who is an only child, I used to be like, “Well, you can’t go until you find some friends.” She’s like, “Mom, I will go nowhere, [laughter] because you keep trying to hold me to the same standard that your parents did. And I don’t have people like that in my life,” And I’m like, “You should though! Okay. Go.” [laughter] I had really had to understand that, okay, that was my experience, and that’s not for everyone. But it kept us safe, right?

EARDLEY-PRYOR: When you were going on these adventures and your world is expanding, but your doing this en masse with your community and the people you care for and are with, what was your role? What kind of role do you think you played in those groups?

BAXTER: Right. I think about that a lot because I do a lot of soul searching. So, I imagine—I'm a fire sign. I'm a Sagittarius. I'm a fire-fire sign, so I have a lot of fire in my sign. But I'm also a middle child, so I have this sort of—I never was pushed to be a leader. But I found that, because I have a lot of passion, I'm put in situations of negotiation. So I think when I was a kid, I thought I was the negotiator. I was the ultimate communicator—like, “Okay, we can talk about this!” That was my role all the time. I was the mediator between parties. That was my role, forever. [laughter] Yeah, that was my role, definitely.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: When you made the transition from junior high into high school, was it still the same community?

BAXTER: Yeah, yes.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: So when you first left that community, that was after high school. Tell me what high school was like. What were some of your memories from that?

BAXTER: Yeah. Yeah. High school was a lot of cutting. So, I didn't go to high school. [laughter]

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What kind of stuff were you up to? What were you rather doing?

BAXTER: Smoking weed, drinking. That was it. I would rather not be doing work. I was into boys. I wanted to be into boys. At high school, I had a very dualistic experience. So I had my church life, and my church family. And then I had my school friends, and my school life. And none of the two should meet. Even my friends from church wouldn't hang out with me in high school, because I had my little popular group of friends, and they didn't really fit into that group of friends.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Did they all still go to the same high school? You all went—but just different social spheres?

BAXTER: Yeah. It was interesting.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: How did you balance these two worlds?

BAXTER: Well, it just happened effortlessly. I don't think it was ever—it never came up. In my social group at church, they were never like, “Why don't you play with us at school?” Never! I think they were probably intimidated by the girls I was hanging out with anyhow. So, they were like, “I'd rather not be with those girls.” And they were cool with us being—I think that I have the ability to make people feel comfortable around me. And no matter when I spend time with people, they were happy in that time. So it wasn't like they felt neglected by me in school, because I spoke to them, of course. It wasn't like, “Oh, I'm not speaking to you in school.” It wasn't a mean girl thing. It was just that we had different groups of friends. And a lot of that, too, was because, if you think about it, we might have been at different elementary schools anyhow. So we already had different bodies of friends in school than we did outside of school. So it just followed through to high school. We were all together, you know what I mean? In this one space.

So I realized that I had this sort of dual life. And it went on years, into my twenties, because I separate everything in my life, because I sort of grew up like that. I tend to—that continued on into my adulthood, keeping my friend groups separate. Work friends were not the same thing as home friends. Home friends were not the same as religious or spiritual friends. I wasn't really keen on mixing that until, I think, about ten years ago, when I started to really evaluate that for myself—and start moving in a way that my work was very much about my life, and the things that I love in life. So now I'm able to do work—the work that I do, it's very much informed by my lifestyle. I work in environmental issues because the environment is everything about my spirituality. It makes sense for me to do this work. It makes sense that my friends, who do this work as well, will have the same interests as me in this social world. So now I have friends who I work with, and allowing myself to have that was a big deal for me. It was challenging for me to integrate that. <T: 25 min>

EARDLEY-PRYOR: In high school when you had these two different—when those social spheres first evolved, what was it that each sphere was giving you? What was it you were having met? What needs were being met by these different—

BAXTER: Yeah. I think growing up in the church, but also having this sense that there's so much more than just that. Even at a young age, I really thought that there was more to life than just this.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What do you mean by “more than”?

BAXTER: Well, because religious institutions are sort of all encompassing, right? Everything you need, you're supposed to get from church. And that wasn't true for me, and I knew that wasn't true for me. So I knew that I had to get those other things from outside of the spiritual sanctuary of religious context and dogma. I think that—I started feeling like something is missing, very much, in junior high school with regards to my religion and what I needed for my

wholeness as a being. So I dabbled. I would imagine that's what, at the time, I would call it—dabbled in some secular activities. [laughter] But my parents were actually really cool. My mom was very much—because she didn't grow up in a church. She actually decided that she was going to go to church, at some point. And she and her sister started going on their own to the church where she met my father, which is Evangelical—a lot different from the Baptist church that her mom went to, where you just go to church on Sunday. It's not like anything—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Oh, so your dad's an Evangelical pastor. Oh, okay.

BAXTER: Yeah. He's Pentecostal. So it's a very different experience in the Evangelical tradition than it is in a Baptist tradition. Way more is expected of you than in the Baptist world. [laughter] She chose that life of her own. But she, my mother, always felt like those folks who grew up in the church, in the very strict way, always after they left those homes, they would wild out. They would just wild out, because they had been so repressed for so long, that when they left out of that, they were able to . . . you know. So she was really clear with my father [laughter], who grew up in the church all his life, that we would be able to have some secular experiences, so that we wouldn't feel like we had been isolated as young people. So I was allowed to experience and experiment in all of these different ways. And as the middle child—they were sort of like, "You're the only one who wants to do these things, or that does things. It's only you. It's only you." But I was just like, "Okay. Whatever. This is . . ." I was the most inquisitive of my sisters. So it just makes sense that I would go looking and searching for other things. I was always just a curious child. So it was expected from me to do things a little bit differently, because that was my personality, I guess. Yeah.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: When your sister—how much older is your older sister?

BAXTER: So my sister older than me . . . she's two and a half years. And my sister younger than me is one and a half. So we're all two grades apart. We say two years apart, but she's a little bit older than me.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: So when you're in high school, and she's about to finish high school, what was the expectation for the next step of your lives as young women?

BAXTER: Well, we were always going to college, all of us. It was sort of like what you did after high school. It wasn't because my mom and dad went to school. My dad went to Lincoln. He did, but he left to go get married to my mom. So he didn't finish school then. He did go back later on to finish his degree. So it was just common expectations for us to go. It was really cool that my sister went to school first because then we were able to visit her college.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Where did she end up going to school?

BAXTER: She went to Stockton State, which I went to do after her. She went to Stockton State until she transferred to Delaware State, because she was a ball player and she had to get to a Title-whatever-school. I don't really know the whole thing, but she went to go to a better basketball division school. But then she messed her knee up, so she just finished out. My younger sister actually went to community college. So she stayed with my parents. She lived at home until she was thirty-something—until she got married—the traditional way, apparently. That's what they say. [laughter]

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Is it? [laughter]

BAXTER: I know, that's what I keep saying! I was like, "Is that what's expected?" I didn't know. I missed that class, I was cutting.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: I'm glad I missed it.

BAXTER: So yeah, I just left as soon as I was finished. When I went to college I never went back. Not until I actually was pregnant—I went home, for a little while, when I was pregnant to stay with my parents. But I was never coming back home, I can tell you that.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: So, you knew you wanted to leave. Where did you go?

BAXTER: Definitely. Anywhere. [laughter] So I went to school at Stockton, <T: 30 min> which is down there in Atlantic City, for the first two years. I went to a lot of different colleges, actually. [laughter] I had a fun time. So I went down to the University of Maryland.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Did you go to Stockton, in part, because your sister was there?

BAXTER: Yes. It was what we knew. We didn't know a lot about college, how to get into schools and stuff like that. We had already forged relationships there, that kind of thing. And I also I didn't have the best grades. So it was like, "Okay, go to a state school, get your grades up so you can go somewhere else," which is why I transferred two years later to the University of Maryland. Which is a huge school, and it was like, blah! And that didn't go well. [laughter] All my friends were at Howard, so I would just stay at Howard all the time. [Maryland] as a

school—big, giant, forty-thousand people on campus thing. It was way more than I bargained for. Then my parents were like—so I didn't do so well there—and my parents were like, “Okay, so come on home.” [laughter] Then I went to Glassboro, which is now Rowan University. That was the year—the year I was graduating was the year they were switching over to Rowan, actually. So I did a lot of school and schooling stuff.

College was fun. I just had a bunch of fun, which I really am under the impression—I really fully feel that college is about personal experience, not really about what you're learning in the classroom. It's who you meet during school. It's parents who will help you get jobs when you get out. It's the relationships you have with your professors, or the recommendations that you get, that you need when you get a job and move forward. It's not really about the schooling, because you're not really learning things that you can apply later on in life in college. It's an experience, as an adult, with no responsibilities. It's the most fun you'll have as an adult. And I took advantage of that to the fullest. [laughter] I took advantage of that fully. I drove up and down the coast, went to all the HBCUs I could—every historically black college I could go to and party at, I did. I met lots of people and did amazing things.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Tell me about the experiences at the HBCUs.

BAXTER: Yeah. Oh, wow.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: So I've heard Ta-Nehisi Coates talk about Howard as “The Mecca.” And I love that imagery. Talk to me about that.

BAXTER: Yeah, I loved reading that. I was like, “Yes.” [laughter] It really was. It was this place where all these beautiful black people were, and they were all smart and thinking about things, and going places. And it was nestled in this huge chocolate city. There were black people everywhere. So it was awesome, for me, to go there all the time. My best friend was there, so I was there all the time. I have friends still from Howard who think I went to school there, because that's how much I was there. They're like, “Wait a minute. You didn't go to Howard?” I'm like, “Yeah, no. I was just there all the . . .” I stayed out there one summer. It was good times. It was definitely, I think, to have this safe space, right? This historically black college as a safe space for black folks to come together and be free. And to practice what it is to be to be free is a big deal. Having the resources and the support, maybe through faculty or whomever, to be behind your ideas and dreams.

At the time, when my best friend was in school, Puffy was in school there. So there were entertainers who now are these big people. I met one of my cousins there, and he eventually formed Dignable Planets. So we had all these people at the time who were thinking in these really forward ways about how to move forward, in entertainment, and in all these different ways. Ras Baraka's son was there. I mean Ras Baraka, himself—not his father—was there at the time. So

it was the nineties, and it was the era of De La Soul and The Native Tongues. And so we were all metaphysically thinking about things and building on ways, as we partied into the daylight. And so—it was great fun. And a lot of learning, a lot of political learning, right? Understanding our position, and our situation, and watching people grow as we move forward. Yeah.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Can you tell me a little bit about that? So you've talked about this childhood experience that was really diverse, and not a real strong sense of discrimination or oppression in that childhood space. That was a safe space. And then funneling into a junior high—more and more perspectives and communities coming together. Eventually merging as a person who has a real strong sense of self and the roles of justice in the community that you're a part of. Tell me about that transition, about those realizations. When did those realizations come to you?

BAXTER: Yeah. When I think about the progression of human development, I think when we get to our later teen years is when a lot of us start dissecting institutional racism, right? So, you were brought up—so, for me, being brought up in this radical black tradition, I had heard and understood, to some degree, what that was. But when you go to college, you get that sort of book learning. And really digging into it, you know—because I took every single African American history class I could take. Every single one. At all the schools that I went to. **<T: 35 min>**

So understanding it, in an institutional way? It's just really hard. It just really hits hard. Like, "Damn. This shit is going on. And it's going on like this." And you had heard the experiences talked about, but when you understand it to be this systematic thing, it just is a whole lot deeper. And so the anger, I think, that comes with a lot of young people at that age, is because that's when a lot of us figure out the institutional barriers that are put in play that affect our lives—during that period of time, between eighteen and twenty-one. Because I've watched it in other people as life is going on. That is just a very real period of development for understanding those things. And then people are angry, in all of these different ways, because of the truth of our existence in this society.

