

Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project
Interview with Bonnetta Adeeb by Chris Keeve
Conducted on July 26th, 2023 in Accokeek, MD

[00:00:00] **LuAnna Nesbitt:** The following interview is a part of the Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project. It was conducted in Accokeek, Maryland by interviewer Chris Keeve on July 26, 2023. The narrator of this oral history is Bonnetta Adeeb.

[00:00:12] **Chris Keeve:** Thanks again for doing this. Just to start us off, I want to invite you to introduce yourself, uh, and maybe share some aspects of your life that you feel are important for people to hear about.

[00:00:31] **Bonnetta Adeeb:** Thank you. My name is Bonnetta Adeeb. I am the mother of three daughters. I am the wife of Hassan Adeeb. I am the grandmother of two beautiful boys. And I come from, a family that had a lot of pride in their African roots. They were followers of Marcus Garvey. And, it taught me that black was beautiful.

And believe it or not, in my day, that was kind of unusual. Uh, I was a prized child because I was a little chocolate one. And so, uh, the pride that my family took in me and the belief that I could do what I wanted to do, that, um, so, I was blessed to come from a family that felt that I was a valuable child.

I was taught to believe in myself, that whatever I wanted to do, I could do. Of course, it was backed up by that statement that I hear all the time, that Lord will make a way. You know, make a way out of no way. So, uh, and they would say things like, well, just because so and so doesn't have a job doesn't mean you won't get one.

You know, because you're a blessed child. We've prayed for you, and you'll be able to, to do what you need to do. You know, and just let your faith work for you. And I think that that has, uh, has been very informative, you know, to move forward in life. Uh, even when I couldn't see the path. You know, I would look for signs that I was on the right track.

My mother said that when African, Africans would walk through the forest, uh, they could move forward. Slowly, but they would get a sense that there was danger and she said they could feel like, you know, the hair stand up on the back of their head and that was intuition. And that I should always rely on that, on my intuition, because it could save me and I should trust that.

So, um, so much of my life, particularly in these last years since retirement, has been, me trying to fulfill a desire to serve, to serve my people, to make a difference in a bigger way, a more substantial way. I had 37 years as a school teacher, which I loved. I really wanted to play a role in the life of people. But after I retired, I wasn't satisfied.

And so I spent the first few months almost in a meditative state saying what can I do to, to solve some of these problems that I see around me. And uh, those opportunities have come to me through my work with STEAM Onward and Ujamaa and the Cooperative Gardens Commission

and all the partners and friends that have joined the work that we're doing with some of the same kind of faith that I have, is that maybe you've never done it before. And maybe you don't know what to do next, but you know, you can read, you can, you can figure things out and you, you have some common sense and you've picked up some scholarship and with a combination of those things and faith in the future and faith in yourself to make good decisions about people, you can get things done and it's been an incredible blessing and I really feel I have a lot of opportunities to do public speaking that people really need me to tell them that things can go good.

I mean, there's so many things that would discourage you. The news is depressing. You know, there's people hungry, there's wars, there's famine, there's migration, there's climate change, but then always, it's what can I do? You know, what's my role? Can I be part of the solution? And I have been so blessed to, along with this community, to be able to shape some, some ventures, some ideas, some projects that can get at the heart of some of the root challenges that Black communities are facing, that women and children are facing, and, uh, and even more on a broad scale, the work we're doing toward regenerative agriculture and its possible impact on this, the climate and on Mother Earth.

So, uh, you know, it's a humbling position. I, I spend a lot of time in meditation and in prayer. And I'm very grateful. And I'm grateful that this is the way I get to experience my senior years. What could be better? It's really cool.

[00:05:25] **Chris Keeve:** So I'm thinking about those stories that your family gave you of the Africans walking through the forest. I'm wondering if you might like to share some of the other stories that were imparted to you, maybe on the land in which you were growing up?

[00:05:41] **Bonnetta Adeeb:** Well, um, my family is from North Carolina. My mother and my father are both from North Carolina. My parents divorced when I was an infant. And I lived with my grandparents in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. My family was originally from, uh, South Carolina. And my grandfather was a minister. And, uh, he was a businessman, a local businessman. And he did a lot of evangelical work, so he traveled a lot. And my grandfather was extremely keen on doing what he felt was his mission, which is, is, is caring for others.