It was, definitely, why I would gravitate more toward these more radical black spaces of people, instead of, maybe, the more multicultural thing. So when I first went to Stockton, I had a friend note to me—she was in my gospel choir—and she said, "I mean, you have so many friends, so many different—you have such a diverse body of friends. Every time I come through this hall, I see you with a different group of people, and none of them are the same." So I don't have a problem intermixing with other folk. I never saw that as an issue. But understanding my situation means that sometimes I move myself into spaces of comfort because it's necessary—for me to have security, for me to stay balanced, for me to give validation for my experience in certain ways. So those black spaces were important and necessary for me.

My parents didn't want me to go to a black college. So I wasn't able. Interesting enough, these black schools get a bad rep. Which is so not the experience that—it's sort of like the one

story thing. This dominant narrative says, “Black schools, they party too much. You won’t get anything done. Oh, it’s not like the real world, because you have to interact. You know, we’re integrated now.” But the reality is, all of my friends that went to HBCUs are all hella successful right now—because of having that grounding, and that safe space to be able to believe in themselves, and have people around them who look like them and encourage them to do things in a certain way. So my daughter is at an HBCU because of that. Because I just watch. All of my friends that went to Howard, all of my friends that went to Hampton, all of them, they are all successful today. And those of us who straddled along, struggled along in these majority white schools and had these really racial experiences that caused us to challenge our identity, we weren’t able—we’re still processing those things after the fact.

I feel that during that time of growth, of personal development, those safe spaces are really necessary, because of what you’re unpacking during that time. When you don’t have that, it’s a really different experience of growth growing up, and then you’ll be struggling after to find that a little bit before you can move on, depending on what kind of support you have in place. So I think that it was really good for me to have those—to search out those spaces and have those spaces of development for myself and be able to talk to people openly about certain things.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: So having these spaces of self-fulfillment, but also of fire, what did you do with the fire?

BAXTER: [laughter] Party. I danced. I danced everything away. Not everything away, but I think it was very cathartic for me, in the sense that I understood that I’m hugely a dancer. That was part of what I did as my release. And I did a lot of activism. So, you know, I was very much—[sigh]. I would say, am I a couch activist now? When people talk about it, the way people talk about it, like . . . I wasn’t as active as I thought I was at the time! [laughter] At the time, you feel like you’re doing all kinds of things—you’re sitting around talking about doing these things, and making these moves with people that you never really made. You just talked about. It felt like activism at the time! [laughter] Very much not active, but verbal activism, I would imagine it was. So I don’t think that—yeah, just dancing would be my relief at the time. I don’t think that there was another release than that. I wish there was, but no.

Right after school, though, the radicalness that was a part of my life for a long time wasn’t completely fulfilling. And that’s when my relationship with nature began.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Oh, tell me more.

BAXTER: So about two or three years after college—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Where did you go after what became Rowan and then, what was the next step for you?

BAXTER: I went Glassboro, and then Rowan. And that was it. So I didn't graduate from Rowan, but I walked. [laughter] I was like, "I have three more classes to take," which I never took and ended up graduating years later. So I went back to school in my thirties to finish my degree. But I was so much done with school. My parents were like, "We're not paying for one more class." And I was like, "Okay, well I'm done anyhow." [laughter] So that was it.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: <T: 40 min> Where did life take you from then?

BAXTER: Back to Philadelphia. We mostly go to the places, to the city that's closest to our childhood, right? So I lived with my cousins here in Philadelphia.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Where in Philly?

BAXTER: In Mount Airy—uptown, that's what they call it now. [laughter] My cousins had a house. They're my age, but their mother—who is also my cousin, they're my second cousins—she had passed away. And she left them the house. So they had a house, and we all sort of lived there at some point, right? All of the cousins lived there at some point. I stayed with my cousins there for a couple of years before I got my own place. And that was here in Philadelphia, you know, in this sort of—I say all the time—in the "party kids" scene. You know what I mean?

We just went to clubs and stuff like that. I sat around with my homies and talked about black righteousness, and we studied Dr. Malachi York, and different black leaders at the time who were present, like The Nation of Gods and Earths. A lot of more metaphysical knowledge, and different... And that was really futuristic in this thinking of ourselves—who are our ancestors, and who are we connected to? And this our third time being here, and how many times have we been on this planet? And how we've grown in that person, and who we were in a different life. And that we came from this planet here, and this star here, and that star gave this . . . I got my daughter's name from the *Enuma Elish* [*Enûma Eliš*], which is the oldest text ever found in the world. It comes from Babylonia in Syria. So we were studying. We were studying all kinds of things about—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What's your daughter's name?

BAXTER: Enlylh. So she comes from the different story of Enki and Enlil, which is a Sumerian—a Babylonian text. A creation story, actually, which is called the *Enuma Elish*. And

that was found in, like, the 1920s. So there was this big deal that they had found this text that was the oldest text ever found. And it had this creation story, and that creation story was very similar to a lot of the other creation stories that we have. So we had a lot of black scholars who came out through the seventies and the sixties who were unpacking a lot of this African history for us. So we were reading about all of these things that went against what we were taught that Africans did and Africans knew during that time.

So the schooling, I think, the education that I learned in high school and in college, the reading—college, not high school, because I didn't do a lot of learning in high school [laughter]—was the textbook American, the African American experience. And so on our own, we sort of experienced and explored the African experience. And then also the African alien experience, and thinking about ourselves as more than just these human beings, but as a cosmic beings. And what is our place the cosmic way of life?

And so, yeah, we were definitely kids that were thinking about ourselves as stars and understanding ourselves to be star people—that our existence was not just this thing that we know as life right here, as everyday life. That there was something way more to life than just our experiences which we have every day. So that sort of informed and pushed me to explore more around cosmology—and cosmologies—and who we are as universal beings, and how we came to this earth. And what are we supposed to be doing while we are here? So then, the ultimately question of “why are we here?” is what's guiding me next.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: So I love hearing this. How did—this new sense of the cosmic connection—how did that square with this Evangelical upbringing? Was that still a part of your life, too, that social sphere?

BAXTER: No. So, that was the conflict that came. When I was about twenty-one, I guess? No, I was nineteen when I knew I didn't want to do religion anymore. But of course, this was—it's my foundation. So I had a very long battle with understanding how to walk away. But I did. And you know ...

EARDLEY-PRYOR: How did that play out with your father?

BAXTER: It's still playing out, my friend! [laughter] It's still playing out. So you know, I'm an adult, I'm not home. So there's not a whole lot they can do about that, you know what I mean? It's just—so they just question me constantly about, you know. And they're thinking, “Oh, she's in a backsliding state!” First, I'm backsliding. Then it's like, “Actually, this is my way of life.” Fifteen years later, I'm like “And it's the way of my child's life.” And then thirty years later, it's like, “Okay. This is me. Can you please accept it?” But it's an ongoing battle most definitely. [laughter]

And for me, inside, internally it was an ongoing battle. There were things that I saw as a child that were hard to dismiss. I've seen people <T: 45 min> possessed with demons. I've seen people who've had demons taken out of them, or whatever they called it—exorcized. I think, for me, those were the hardest things for me tackle. So I wanted to know—there were certain things that I was just like, “Okay, how do we explain this?” I saw this happen, so what is the explanation of that? And that guided my learning experience in trying to understand energy, and how energy coalesces in this world, and how it manifests, and how we manipulate it, and how it can be manipulated.

It's interesting—we're talking about energy [use in Philadelphia]. But this is real, really just thinking about that in my twenties—in my early twenties—about energy. My learning and understanding of energy helped me to process what I saw in a way that made sense, I think, scientifically—not in a mystery way, not in this mysterious—like, “Oh my God, there's these demons, and there's these . . .” You know? Just understanding things as energy helped me a lot to understand what I had experienced growing up. And then to put a lot of language to other experiences, too, that I had growing up. I mean, my understanding of energy and how energy works, and how waves work, and how—all of that—really explained a lot of the things that I thought or saw as mysterious when I was growing up.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: You talked about this time—being on Mount Airy, moving back to Philly, being there—as also a time of your environmental awakening? Talk to me about how that cosmology, and the sense of energy moving through the world in this time in your life was—and that place maybe, even. I mean, you're close to the Wissahickon. That's such a tree rich area—

BAXTER: Yeah, it is.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Tell me about this kind of environmental awakening, in the midst of this spiritual awakening.

BAXTER: [Yes]. So my studies, which were very metaphysical in nature, I guess after a while they stopped being as nourishing for me, because they were also really patriarchal. They were texts and/or philosophies that came from black males, but were very patriarchal. And so for me, even in the church, my whole thing was always like, “where are the women? Where am I in this story?” So inevitably, I say, “Jesus introduced me to his mother.” [laughter]

So I found—I think one of my girlfriends gave me this book called *The [Great] Cosmic Mother*, which is like the bible for all of us Earth worshippers. That was my introduction into this world of the Goddess. That put a lot of grounding to the metaphysical stuff that I was dealing—that I was researching and studying. And I think that—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What do you mean by grounding?

BAXTER: Right. That's what I was going to say. I think that the context—so the reality of “as above, so below” is really, really evident and clear in so many ways. So when I was reading—what I was reading in *The Cosmic Mother* was very similar to what I had been reading in these other contexts, but it was very, very enriched with this feminine understanding of it, in an earthly way, right? Whereas the other things that I was reading were very universal and male, in a cosmic way, right? So I saw it as an extension of the “below”—that these things here, that are mirroring these things here.

I actually resonate more with the earthly way of understanding these same concepts than the cosmic way. Because the cosmic way, for me, felt really heady. It felt not grounded in the Earth. And I felt like, “This is where I exist. This is what I know.” Then that teaching should be able to be applied to my earthly experience. So I found that in the text—in the expression of the Goddess, in the religion of the Goddess. So, yeah, that was how that happened for me, looking for this place. Because even the folks I was building with were mostly men, right? So understanding the dynamics, just within our study circles and our study groups, was like, “Okay. There has to be something other.” <T: 50 min>

So when I started reading more things about the Goddess, and/or the religion of the Goddess, and sort of understanding the Earth-structures, and how Earth energies are manifested—it spoke so much to me that I knew that it was where I was supposed to be going. It was just like, “Okay. This is the path that you should be on.” And that separated me actually, for a while, from my black radical spaces. Because no longer was I studying things that black folks were studying so much. I didn't know, at the time, any black women who were really into that—just a few us, actually, I had a few friends. They were from California, of course. [laughter] You know what they say, “Those West Coast people, who always got their heads in the clouds!” [laughter]

So yeah, it was a solitary journey. I had one girl friend, a good friend of mine—she was a white woman, and she and I raised our kids together, pretty much in the woods. And she—they bought some land, maybe two years after that. She and her husband—he was her boyfriend at the time—bought some land upstate in New York. This was twenty, twenty-one years ago. And we started camping, you know what I mean? And going to festivals—music festivals—and just having these experiences in the woods. I had my child first, my daughter first. Her children are younger than mine...

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Tell me about becoming a mother. Was this around the same time as—?

BAXTER: Yeah, that was twenty-six. So I'm at age twenty-six, and I'm two years into my sort of transition, into my Goddess—my environmental, sort of, Goddess Earth-worship and studies.

So I was twenty-six when I had my daughter, or when I got pregnant, and twenty-seven when I had her. She was amazing, of course. And during the process of carrying her and birthing her, I was like, “Oh! The black woman is God.” So I knew! [laughter] I was like, “Now I know that women are God!” Why and how could anyone say anything different from this, I will never believe. How they got to that must be some mind-compelling spell on men that says that—because anyone that can understand this process will understand that this is truly an act of miracle—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Of creation—

BAXTER: Of creation! And, wow! So yeah, being pregnant, growing something inside you, the whole thing is just mind-blowing to me—how amazing it is, and how blessed I was to be able to carry a person into fruition, into—Yeah. That creation thing is real.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Did you become a mother while living in Mount Airy? Or was that –

BAXTER: Oh no, I was in North Philly. By this time I was in Northern Liberties, before it was like the—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Before it got all gentrified and all the breweries came in? [laughter]

BAXTER: Right, in the beginning of gentrification! Yeah! So, I was there at that time. I was in and out of North Philly by that time. I was only at my cousins for the first two years. Yeah.

So then motherhood happened. And the experience that I was having religiously—spiritually, not religiously—spiritually, was very much embedded in Earth worship. And we had—I think that, also what I was studying within my black circles was very much about Earth. You know, naturalness, right? It was a very black, natural—it was the natural movement—so we were all about doing adult black natural things. So I thought part of that was nature! Actual nature! [laughter] Not just natural hair, natural looking clothes, but nature. I’d be like, “Let’s go to—” And they were like, “Yeahhhhh, no. I’m not really trying to go to the woods. I’m just saying we want to live a natural existence.” So we had all these talks and these conversations about living in the woods and on our own.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Had you ever done that before? I mean, you grew up in the suburbs. So you had yards . . . but woods and stuff?

BAXTER: No, never. Well, we had woods in—when I was growing up, little pockets of woods that we would explore into. Absolutely, I was all about exploring in these little natural—in the creek, we’d catch tadpoles and shit. But never, ever—like my parents, when I first took my daughter camping, was like, “You’re going where? What is going on now?” [laughter]

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Where would you go?

BAXTER: Up to my girlfriend’s, my friends’ land.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Oh, so when they bought that place up in New York, that was the go to.

BAXTER: Yeah, we just started camping there. Yeah, every year. We camped every year, sometimes two or three times a summer. And outside of there, we’d go to festivals—musical festivals where you camp out for the weekend or whatever. So that was an interesting turn. And a lot of my friends weren’t into it. So that separation was not necessarily about the change in what I was studying, but more so about the fact that I wanted to be in these spaces. And they were like, “Yeah, but I’m not really trying—I’m not ready for that yet.” [laughter] And “black folks don’t camp”—that kind of thing, which is so untrue.

Now I’m very blessed to have this huge, enormously beautiful group of black folks around me who are all about natural spaces, and all about camping. So that just had to be, you know—it’s timing, right? At the time, the folks that I was hanging out with weren’t down with that. So we separated because of that, and because of other things, I’m sure. We got old. I got pregnant!

Once I had my child, all of my priorities changed. <T: 55 min> My priority wasn’t hanging out at the club, sitting around my homies, and chit-chatting and philosophizing about the future. It was like, “I have to take care of this little being who is counting on me for daily life.” So yeah, my priorities shifted.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: How? Tell me about how.

BAXTER: As a mother? Yeah, so it was about how do I put food on the table? How do I make sure that she has a space that is comfortable, and is safe? So where we lived was really important. Making sure that I was working consistently was really important. Making sure that she had the most experiences she could possibly have to fill her head with all things imaginable was really important to me. She was everything, actually, to me for a very long. I didn’t have space in my head for anything else. I had made that commitment because I was just so in awe of

who she was, and I was like, “Yes, nothing else matters but her.” So that’s just how that went for a long time. She was connected to my hip.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Tell me about how you merged the spiritual awakening—the new kind of social connections you’re starting to make, but also motherhood—with your work life. I mean, when did those things start to become more synthesized?

BAXTER: Well, work—actually so in my late twenties, after I had my child—when she was about two, in her toddler years—I did a real soul searching of what makes me happy. What do I want to do in life? Really, because I needed to find, you know—because I didn’t have a career path. I didn’t have a—I went to school for communications. It’s like, “What is that? What do you do with that?” [laughter] I knew I didn’t really want to do communications. I didn’t want to do PR, or public relations, which is what I ended up sort of trying to focus on. But that was just too mired in this capitalist marketing thing that I’m totally against. I’m an anti-capitalist and have been for a long time. I was like, “Okay, what can I do? I don’t want to work in a”—because I did some temping, and in the temping I was able to experience corporate America in these different ways. Just to see, this is what—you know. And does that make sense for me? I very much could have been a marketing whatever, because I have the passion to do that thing. But feeling very uncomfortable with the field, and understanding that is not a part of who I am.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Those aren’t the interests you want to work toward.

BAXTER: Not at all. So I did a whole, long, soul-searching, looking for my path. And I realized, actually, that I was most happy when I was in service to others. So that was when I was about twenty-eight. Then I realized—then I knew, “Okay, I’m going to stay in non-profit work, because this way I’ll always be in service to others.” So I just started, actually, I started off—it wasn’t non-profit work specifically—but I was working with children with disabilities. That allowed me to work in the schools, so I had the same work hours as my child. So that was things that was important to me, that I’m home with my kid. She’s not a latchkey kid. She’s not going to after school programs all day long, all evening long—that she’s in school for regular school time, and then we’re home together. So I didn’t take a lot of other jobs, or extra jobs, like some people thought I should have or whatever. Because it was important that she be with me, that I’m influencing my child’s decisions and my child’s development.

So I didn’t make a lot of money, at all. And in the summer times I was off, which meant I had no money in the summer time. But I was out camping, so I didn’t care. [laughter] But somehow we were blessed and favored, and we still kept a house over our head. And eventually we moved to Upstate New York, because I wanted to have my child grow up in the woods. I wanted her to run freely and be free, and feel free—and not be bogged down by the things that young people in cities, you know, feel like they have to hard. You know? The hard life of the city. And I didn’t want my child growing up like that. I wasn’t raised in the city. I didn’t want

her to be raised in the city. I was not taking her to the suburbs. Everything that we were learning and living in was about the environment. So I wanted her to grow up with this real, visceral relationship to Gaia. So let me just take her up there. So we moved up north!

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Where'd you go up north?

BAXTER: We went up not too far from where the land was. So we had this whole plan. It was a bunch of us, our eclectic group of people, and we were like, "Yes, we're going to do an exodus to the land! And we'll live on the land and eat! And feed each other!" So three families moved up and we all moved to different counties. And we never saw each other again, except for the same time that we would meet every year before that. So funny. And even the people who had the land never moved up there. It was just like, "We were moving to your land, and you're not moving up here?" And they're like, "We're not ready yet." [laughter] So we had amazing experiences on the land for so long. We moved up to Oneonta. So that's right outside of where the land is that we were—where we would camp out all the time.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Oneonta?

BAXTER: Yeah. Oneonta. We actually—when we first moved, we moved to right where the land was, which was outside of Oneonta, which is this little, tiny town. It had like a K-12 school, and that was like the worst racial experience ever. It wasn't the worst racial experience. It was just too much. I was like, "Okay, this is too much—too much in the country." Let's just go on into town. <T: 60 min>

EARDLEY-PRYOR: It was just all white folk—all white, rural white folk?

BAXTER: It was all white folks. All white, rural folks, who acted like they never saw black folks in their lives—like they wouldn't play with my kid at school. Little kids would tell her, "We don't play with brown people." She would come home with these stories, and I would be bawling. But she was so strong! She was in second grade, and she would come home with her fist in the air like, "I am black and beautiful." [laughter] I don't even know how—I didn't even realize I had embedded all of that in her, but she was so strong through all that. And I was distraught trying to hold myself together, [pretend crying] like, "Tell me more. And then what did they say?"

And then I was there, every day, like, "What the hell? What the hell is going on?" Because I am hugely an advocate for my child. Especially because I worked in school, so I know how that works—if you're not there, they don't care about your kid, especially if they're a child of color. So I've always been a huge advocate, and a proponent, that parents have to be advocates and at your school all the time for them to know that you care. If not, they treat your

kid mediocre, at best. So the teacher was sort of like, “Oh, I really don’t—I don’t see a problem.” I was like, “Okay, I got to—she’s got to go.” So she was out of there within a month.

She went to the Montessori school, which is a better experience, of course, but very challenging for the teachers. Because my kid is pretty—she’s a fire sign too, and very opinionated. [laughter] And they had this rule where kids can do whatever they want to, right? If they didn’t want to go to other things, they didn’t have to, as long as they could explain themselves. So she explained herself out of everything and stayed in one corner the whole time, and played in the play area. And they were like, “We think that you need to...” And I was like, “But you told her that she could do that! So unless you can make her do the thing . . .”—and they were like, “We can’t.” So I was like, “Well, then that’s what you get!” Of course, she’s an amazing student, like literally has been an A student all her life. So that was not the issue. The issue was that they couldn’t make her do anything, because she could explain her way out of everything. “This is why I want to be here.” And it made sense! You know? [laughter]

She said to this guy—in the second grade they took this field trip to this church—and the preacher was saying how “We need schools—schools are the thing! Because if we didn’t have schools, people wouldn’t learn.” And she was like, “Well, then how did the first person ever learn?” They were like, “Whose kid is this?” [laughter] She was like, “That’s not true. I know that’s not true! I learn all the time at home.” She was just always pretty amazing. But for me, it was really challenging. So we left and moved closer to the city, where we had friends at anyhow.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Which city?

BAXTER: In Oneonta—not really a city, but a town, which is a college town. In upstate New York I stayed in college towns, because at least there’s some kind of diversity, right? And Oneonta is very, very little diversity, and it was probably was from the college, not necessarily in the town. But because there wasn’t a lot of, even a small trickle of black folks, there wasn’t a lot of visible racism. So I didn’t experience a lot of, or any other . . . We had the most amazing five years in Oneonta. We just played music. Our friends had land. We stayed on the land, and we swam in rivers and waterfalls. She just had amazing experiences. We just had so much fun there.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: When you say “stay on the land,” what does that mean?

BAXTER: Camping out, on people’s land—people who have acres of land. We just sit out and camp out for days, and eat together, and play music together. You know, we take care of each other and love each other. Yeah. It’s fun.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: That's beautiful.

BAXTER: Yeah. It was good times. We all talk about, "We want to go back to Wildwood!" My friend's land was called Wildwood. He had festivals there. It was good. They were all musicians and artists, all of my friends, it seemed. Later on someone had asked me, and I was like, "I have really good friends who are white." And they were like, "Well, they must be all radical." And I was like, "Oh, you know, you're right." They were all artists and radical in some way—in some way they're definitely anti-establishment. So they weren't like your average white folk. You know what I mean? They were people who were really against living in a certain way—like in a box. We're not going to live in a box. So my friends were carpenters and stone masons, and guitar players and singers. And it was good, for a long time.

But there was no—I couldn't make enough money in that town. It was just too small. There was no real industries there. Working in the non-profit was cool, but not really fulfilling. And she was getting older, and she needed to be around more children who look like her. So I thought that Ithaca was the next best place, because, hey, there's brown folks in Ithaca. And they have a long-standing history of black folks there—black and brown folks there.

And so we moved to Ithaca from Oneonta, and that was a complete change, because Ithaca is hella political. So where, in Oneonta, I didn't have any experience with the political—it was just about feeding my spirituality, feeding—drum circles, and women's spaces, and all these eclectic sort of cool, out-of-the-way things. <T: 65 min> And then all of sudden there was like, "Pow"—I was slapped into the, like, "This is what's happening between white people and black people, and Puerto Ricans, and..." Everyone has an opinion—everyone has bumper stickers. I've never been to any place where the whole fucking place has an opinion, and you have to listen to it. T-shirts say something, bumper stickers. [laughter] It's crazy. I couldn't go to the grocery store without people engaging me about issues. I was like, "Seriously? I just want to buy chips." [laughter] So it was crazy. And very, very much an educational experience for me politically.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: How so?

BAXTER: It was where I needed to go. When I had moved up to upstate New York, I had this—I had convinced myself that multiculturalism was the way forward, and that I wanted my daughter to grow up in this experience of having all these different people around her from different walks of life. I just wanted her to have this diverse experience that that would make her more of a full being to know and understand other people's plights along with her own. And searching for that in upstate New York is—I was in a few different groups where we talked and studied and we tried to create intentional communities. Because I always—I was still on my path to live in the woods, right? [laughter] Like, "Let's create intentional communities!" And we wanted to have these diverse bodies of—but the diverse was me and my kid. I was like, "We can't be what is diverse in this group. It can't be the two of us, and all white folks for the rest of

my life.” That doesn’t feed me at all. Once I realized that, I stopped doing the intentional community thing, until—you know, like I said to ancestors—until that comes to me. You know what I mean? I know this is what I want to do eventually, but until that comes to me, I’ll leave that alone. I’m not going to be searching for these groups that are living on the land in a way that’s really cool.

And so Ithaca was like, you have—I had to participate. I worked for a historically black community center, which I wanted to work for when I first moved there because I read about it. It has this historically amazing story of when it was created by these black folks who lived in the south side. And they were folks who were planted there from the underground railroad. It was just such an amazing story. And then I got there, and they weren’t really doing anything. I was like, “What’s happening at the community center?” I was like, “I want to work there,” But I had this other job, the job that paid me a lot of money for what I had been making at the time. And was more stable, of course.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What was that job?

BAXTER: I was working for people with disabilities, getting them jobs. I worked there for a year, and it was so boring and so non—it didn’t feed me at all. I would fall asleep at my desk all the time. I was like, “I can’t believe I’m getting paid to do this. This sucks. I don’t want to just take money for . . .”—even though the work was worthy, there wasn’t enough of it. And I didn’t feel fulfilled doing that. And it was boring the hell out of me. So, I took a huge pay cut to take this job at the community center, but it was what I wanted to do. I wanted to work in that black community. I wanted to change things. And so I did, and it was awesome.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What did you do?

BAXTER: Well, I was the program manager there, and we did a lot of stuff. I was only in Ithaca for three years, but I feel like we did so much work.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: When was this, years wise?

BAXTER: This was in the 19—sorry. This was in 2009. I was there from 2009 to 2012, when I moved back here [to Philadelphia.] We started the Youth Farm project when I was up there. So that’s when I got into food activism.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: I was going to say. When did the farm—you talk about the land, and camping . . .

BAXTER: Right. So I was on the land forever. I was experiencing all the land, and creating a relationship with the land, and very personal, very intimate relationships with the land while I was in Oneonta. That just allowed me to open up this whole thing that I had—to put my theory into practice. I had been studying all these things for a very long time, and then I was able to do a lot of practicing, spiritually, on the land and with the land. And Ithaca was—even though I had waterfalls down the street from my house, which was fucking awesome—I was barely able to participate in that too much because I was so politically involved.

And that’s because of seeing the situation, right? So I can’t really—just a part of who I am when I see—as I told you earlier, when I see injustice, it’s like, “What? This is not going down like that.” So immediately I just jumped into what the community needed. I just talked to people all the time. I talked to young people. I talked to elders. I talked to old people. What do people need? What has happened before? What was the story before I got here? What’s the situation with the board? So there was a lot of politics involved there. So I had to find all the answers—or not answers [but] get all this information—so I can try to figure what to do. So a lot of different work was accumulated during that period of time.

We started the black—the Community Leaders of Color—during that time, that got started. <T: 70 min> We started the Youth Farm Project. We started the Congo Square Market at the community center where I worked at, which is an open-air market for people of color to start entrepreneurial ideals. We started a fresh fruit and vegetable snack program where we were able to provide a fruit and vegetable snack to two different schools that had the majority students of color—had the most students, not majority, never majority students of color—that had the most students of color and/or the poorest schools, I guess. In the community, we were able to introduce them to all these really good foods and stuff like that. That’s still going on. All these programs are still going on, which is really awesome to know. Because that’s always the worry when you leave a place. It’s like, “Oh my God, will everything stop with me?” Which is so funny that I even had that idea. [laughter] But I’m so thankful now to know that—“Okay, you’re tripping.” And that’s what planting seeds is about.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: You build a foundation and it grows, right?

BAXTER: Right. Absolutely. So all those programs are still going on, and it’s great. So Ithaca is this microcosm of a city. It’s considered a city. It’s designated as a city. So it moves in the same way that a big city would move, but because it’s very small, you get to see a bird’s eye view of what happens. So that bird’s eye view is really, is really...bad and mean, and it feels bad to know that this is how things play out. When you can see them actually, it’s just—like here in Philadelphia, it’s huge, municipalities, and we’re the county seat, and there’s all these different things happening that keeps us from actually seeing the mechanisms that create the divides and that create poverty. But in Ithaca you can see it really, really clearly. You can see why these folks aren’t getting funding, and they’re funding this way. Why? That for me was the

hugest lesson while I was there—the political situation, and understanding how things trickle down, and who’s pulling strings —because I was able to be in those spaces. You know the mayor. You know the superintendent of schools. You know these folks. You see them at the stores. You have conversations with them, and you see how the politics work, and it’s ugly.

And so I left because it was just too much on my child, actually. She was getting to the age where her identity was being challenged in the town where black folks are always the minority, in a town where the brown folks and black folks who did live there have so many social agencies that they don’t really understand the impacts of race in a way that’s informed. So there’s no real political education of the people there. You know, there’s certain people that But there’s this huge contingency of brown and black folks who are trying to keep the status quo. So I was way too radical for that city, ever. I was always way too radical. [laughter]

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Philly needed you.

BAXTER: Right. I was way too radical for Ithaca. They got the colleges there, so we’ve got the black elite agenda to deal with. Then you have a huge group of white hippies from the sixties who moved out there and started these social justice organizations to get—so there’s this co-dependency that’s happening there that’s just so different from what I know.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: So, before we—let’s maybe take a break here before we step into Philly, and then thinking about Philly’s future.

BAXTER: Because we’ve got to do futures. What time is it?

[END OF AUDIO, FILE 1]

INTERVIEWEE: Kirtrina Baxter
INTERVIEWER: Roger Eardley-Pryor
LOCATION: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
DATE: 2 August 2017

EARDLEY-PRYOR: All right. Today is August 2. This is a follow up interview. This is Roger Eardley-Pryor. I'm here speaking with Kirtrina Baxter, and we are in Philadelphia on Benjamin Franklin Parkway.

The last time we met, Katrina, you had just spoken about moving from Ithaca, New York, back to Philadelphia with you and your daughter and having a new experience here. So, bring me up to date from when you moved here to Philly, to what you're up to today, and what kind of things you're up to in the city.

BAXTER: Right. So, when I first moved back to New York, I was being vetted for directorship at one of the local farms here—urban ag [agriculture] farms here—and that didn't work out. So, it was more because that organization itself was trying to get themselves together. They decided to just go a whole other way from what they originally—like, “Okay. Let's fall back and see.”

EARDLEY-PRYOR: But you knew you wanted to do urban farm work when you came back?

BAXTER: Oh, yeah. I specifically knew when I came back to Philadelphia. Well, in Ithaca I had worked across the gamut in different issues for the black community and that sort of took me away from what I realized that I wanted—when I realized that I wanted to work specifically environmental issues. Because remember, I think I mentioned that earlier, that I sort of figured at some point that land is the basis of all of our “ills.” So, if I'm going to be fighting, sort of thinking about, all the different things that I feel that are wrong—all the different injustices in the world—I thought my energy would be best served working through the environment. I think I mentioned that the last time. If not, then that happened sometime in my early thirties. So when I got sort of wrapped up in all so many things in Ithaca, I was like, “Okay. So, that is not what I continue to do. I don't want to have my energy spread so thinly across the board, because so many issues in our community need to be addressed that I can't fully address one thing.”

I decided when I came back to Philadelphia that I was just going to work in environmental issues. I'm just going to stay there. And also I really wanted to work with black organizations. It was a great thing I was able to do that in Ithaca, and so I wanted to continue

that. You know, working with black organizations it's really challenging to find any—and then that's when I found out that there were really no black urban ag orgs [organizations] in Philadelphia, not run by any black folks, and that the urban ag community here was pretty small and siloed. So, organizations weren't really talking to each other a whole lot across the board with other non-profits. It's sort of like “that's our competition for grants.”

There's not a lot of impetus to work together organizationally unless the grant requires a collaboration. And so I think a lot of us feel like our organizations sort of required us to see each other as competition as opposed to friends, as opposed to alliances. And those of us who worked the land understand how very important we are each to each other. So, the whole understanding how ecosystems work and working in that field gives you a really present understanding of how connected we all are, and how important it is for the connections to be there.

So for two years when I first got here, I think for a year and a half, I worked doing parenting classes. I couldn't find any work in urban ag, mostly because it was siloed and folks were hiring people that they know, who looked like them. And that was disconcerting for me, because I feel like my resume speaks for itself. Like, “Why am I not getting callbacks? Why am I not—where are the jobs? Where are they posted? How do people even find out?” You know. So, it was a while—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: And this is late 2000s?

BAXTER: Yeah. This is late 2000s. Two thousand-twelve. So, I volunteered at a whole bunch of farms around—at community gardens—around my area. I got involved with the [North Philly] Peace Park. I got involved with the—right now it's Brewery Town Community Garden. At the time it was Marathon Farms, and those were both of my community, not too far from my house, both of which—Marathon Farms was started by a restaurant in North Philly. I mean the restaurant was downtown, but they got this lease to purchase this land in the middle of the hood to grow food for the restaurant, and of course for the community too.

So the interesting part about—what I felt about—that project was what we usually look for in community gardens. After a few years of researching and working nationally with other folks through Ithaca—my work in Ithaca—was that when white folks come into a community of color and start a garden, there's no buy-in, because those [local community] folks didn't say, “This is what I want.” It's someone else from the outside coming in and telling them, “This is what you need.” **<T: 05 min>** So across the board, nationally, those programs aren't really well received, and you don't get a lot of community buy-in. You might have a whole lot of activities happening there, but the community isn't necessarily engaged in those. So that's always been an issue—that has been an ongoing issue within urban agriculture.

With Marathon Farms, it was interesting to me because there was a gentleman on the block who totally was like, “What is this going on?” He lived next door to the farm, and so he's like, “What is happening?” When it started happening, he'd hang out with them the whole

year—the first year they were there, learned everything, because he has this ridiculous memory where he can remember everything—literally learned everything they did in a year. And then the next year was able to do everything. He had never grown before. So they were really excited and impressed. And they hired him, which is unusual, because that’s not usually how those things go. And by the time I came—I think that was his second year, the end of his first season there—he was telling me his story.

So I was helping him at the garden there. Then I learned about the Peace Park, which wasn’t too far from that. So I started volunteering there, as well. I was just doing a lot of volunteering and gardening. And then one day I saw the job for The Law Center—at the time it was the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia, which was PILCOP and—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What is it now officially?

BAXTER: We changed it to The Law Center. We took off the Philadelphia because people were saying “PHILCOP” instead of “PILCOP.” But now everyone still calls us “PILCOP,” so it’s just so confusing. [laughter] Transitions take a while.

So, when I saw the job, it was interesting because checking out I had known a few of the organizations now. I knew about UNI [the Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative (AUNI)] because I had some friends who worked there that I met at conferences nationally. I knew that was a large farm that was organized through a university. So I wasn’t absolutely sure that was the way I wanted to go politically—understanding the dynamics between university and community collaborations, and how challenging those are.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Where is the UNI farm? Is that over in West Philly, or North?

BAXTER: It’s at Bartram’s Garden. They have huge, beautiful farm in the back of Bartram’s Garden, and that was started with the University of Pennsylvania. They were really, really well resourced, of course, but had a very specific mission that was tied to the University of Pennsylvania, not tied to the community.

The other job fell through, so I was doing parenting classes, and then I saw this job [at The Law Center]. And when this job came across—I saw Amy Laura’s name. I had met Amy Laura Cahn, who is the attorney that I work with here—she just left actually, she’s moved on to better things—but she and I had met a couple years ago at a conference in California. I really liked her. She was sweet. She had good politics in the conversations that we were having, when we were talking about these things in Oakland. And then I met her again—we got reacquainted when I first moved back to Philadelphia. There was a conference out here when my friend [Malik ?] from Detroit was in town. He and I went up to the conference, and she [Amy] and I had a whole conversation then, too. This was a year before I moved back here, or a couple of

months before I moved back. So when I saw the thing [job posting], I remember saying, “I’m going to reach out to her when I move here,” so I took her card. And I never did, or maybe I did once or twice and we never really linked up or something like that.

So when I saw the job, I was like, “That’s for me. That job is for me.” I had no idea what a public interest law center did, because who ever had heard of a non-profit law center? I’m not sure, really. I don’t know. I just had never heard of that. It was like, “Okay. I don’t know really what this is, but I know that I respect her politics, and I know that job will allow me to work across gardens across the city. I won’t have to be just loyal to one organization. I’ll be able to work with all these different organizations, and help them in these ways.” That was, for me, really advantageous.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: When did that position open up?

BAXTER: That was in the fall of 2014.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Awesome. When you talk about the “politics,” what does that mean? So I’ve seen you speak before about this relationship—when you work the land, that creates both prosperity and encourages democracy. What are the politics that you’re interested in, in doing this sort of land movement?

BAXTER: Right. Well, I think for me, when I think about when I was speaking about Amy Laura specifically—when I think about politics of white folks—well, for me, actually, I think about it across the board. But when I’m thinking about it in relation to who I’m going to work with, and who I’m going to—we say “throw down with” in the movement, if it’s in movement terms—“who I’m going to throw down with,” then I need to know: what are your personal politics? What are you moving politically, and where do you stand politically when it comes to race, and racial justice, and economic justice? So, racial justice—a lot of people have an understanding of—so when I say politics, [I mean] an understanding of the real issues behind the situation. <T: 10 min> So, what do you understand about the racial politics, the racial situation for black folks and people of color? And where you stand in that is really important to me. So, if you don’t have—people that say, “I’m very much all about social justice,” but you don’t have a racial politic. So if you don’t have a racial analysis, that’s challenging, that’s problematic for me. I don’t want to be with people who just want to do good without really understanding the issues behind the systemic oppressions that affect us.

When I say politics, I’m saying “people’s understanding of the systemic ways that folks are affected through our society.” I understand that there’s a continuum. Some people are here, and some people are here, if you look at it like a metronome. So I choose to work with people who are a little bit more understanding and knowledgeable on their politic around race and gender. That’s really important to me. Amy Laura, in that, sense had really good politics around

race and gender. She is someone I could work with, because I don't have to be constantly explaining why these things are important. Because that's what happens if you're working with people that don't have a politic—then it's a constant education of getting people up to speed and understanding why we fight for these things, and why these things are happening to our communities. And also sometimes convincing them that these things are actually happening, because a lot of people refuse to understand that this is our reality as black folks on this planet. That's what I mean.

So when I saw the job, Amy Laura was there at the interview, and I just was like, "This is my job." Usually that's how I get—I'm just like, "Okay. I know this is for me." I knew it was for me, but I had no idea what this whole thing was. It was my first time applying specifically as an organizer. Because I had done this before, but then I didn't really understand. I'd just do what needed to be done in my community. And people are like, "Oh, you're an organizer." I said, "Okay. That makes sense." So, it was understanding that. That is my role. And knowing that, at that time, understanding what an organizer was, it's like, "Oh, yeah. I can do that. I do that all day." So yes.

Then I started here [at The Law Center], which was awesome. It allowed me to really... I think in my role, because it's a law center, and because of Amy Laura's work before I got here—she's very respected in the urban ag community because she has been championing the causes of urban agriculture since she got into this role, more than anyone before her. Across the nation, she's one of the only—no, she's the only—fulltime lawyer working on these type of issues in the country. What she did here in Philadelphia was just phenomenal. I was thankful to be a part of this machine that was just getting started.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Can you tell me a little bit—so, you mentioned earlier that you saw land as kind of the focal point that brings together all of these issues—that are about justice, that are about the black community, that are about economic issues, that are about gender inequality, and the systemic forces that encourage continued oppression. How does that all come back together for you, in terms of in urban agriculture? Why is that connection point?

BAXTER: Well, I think that, for me, it first stemmed from when I think about the history of the world. A lot of it we don't know, right? We just have this European history and this European understanding of what "civilization" is—quote, unquote. So if you look at the beginning of European history, a lot of what they talk about is fiefdoms. Their whole impetus for moving, for movement, for their migration, was based on them needing land—on not being able to subsidize themselves in the place where they were, and looking to other places to get the thing. So when you look at that, everything stems from this desire to have something that is not yours, which is the land. Because the land is what provides you with everything that you need. If you have land that is barren, then you don't have everything that you need. So land, for me—understanding that everything comes from land, means that the land is most important. So, when I think about that, the work that we do here in the cities—with regards to urban agriculture, and the act of taking over vacant lots, and repurposing them for the community purpose—is taking

back control, taking back power, taking back this ability to sustain ourselves through the land. Even though it's on a small—if you want to just look at it as, “It's just growing food”—but for me, I'm looking at it with a very larger sense of power. Understanding that is what has guided this whole process all along—people's desire to have that land so that they can have what they need. That's sort of where that connects for me. <T: 15 min> Did that—?

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Yes. That makes sense. That's beautiful, because the last time we spoke, you spoke a lot about your environmental awakening being also a spiritual journey. And just wondering how all these things collide together in this one sort of environmental frame is really—I think that helps me understand it.

BAXTER: Yeah. Good. It helps. One of the things I wanted was to make this really clear with my daughter. When we first moved here, I guess within the first year we were here, my daughter and I were driving in the car and we were having this conversation. And she says to me, “Mom, you raised us”—or she says, y'all. “Y'all raised us”—thinking about those folks out there who raised us alternatively—“to understand these systems, and understand how unjust the system is.” She grew up with this very alternative—not what the average person or average family is discussing at their dinner table are things that we discussed about. And she was like, “But, what are we supposed to do with that?” She was like, “I mean, so when I graduate from college—I'm going to college—and when I graduate from college, what am I supposed to do? Knowing the system as it is, how can I rightfully go into this workforce, and expect to contribute in these ways in the system that we are not down with?”

That was a moment for me that I just—I keep that. I hold that as my charge, for my child, to create something for the future. So since that day forward, I've been working towards building a future for my child. Where she goes when she comes out of school is really important to me. Where do her friends go? What are the other opportunities that our young people will have that are not embedding them in a system that is against them? That has been what is guiding me since she was in ninth grade.

So this work started here. And right when I took the job, actually, was when the Land Bank law got passed.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What's the Land Bank law?

BAXTER: So, the Land Bank law was this huge deal here in Philadelphia because it will allow the city to lump private property into one parcel. So private and public property has completely different ways to get access to, if I wanted to—if I had my garden and my garden is on four different lots, those four lots could have four different owners. And those four different owners will have four different processes in order for me to get ownership of that. And that is the most confusing thing in the world for people. Most of the gardens in the city are illegal because of

this. Most of us don't have licenses or leases to be on the land. We don't own the land. We just utilize the land in our space. If we wanted to own land, it would be really challenging because you have all these different processes. And if you don't know the right people, you wouldn't know how to do the thing.

So the Land Bank was designed to create a process within the city that could lump those things together for a garden, for a developer, for community benefit. And if it's a privately owned lot that is tax delinquent, then it can take that into public inventory and group that together, and sell that parcel, or lease that parcel to a community organization. It's very specific. The language was very specific around development to the community, development that would be helpful to the community. It's not for big developers that are just coming in to put in condos. It's very much about low-income housing, or mixed-income housing—not a lot for low-income housing, unfortunately—mixed-income housing, community, elderly housing, those type of things. And gardening.

There was a coalition that formed before I started here called Healthy Foods Green Spaces. It was a coalition of urban ag enthusiasts who came together to help make that link—to put language, it's a very specific language—into the Land Bank during the process of them creating and writing out the law. It was an awesome effort. Mostly institutional. The coalition was mostly institutional. They fought—initially they came together around some zoning laws that they were fighting. And then they stayed coalesced to fight, to change, and to help work with the Land Bank legislation that had just been passed that December. It was all these wonderful things that were supposed to be happening, because the Land Bank was going to make it easier for all of us. When I came on board, one of my jobs was to continue to organize this coalition. But because the Land Bank had been passed, and the nature of coalitions, you sort of coalesce for a thing, and the thing was over. So most of those institutions didn't come back to the table. <T: 20 min> What was left at the table was folks who were really invested in working in urban ag, and moving forward policies in very specific ways.

And so we talked—Amy Laura and I—about what we really wanted the coalition to be. We said that it should really be community informed, it should be community folks at the table, and there should be gardeners in this coalition, not just institutions. So that's what I started to work towards, getting gardeners at the table for the coalition. Let's bring some actual people who are on the ground doing the work into this thing. And then, while I was doing that work, I realized that actually, also, I want people to come to the table with their personal politics, not their organizational politics. So that, with a coalition, it's challenging, because institutions want to be aligned. With a coalition, for them, it looks good. But for us, as employees, that's really challenging because a lot of times we don't—our politics don't align with that organization.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: So, how do you create a coalition that lets that space grow?

BAXTER: Right. You make it known in the beginning, and you say that. You name the thing. So I was very clear with folks when I invited them out to meetings that—"I want you to come

with your personal politics. I'm not asking you to be a part of this because you're—because you work at Food First, or—I'm not asking you to come here because you work at UNI, but because you're a grower. I'm asking you to come here because you care about this issue—these issues." So people were down with that. The folks who came were like, "Oh, yeah. We totally need this." The folks who came were like, "Oh, yeah, because we never—we didn't"—because it was all white before. There was two people of color in the whole coalition, maybe three—three people of color in the whole coalition.

So now I was engaging people of color, growers of color around the city, inviting them out to the meetings. They were excited to be connected to other growers of color, because a lot of times we feel isolated in the work that we're doing, not knowing that all of these other folks are out there doing this work too. And even the folks who were of—there were a few folks of color working in organizations—they needed respite as well, away from organizations that were completely white and not understanding the issues within our communities, and still trying to push forward a mission.

This was—from what folks tell me—this was a place a respite, where we could come together and talk about these issues and support each other in different ways. And also break the siloes. So we were really keen on the sense that "you know what? We would work better together even though our organizations have been trying to keep us pitted against each other. This actually works better when we support each other." So that's what we did—and that's what we continue to do.

We changed our name Soil Generation within a year. So that first year of us being coalesced and growing in a coalition, we decided that we wanted to be another name. Most of us weren't a part of creating that first name. And we were completely different. We looked completely different than that did. So we had this dynamic meeting where we chose our name in like twenty minutes. It was awesome.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: It's a great name.

BAXTER: It's a great name, right!? And the process was awesome too. We talk about it. All of us were like, "Yo, it was the best process ever!" It was right. It just felt right. When it locked in, it was like, "Okay. Yeah. That's who we are." So we moved forward as Soil Generation.

Then a year later we decided that we would name the fact that we were black-led. Because I, being the co-organizer of the thing—we practice shared leadership—they recognize, because this is voluntarily run, I'm pretty much the only one getting paid to do the thing. So I'm leading and moving the organization in certain ways, based on the conversations that we have within the group, and that I have with people within the group individually. So that, for me, is what I consider shared leadership at the time, and also building up folks within the coalition to feel like they can take ownership of the thing. So we decided to name it black-led. It was very important for us to name it black-led, and a lot of the white folks within the group were very

adamant about that as well, because they understand that they're liberation is tied up in black liberation. So when black people get free, everyone gets free, and that's because we're at the bottom of the—you know there's a whole theory behind why, the whole "theory of the oppressed" thing. So the folks who are working within the coalition understand that.

It's multinational, mostly multi-racial, purposefully, so that we can make sure that all the voices are heard. It's still not as POC as I would like it to be. I would totally—we need more Latino representation there. We need more. Also recognizing that Latinos in Philadelphia have a large network within themselves in their communities with growing food. So I don't feel a need for them to be there unless it's a need for them. If you feel like you need to be connected with this larger movement, then do so. We have Asian folks who are part of the group, which is awesome. And black folks who are a part of the group. And then white folks who have been really growing with us and this process—and understanding, and releasing their privilege in certain ways, and using their privilege in certain ways to move things forward. <T: 25 min>

And that brings us up to certain things that I was talking about earlier, with changing the dynamics of what the organizations look like. That came up a lot for us in our conversations, in our talks, and our meetings around "Why is my job not hiring people color? Why is my job not hiring, or maybe keep hiring, people who look like me? He's fresh out of college. He doesn't really have any experience—or he may not even have any farming experience or growing experience." But because these organizational heads are comfortable with people who look like them, they just continue to hire these people. And people have been fired from raising these concerns at their jobs before. People have been pushed out for raising these concerns at certain urban ag organizations in the city. It was real for a lot of the folks who were at the table. I was thankful that at the table was a bunch of radical people, which was awesome! [laughter] They were willing to stand up and take these into—what we found was that being coalesced as a coalition was actually giving us a little bit more power to push these organizations to do the thing.

For me, because I'm not aligned with one specific organization, but I am aligned with a law department, when I go talk to a director and I say, "Why doesn't your staff look like your community?" Then, I'm heard. As opposed to someone just off the street, or a staff person coming and saying the thing. So, the conversations that I was having with EDs when I was meeting with folks was, "Okay, why does your staff look like that? Why does your board look like that? What are the things that you're doing to change that? How would you like me to help? If this is your mission, as a food justice organization, then these are things that you should be thinking about. Economic justice is very much tied to racial justice, and you can't think about one without understanding and acknowledging the other, and participating in changing both of those."

So people started listening. And I feel like, because there was so many of us and we were coalesced, that organization heads were sort of like, "Okay. I've got to get my shit together. People are looking now. Someone is paying attention to me." And so then I started getting—people started sending me job things when they come in—job announcements. Now all of a sudden, I'm the gatekeeper of these job announcements, which I hate. But on the other

hand, I have this extensive listserv of folks of color that I've met throughout the city, who may not be connected—who aren't connected in these other ways to these organizations. I can pass that out to them. So that started a whole other line of work for us to do.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Yeah. You became a hub in this network, a network of empowerment.

BAXTER: Absolutely. Absolutely. Right. So, we were this—and it continues. We've been really helpful. We're really blessed to have gotten lots of people jobs and changed the way people are thinking about their boards. So we're pushing institutions in the city and within urban ag in this really awesome way. Also, at the same time, we're like, "And we still don't like the non-profit industrial system. So what are we going to do about that!?" And so, we said, "Let's form a cooperative. Why don't we show them a model of what collectivity looks like—what we could actually do if we were all working together, resourcing together, in a way to make sure that the community as a whole in the city is cared for?"

EARDLEY-PRYOR: And that's what Soil Generation has become.

BAXTER: And that's what we have become. Yeah.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Tell me a little bit about your work with Urban Creators [at Life Do Grow farm in North Philadelphia]. Is that a part of Soil Generation?

BAXTER: They are another organization.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Within Soil Generation? Oh, I see.

BAXTER: Yes, within Soil Generation. I met them [Urban Creators] through my work here, going around and meeting different orgs and different people growing food in the city. And I immediately thought, because they were young people—like twenty-five, twenty-six—and they had taken over this huge piece of land, and they were doing amazing things there. And because they weren't—they had no understanding of the non-profit system. They had no understanding of how they should properly—quote, unquote—"properly" do things in a non-profit way. They were just moving as a force—just doing it, and I loved that.

I totally support young people doing this thing. That's my thing. I love young people, especially teens, and younger adults, and their vision, because their ability to dream—we have that when we're young, because we have no fear when we're young. We gain that as we get

older—the more experiences we have, the more fearful we get. When folks are young, they just have no fear of repercussion, no fear of messing up, failure. It's really interesting. So they [Urban Creators] were doing things that other farms weren't doing because they were young, by themselves, and had vision. So things at other farms would [have] large boards that dictate what they can and cannot do, and it's always within the realm of the possibilities. But these guys were just like, "We're going to do the impossible, all the time." <T: 30 min>

So they asked me to be on their board, which is the first thing. Before they were a part of Soil Generation they were like, "Oh, we love you. We love you. We want you to be on our board." So that's where I started with Urban Creators. Then, of course, they came into the coalition. Then, in my role—understanding they were having a challenging time keeping a gardener, a farm manager—I said I would do that for them. One, because I love to work in—I need to stay on the ground. I can't just do organizing, because then I get separated from the community. A lot of times you find—I didn't want to be in meetings all day downtown, and not be a part of. So I always kept a gardening job as well.

When I was volunteering at gardens, when I first started working here, I started also working at—it's south—what is the name of that organization? Overbrook Environmental Education Center. And that was because I had met Jerome [Shabazz] at that job, and he was the only black man I knew in the city that had a thing. He was a black man who had an environmental organization, and I was like, "All right. I'm going to work for you." He literally offered me a job the second week that I worked here. [laughter] I was like, "Okay." So I took that job, and it was interesting there. But it wasn't . . . So, it was nice knowing that I was working within a black organization and staying on the ground, and staying connected to people. But it didn't have a huge community base. So a lot of times, it was just me growing food in a tunnel, in a hoop house, because he didn't have any actual—enough land to grow outside on the dirt. So we were growing inside in this hoop house, on top of—it's a garage, very interesting setup. But it's a demonstration garden. So it wasn't really feeding people in a way that—you know, it sort of felt like, "Okay. This is all for show, and not necessarily for actual work." And it was weird for me for a little bit. I wanted to be more infused in more community-based stuff.

When the issue came up there [with Urban Creators], I was still working at the Environmental Center. But I said I would finish out their season for them [at Urban Creators] because their farm manager had left early. So I finished out their season and I decided, actually, I want to stay here [with Urban Creators]. It's a lot more land. It's on the land. I can actually do more growing, and we're more community based. So I left the other job [at Overbrook Environmental Education Center] to take that one [with Urban Creators]. And so I've been there as a farm manager ever since. But I can't, you know, I'm not working there like—most farm managers are there every day and all day long. So luckily, I have a farm assistant who's there daily. I just sort of give direction, put the plants in, and that kind of thing. And so we work together. It's a very collectively run organization. We all, sort of, help out each other in our roles when it's needed.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: This is something that I've been thinking about with the boom that's going on, the building boom in Philadelphia—and this concern about toxics, and lead being particularly an issue. I wonder about this reclaiming land—these lots, these abandoned, vacant lots. What is the process for extracting that [lead and toxicity], to then be able to grow food that's healthy for the community there?

BAXTER: So the thing about soil is it's—the thing about soil, and plants, is that they're amazing, right? And certain plants have the ability to remediate soil. So the studies on soil and contaminants in soil—and the uptake of contaminants in soil into food—are very varied actually. In one of the coolest studies I read—we did a whole soil study here through the Food Policy Council in the city. Because when the city was like, “Okay. We're going to give leases out,” they were like, “What's up with the soil? Because we don't want to be liable for people getting lead contamination and things.” So a lot of times what farms will do, what gardens will do, is they'll build raised beds. Raise beds bring in compost and soil, and just grow in those to avoid the situation with lead.

All farms and gardens are told, or advised, to get your soil tested when you first start. When you first start, wherever, get it tested. It's very inexpensive. It's like five dollars to send it. It's really cheap. You send it in through Penn State Extension or something. And they send it off to a lab, and they send you back your results. There's precautions that you take to make sure that—you know, you use gloves, that kind of thing. But a lot of our farms are very interested and very committed to building soil.

So a lot of us grow directly in the soil. We're using woodchips. We're using cardboard mulching. We're using different mulching methods that help repair—and planting specific plants, to help remediate the soil. So we had a young woman who came out last year—one of the scientists I know—with her little science soil gun, which is really cool. They have these laser guns now that can just “shoo”—and gives you soil readings. She said—this was the farm at Urban Creators—the soil at Urban Creators is some of the best soil that she's tested in the city. She's like, “Ever,” like since she's been testing soil in the city, she's never had soil that clean. I don't know really what that means, because I'm not a scientist like she is. But I was like, “Okay!” Because we just actively build—woodchips, compost, woodchips, compost, newspaper, cardboard, woodchips, compost. **<T: 35 min>** And over the years—it's been seven years now—we've built up.

And that site was a dump, a trash and dump site, for years. It was an old industrial building years and years ago. It wasn't as bad—it's not a Superfund site. It's not a brownfield, where really everything was destroyed. It was just an industrial site. There's a lot of chances that there was all kinds of things in the soil before, including pipes, and all kinds of things under there! Things pop up still. That's how it is with the earth. But a lot of farms are actively building soil, because we know that we can.

And the work that we're doing is helping in a way that's really, really important to the cities with regards to climate. Because it allows us to filter ground water in a way that is not

happening around the city. So the big thing in the city with global warming is ground water, not having—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: The increased precipitation?

BAXTER: Yeah. Because we have so much concrete, we can now charge a stormwater runoff fee. You get charged a stormwater runoff fee because you live in a city with a lot of concrete, and that concrete is not allowing the rain that comes down to go back into our ground water system. It washes off, goes into our rivers and our lakes. It's not getting into our ground water, which is where we source our drinking water from.

So gardens, and not just green space—because green space with grass is a very different experience than when we have plants that have deep roots, that allow the water to go back into the ground water source. When rain comes down in gardens, it is filtered and goes right back into the ground water sources. Which is very helpful for the cities with regards to flooding, which is why you see now, the Water Department has lots of rain gardens all over the city. Because they are acknowledging that, actually, plants help the situation with climate change in the city.

As well as cooling down, too. When we have more trees, and berry bushes, and things that are cooling down the systems as we are heating up in our cities—when we have these green spaces, these green spaces are allowing us to cool down. There are a lot of different ways that urban agriculture is contributing to the sustainability of our cities.

For me it's like, "Why is the city not realizing that as a whole?" Because the Water Department knows, but these guys, they're not—they're like low guys on the totem pole. [laughter] And when you get to council? Councils are really funny, to watch the whole dynamics. The folks who are in power are still reticent to accept the fact that these are really necessary. They're going to be way more necessary moving forward, with climate change the way that it is, than they are even now. Understanding that these green spaces afford us a lot of different ways to sustain the systems that we currently have—even though we would like those to change the [systems] that we have.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Great. This sounds like a good opportunity for us transition into our future visioning part. I'd like to start off by asking some abstract questions, and then we'll just kind of move into the vision piece of it. Does that sound good? Is there anything, before we move into the future, that you want to talk about from the past that we haven't covered?

BAXTER: I can't think of any right now.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: All right. Well, the first question I would ask that's sort of the abstract transition is: what are some of things that you value most—that you love most?

BAXTER: People. Land. Love. That's pretty much it.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Love it. What are some things that scare you, that you fear most?

BAXTER: Injustice, and the manifestations of it. I think that's pretty much it.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What are some things that you would be willing to fight for?

BAXTER: Things that I do fight for, still, or currently. I fight for our right to exist in a way that's meaningful, and so whatever that looks like, but yeah. I'm willing to fight for our right to live meaningful every day. That's what I'm doing. Yeah.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What are some of the things that make you most hopeful?

BAXTER: Children! Children make me most hopeful, and seeing their response to the natural world around them. It's like, "Yeah. We'll be okay."

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Yeah. I love it. When you think of the word "energy"—that's kind of an abstract word itself in some way. What comes to mind when you think of energy?

BAXTER: When I think of energy I think of everything, actually. [laughter] So, I think of the fact that energy is around us consistently. Everything that we know of is created by energy. So I think of how large the concept of energy is, and how we sort of narrow it down, and think about how we get our appliances to work. <T: 40 min> That's such a small aspect of what energy is to us. So, yeah, I think of everything when I think about energy.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Yeah. What isn't energy?

BAXTER: What isn't energy? Right.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Well, let's think a little bit about Philadelphia's energy future. Right now there's—for the future-visioning piece—you can go on all of these different extremes. There's business as usual and the dystopic sort of tale that might happen that way. There's the utopian sort of side—where all of your dreams, all of our wishes coming true, whatever that might be. And there's maybe a hybrid somewhere in there. So however you want to imagine these futures, these are your futures to dream with.

If we are going to launch fifty years into the future, into the year 2067, what does Philly feel like? What does life in Philly feel like, and how is energy a part of life in that fifty-years-from-now future?

BAXTER: [Yes]. All right. So, fifty years in the past was

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Fifty years in the past was 1967. Oil was the king energy source. Philadelphia was in the midst of a transition. The nation itself was in a transition culturally, socially, economically. Issues of gender were just kind of emerging as far—in a lot of contexts—as far as power is concerned. The environmental movement was kind of moving forward in a different way at that time. Yeah, and absolutely, black identity, and black consciousness was continuing to expand at an even broader and bigger rate. So, that was fifty years in the past. For fifty years in the future, in the year 2067, talk to me about Philadelphia.

BAXTER: So, fifty years in the future for me will probably look like a hybrid situation happening with us trying to get off of fossil fuels. Understand, for me, I feel like that's inevitable. So, inevitably we have to be off of fossil fuels. It's like drugs. Yeah. Get off of fossil fuels. So fifty years in the future, we are transitioning between letting go of the fossil fuels, and accepting more of the renewable sources that we know we can achieve, that we have access to, that we have ways to create, which for me is understandably there. We have the science of how to harness energy and have had it for over a hundred years, and how to do so in way that's free.

So, the next fifty years is going to be them trying to figure out how to utilize that, to take that information and put a value to it so that people can't get it for free. So that—how do we—sort of like the marijuana thing. How do we regulate this in a way that only certain people have access to the creation of it, and folks who want it have to pay to get it. So, it's really the next fifty years trying to create the system of ushering in renewable energy.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: That'll be about existing power forces trying to create a valuation on that to then sell it?

BAXTER: Yes. That's where it will be—so in the middle of that. It'd be pretty chaotic. It's going to be pretty chaotic in fifty years.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Yeah. What does Philly look like in fifty years? Is it much different from today? Are people moving around in different ways?

BAXTER: Yeah. I think it is much different. It's much whiter than it was—than it is now. It's a lot more crowded. In my head, it's more like Hong Kong. So, there's a lot more people here—a lot more white folks here.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Why more white folks?

BAXTER: Because that's the trend.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: For the city?

BAXTER: Yeah. That's the trend. That's what's happening now. Folks are coming back. White folks are reclaiming land that they've—maybe their parents had years ago, and that kind of thing. The whole gentrification thing is based on young millennials wanting to come back to the city, but also on our older folks who want to be closer to the resources that they need, who maybe moved out to rural space—suburban spaces where they were driving. And now they don't want to drive so much. It's more convenient. So, the convenience of the city and having things close to you—resources close to you that you need is appealing to a lot of people right now.

Also that's what the push is. The larger push nationally and internationally is to get folks into the urban centers. We hear all about the super urban centers that are going to happen, and that's based on the fact that all the needs, all the resources are going to be in these cities, in these huge hubs. So, I think it's going to be a lot, a lot more crowded, and a lot more white folks. That's what it looks like to me. <T: 45 min>

Competitively, energy is going to be hugely competitive. There'll be a whole lot more players on the scene, because now we have renewable energy folks coming, and folks that were so adamant to stay with fossil fuels are going to be trying to catch up to the folks who already have the—so that those folks, those [renewable] companies will be growing and getting more money, and then probably changing. Unfortunately, the way that this thing goes—and then probably changing their values, based on economic trends. So it may not be so much that they're green,—the companies that are right now, really, about this renewable energy, because I think it's the right thing. Once profits start rolling in, it's going to be very much more about money than it is about the green thing, the sustainability. They're going to change and be a lot more greedy than they are now. Because they're just playing small fish now. When they start to

get that taste of what can be, they're going to want more. So we're going to have a lot more greedy, greedy guzzlers trying to get renewable energy versus—you know, it's sort of like the soda tax thing, where you have these huge soda companies who ally themselves with these community groups to say “we don't want to the sugar tax.” It's weird. Because it serves all purposes. I see that for energy sources in fifty years. That's what fifty years looks like.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: In fifty years, what's the—the food movement that you're building here now, what's it look like in fifty years? Because that's a big part of energy, too. Where are people getting their internal—their energy to move—their food?

BAXTER: Yes. So, I see small groups of—what's the word I was using? “Village style.” Small groups of land trusts within the city that are caring and stewarding land in a way that is helping them sustain the larger systems. A lot of the time, we hear and we know about these big things, or these big institutions. But the smaller ones are the ones that sort of comprise and make up what's really happening on the ground. So I think that that's going to continue in the future. It's where—we'll have little pockets of land trust where people are stewarding land in a very thoughtful way and practicing very thoughtful ways of being together on the land in urban spaces.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: It's more like neighborhood cooperatives.

BAXTER: Yeah. I say community land trusts because that's what those folks own and have a stake in the land and where they live, and staying in these cities, and helping them to sustain themselves. Because for me, I would think that we would all roll out of this city and go live in some rural spaces, but people are really committed to the idea of living these urban lifestyles. So for those who are committed to living urban style, and also committed to the Earth, they're going to create their own little, small Meccas of earthliness within the city. So, there will be little small groups of earth workers. [laughter]

EARDLEY-PRYOR: I love it. Let's move forward, and jump about one hundred twenty-three years—we're looking at the year 2140. So, almost one hundred twenty-five years in the future.

As a reference point, if we step back in time—one hundred twenty-three years in the past was the year 1894. So, this was when Milton Hershey is founding his first chocolate company. Thomas Edison had just built the world's first ever coal-fired electricity plant in New York, and coal had just—in the United States particularly—just overtaken wood as a dominant energy source. This is really before the age of oil as a means of transportation and energy, or electricity generation. So, that was one hundred twenty-three years in the past.

I'm interested in what 2140 in the future looks like. Long term, scientists of course are anticipating all sorts of climatic effects that could destabilize governments, increase waves of refugees, the precipitation of this area in particular, in Philadelphia, is expected to rise. As you mentioned, and some of the neighborhoods around our tidal rivers could be inundated and slightly flooded. But there's also potential of collapse of agriculture as a result of the climatic changes, and whether plants can adapt fast enough, and whether genetic modifications to those plants can be implemented.

So, there's a lot of questions about what the year 2140 could be like. It's one hundred twenty-five years from now. What's your vision for Philadelphia in the year 2140?

BAXTER: Right. Yeah. So 2140 is completely different! Everything has changed. Buildings have changed. We don't have the same energy means as before. Let's say that in one hundred twenty-five years those folks who have been working under—sort of below the radar on different types of energy sourcing have had time to really put together the understandings of these—the workings of energy in our spaces, and how we can harness energy in different ways.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What are some of these ways that you're picturing? <T: 50 min>

BAXTER: One of the ways that I'm picturing is from life. I feel we're looking towards how we can harness our personal, bodily energy. So I should be walking down the street and my iPod or iPhone is playing because it's linked into my system somehow—into my body somewhere. So I am generating the energy that's necessary for my iPod to run as I jog, or as I'm just walking down the street. I feel like there will be a whole lot more ways that people have been able to explore energy sourcing.

So, I don't see big—because it's one hundred twenty-five years later—I definitely see government almost non-existence, or very chaotic, and them not serving the community in a certain way. Over so much time, people have stopped buying into government and have created their own little societies. So there's these smaller societies that are ruling—that are creating their own ways of sustaining themselves based on their resources. You will have some folks who are really innovative. You have some folks—money folks—who will still be reliant on those large systems to keep them afloat, because that's what they know, right? And those folks who are more innovative will be now—so now there's this shift. So we were at the fifty-year mark—fifty years from now, everything was still as it was.

But now one hundred twenty years later, folks are separated. There's not so much the “them and us,” there's a whole lot of smaller groups of—what are they? Affinity groups—of folks coming together, and supporting themselves in specific ways, because they know they have to because the government isn't serving them. It's been long enough. Folks know this is not the case, and so they've started to create their own systems among themselves. So, we have

smaller systems interplaying with each other, and folks are working together collaboratively to figure out how to get their energy needs sourced.

Agriculture, and the needs for agriculture . . . I feel like those folks who were fifty years [ahead in 2067], who were seventy years before [2140], those who were in these smaller—stewarding lands in certain ways—will be a lot more influential in showing and growing and sharing that knowledge with other people who are understanding a little bit more now. Like, “Okay, these guys might have an answer, because where the rest of us are standing in three inches of water, these guys over here have this whole water filtration system that is allowing them to exist in a certain way. So how do we do that too?” So then you see that the folks who were stewarding land and living in a certain way start to be the leaders and the thinkers for the “how do we break this out?” And so those are folks, now in one hundred twenty years are—so that’s sort of the turn-around.

Now those folks who had to be most resilient—because they had the least resources, because they’ve built up their resilience, and built up their understanding and knowledge base due to their having to be resilient—are now the folks who are leading the thing, because they know best how to do the thing. Energy is being sourced in various ways because we understand that the siloes and big systems never worked for us. So, we are valuing smaller systems and so there’s a lot of small ways that we’re sourcing our energies—very diverse ways of sourcing energy, not just one big system of coal, or one big system of . . . so yeah, there’s a whole lot of—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What do buildings look like? What’s it look like to walk—what does it feel like to walk throughout the streets of Philadelphia?

BAXTER: I feel like the streets are spongy. [laughter] I feel like the streets are spongy and not really this—the cement is cracked up, and earth has seeped in, and because water is so present everywhere and not being able to go back, it has created this sort of this marshy, almost slimy—you know how you see leftover algae, sort of, in streets? Yeah, it’s really almost Jurassic—But not, because you have these large constructions, these large buildings that served a purpose at one time.

So like North Philly now [in 2017], you have these old industrial buildings down there now. At the turn of the century [in 1900], they were alive and flourishing. Now they’re just broken windows and big giant Those now [in 2140] have grass and everything. Vines have grown all over everything.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Nature has reclaimed those buildings.

BAXTER: Nature is reclaiming the place to a certain way, most definitely. Then what's happening now is that you don't have these large Meccas. Where are all the people? I think a lot of people are going to be gone. So, I think that—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Philly's population will have shrunk? <T: 55 min>

BAXTER: Yeah. I think that a lot of populations will have shrunk across the world due to climate change—that a lot of people are going to die. A lot of us aren't going to make it because of this so—the varied situations that we have with the weather and the land. As a response to that, people are going to die. So it will be a smaller population.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: How are those people that are living in Philly—how are they moving around? How are they getting around?

BAXTER: Horseback. Just kidding. [laughter]

EARDLEY-PRYOR: I like that vision!

BAXTER: I know. Right? We all got horses! [laughter] So maybe some horsebacks? I don't know. You know, I think about the future cars, man, I just have no idea where that's going go. I think about *The Fifth Element*, often—Bruce Willis in these flying contraptions, and these little, tiny parking garages. And I'm like, “Oh, my God, please don't let that be our future.” At the same time recognizing that it absolutely could be.

In my future, we're not so technical. It's not so technical because technology started to, at some point—and will go in to that in the three hundreds—so technology at some point to is starting to co-coexist with the environment, and understanding how they can work together collaboratively in ways that are not so demanding of the Earth. Because the folks that are doing—the techy folks—are understanding that they have also a role in trying to save us here, to allow humans to still exist on this planet. And I say “save us”—I mean as humans. Because I don't think the Earth is going anywhere, man. We're not killing the Earth. We're killing our ability to live on the Earth. And so hopefully folks are being more politicized. So, their actions of technology—and now technology is serving the environment in a better way. So, yeah. So, I don't know what cars will look like in that sense. I don't know if we'll be having cars.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Well, let's think even further, because you're mentioning—you're already—I can see you're starting to creep into thinking about what that three hundred-year

mark looks like. So, if we launch the to year 2312, that's two hundred ninety-five years in the future.

As a reference point—for us to step back from today—two hundred ninety-five years ago was the year 1722. All right. So, North America was dominated by Native American cultures across most of the continent. There were some pretty strong white colonization practices happening along the coasts, some battles and a lot of disease being moved because of that. But Philadelphia as a city did exist. It was forty years old at that point. But the [American] Revolution that began in Philadelphia, or was the political hub for it, was another half-century into the future. So it's a pretty long time ago. Dominant energy sources, by far, were wood, along with food and plants—food and plants that were fed to people or to animals, and then their muscle power is what created most of the energy, along with burning wood and water.

So if we're going to step forward not one hundred fifty years, but twice that: three hundred years into the future from today—into the year 2312—what's Philly like?

BAXTER: Yeah. So, Philly is—

EARDLEY-PRYOR: This Philly here?

BAXTER: This Philly here. [laughter] So I think that we are going to be growing food and growing food indoors in some ways, sort of like those—not just indoors, also—in order to supply what we need agriculturally. We would have created much more highly intensely grown foodways, which will require us to do more vertical growing. So you'll see large paths of food growing vertically in these constructive, interesting ways.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: So, buildings that are basically farms?

BAXTER: [Yes]. It used to be buildings, but people can't dwell—they are dwellings that used to be, but their materials haven't broken down yet. They're still being used and repurposed in this other way to help to grow food.

Technically we've advanced to the point where we are utilizing our body systems. That's what I was saying before. <T: 60 min> We are traveling by our own means. We're able to travel around the city with a thought, in some ways. Shielding ourselves, or creating, or utilizing this body as a machine, in a way that's really moving us around the city. So, like a skateboard, but you're just on your thing. So, we don't really need cars anymore. So cars are a thing of the past because—understand that this body we have can be manufactured to travel in these other ways. So we're traveling with our bodies around to the places that we need to get to, and to see the people that we need to see.

Our energy sources are still varied. We have a huge amount of different ways that we collect energy to enact the things that we need to do. So, we are never again going to be resourcing just one energy source. We have understood that our energy needs have to be met by a diverse system of –

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What are some of those different ways that you have in mind?

BAXTER: Water. Water is going to be hugely present. It will be, again. We're three hundred years in the future, so there's less people because there's less livable land—land that people can actually live on and resource. So let's hope that Philadelphia is still here! [laughter] But I feel like the way that Philadelphia is positioned on the oceanic, like geographically, that this will still exist. Most definitely. Not as large as it is, not as large of a city as it is. We'll lose some. We're going to have lost some feet—maybe a mile in or something like that. But we will still stand, luckily, because we're not on the ocean's edge, but on the river's edge. And also because we're sourced between three rivers. So we do have access to fresh water, which is going to bring more people probably down to our area but on a smaller—because there's less people in the world altogether. It's not as many as when it was fifty years later [from 2017], at the height. I think fifty years from now will be the height of what the population density will be in the city here. In three hundred years from now, it will be lessened, of course, a lot. But then, also, folks from around are coming into the city to get their resources and certain needs.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: So just so I can follow that, the population will peak in fifty years from now [in 2017]. Then, in one hundred twenty-five years, it will drop, because they'll be dealing with all these climate effects. But in three hundred years, the population will rise again, but not quite to the crazy levels that it will be—I love it. Okay. I love this vision.

BAXTER: But not to the level of from—yes, exactly. [laughter] So, right, so we're—our energies are being met from all different, from all—and thoughtfully. But you also have greed. I would think that greed is always going to be in the picture.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Less greed?

BAXTER: I said—yes, there will be less greed. Greed will always be in the picture, but hopefully less greed.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: What do you picture in its place? Like what are the politics and the way that Philadelphians are interacting with each other?

BAXTER: Right. So, hopefully we—[laughter] You know, I'm hopeful that three hundred years from now—I don't—but I'm hopeful that the race situation is figured out. I'm hopeful that the poverty situation is figured out, where we have a better understanding of what was driving poverty. And since those systems have been destroyed—and the rebuilding required those people who were most oppressed, they're now the knowledge holders. Those folks have chosen to exist and to organize in a different way, in a way that's not so oppressive of others. We're not recreating what was done to us but allowing something new to unfold.

In doing so, there is a lot of opposition. So there's insurgent groups of folks who don't want to give up power from the past, [laughter] who are doing all these really cruel things to—so you have to have some kind of defense. And that defense in three hundred years is not going to look like what it looks like now—with these really cruel and crude ways of destroying people—but these really awesome ways of generating and manifesting energy to protect ourselves and our communities.

So, you might see large, green domes that encapsulates the urban spaces where people are dwelling to keep out negative forces who would come in to destroy us. [laughter] So yeah, we have an understanding energy in a certain way, being able to harness energy in a certain way to protect ourselves from outside harm. So, we would have force fields, and things like that, [laughter] that allows us to not be totally inundated from other folks who are trying to get to the sources of things. <T: 65 min>

EARDLEY-PRYOR: Yeah. So, one of the things that I heard is the poverty issue will have been solved, or at least moving toward a solution in terms of equity. But you said that the race issue still would be present. Talk to me about why. Why do you think that's happening in three hundred years?

BAXTER: Yeah. I think that—I had a friend years ago, and she said to me, “When we look at ourselves as energy beings, and understand ourselves to be able to be—sort of... As creators, we could manifest lots of things if we didn't have fears, and different blockages keeping us from doing that.” Lots of different things—maybe the ways that we eat food—all of these different things that sort of keep us from tuning into our real—to the potential of the power that we have within these bodies, these shells.” So we were talking about race, and how sort of race evolved, understanding that as a civilization—folks—civilization started in what we know now as Africa. And so everyone sort of moved from that space around the globe. So why do we even have these different colors, and these different shades of what we are? It's very much related to our environments, and where we ended up being, where our folks laid down roots, and contributed to.

So our conversation was around, “Why now, still two thousand years later, are we still holding these colors, even though our environments and our situations have changed?” And she

said to me—it was just such a simple response, I mean, it's so weird that I just never thought about that before—she said, “Because we want to.” So understanding that this is psychological, that race was not just a social construct, but now is being held as a kind of psychological construct. How do we move past that? I think it's going to take a little bit longer than—we've been out of slavery—what? Slavery happened, what five hundred years ago, right? It began around five hundred years ago, and what? We are still in the midst of figuring this shit out. So I don't think at all that three hundred years from now, we'll have that figured out. I don't. I think we'll still be dealing with the race issue.

And I mean, three hundred years from now, there might be all kinds of different races down here! [laughter] We could have all kinds of different beings, sentient beings, that are living side by side with us. We might have energy sources and information that we never had before based on alien technology and alien influence that we've been pretending is not there, and allowing that to be a part of our society, and acknowledging that. I would imagine that—I have no idea what three hundred years is going to look like—because I expect the alien influence to be way more present, and accepted, and understood, and acknowledged than it is now. And that will unlock and open up this opportunity for us to experience and experiment with lots of different ways of being that we haven't in the past, because we've been trying to control the narrative of what is actually out there. Yeah.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: I love it. I love it. Is there anything else you want to share in terms of your vision of Philadelphia and its future, what you hope for, what you're concerned about, what you would love to see happen?

BAXTER: Yeah. I don't have . . . I think that I dream about the future, and I play in the future—in the concept of and the realm of future—because I can and because it's fun. And at the same time, I recognize and acknowledge that—I believe that this is a design, that there's a perfect design to the way things move within the universe, actually. And that, just our soul—the things that are happening here Earth—are a very small part of the changes that we experience, that there's this whole universal system that is also contributing to the changes that are happening here. So, because we don't acknowledge that, and we don't really have a deep understanding of what is going on universally in our cosmos, we haven't been able to implement that, and sort of put that in a place here, in our daily lives, in order to understand its influence on us in the future. So I see the future as whatever it should be when that future comes around. And understanding that this is perfect design—or not perfect design, but just a design—and that things fall and follow patterns in a way that it was created.

EARDLEY-PRYOR: I love it. Thank you so much for your time.

BAXTER: Thank you, Roger. This was fun.

[END OF AUDIO, FILE 2]

[END OF INTERVIEW]