You know, his, his Christian walk, that's what they used to talk about, the Christian walk, and all the obligations that came with being a good person. And, you know, WWJD, you know, what would Jesus do, you know. And, uh, that opportunity was manifested, uh, believe it or not, a lot through food. Because one of the things that you can do when you have a brother, or you see someone in stress, his food is comforting.

So, uh, we always had, you know, a huge garden. I, I called it, called it almost a truck farm, because they raised a lot of food, much more food than we could ever consume. And so, I would travel with my grandfather as he went out in the community to distribute food. And then as I got older, I, we worked with the Salvation Army with missionary groups and, uh, there was always a belief that if you did for others, you would surely be blessed. I think I can testify that's pretty, it's been pretty real for me. You know, it's really, it is more blessed to give than to receive,

you know, so I come from this. I think it's such a rich heritage of people who even during slavery time were able to impart stories and keep the family going as much as possible.

On my grandmother's side was the story of a woman named Sookie. She was an African woman who was enslaved in Rock Hill, South Carolina. And she was a very tiny little woman. And the way they described her was that she was so strong, you know, she could work. You know, she could do farm work, and the master was very interested in her.

And so, but she was a fighter, and she fought him, you know, but I think she had three children. Uh, you know, they set her back, you know, it was like an oak tree, you know, from all the whipping she had. She took a lot of beating, but she kept on, she kept on, uh, coming. And then one of her sons, uh, had a, had a married another woman who's another African said two generations of African women back to back and her name was Mary and there again amazing healers knew how to forge find out all the nutrients in the foot woods in the forest there's a lot of talk about going into the woods for food, for clothing, for healing, and I know there was, there was spiritual things.

There was something happening in terms of a worship also in that, and there was a safety in the woods. Uh, so I never was afraid of the woods. I always found it a place of, of comfort and solitude. As a, a woman, as a mother, I saw a film called Beloved. And in this film, Beloved, there's a scene where they are in the woods, having a religious ceremony. They call it a shout dance. And so there, it's a circle and there, they're singing and they're, they're, uh, you know, praising God. And then I find it so interesting to see it, people believe that we lost our African traditions, but we really kind of didn't. I mean, maybe we lost the name of it. I mean, maybe we forgot that, that gumbo, you know, was okra, you know, the word, but you know, the associations are there. And so what I hope to do with this work we're doing with the, with the seed stories is to help other families wake up the power and the knowledge that's passed from generation to generation.

Unfortunately, some people have been robbed of, of the beautiful stories. They've been robbed of the joy. And when they're told the stories, they don't hear the story of resistance and survival. You know, I think that's so important is to resist things that happen to you. You don't have to take life laying down. You can fight for what you want and what you believe. And, you know, as a grandmother, I think I'm uniquely in the position to fight.

So would I fight for what I think is right? I'm fighting for Kaya and Jabari, but I'm fighting for all the other children out there, you know. And when you look at the fact that Ujamaa was basically organized by Grandmother and us doing COVID feeling like we couldn't sit by and just watch things fall apart knowing that people were hungry. And we knew how to feed them. We had ideas and we had, we could do better. You know, we didn't have to take life just the way it's diff to you. You can take that, you know, and make something beautiful out of it. You know, so, uh, that's, that's, Ujamaa was born out of the spirit of grandmothers fighting for their families and protection of their families and support of their families.

And so, I must be honest with you, I wasn't excited about being a grandmother because I wanted to have a business and a whole life after I retired. And I knew because I came from such a line of amazing grandmothers that I would have to, prior to my grandchildren that all the things I wanted to do in my life, I was like, oh my god my kids finally grew up and they went away to college and everything's good But no that my grandchildren have simply given me more fire. They've they have stoked my flame of, of resistance and fighting for food justice and sovereignty and dignity in the face of insurmountable insults, you know, the thousands of insults that are being slung at my people every day, you know, and, but still we rise, you know, and we can conquer, but you really can't do a lot on an empty stomach.

You know, you need good nutrition, you need a full belly, and you need to be eating foods that are good for you. And, uh, you need to know the common remedies if you have a sore throat. You know, do you have to go to the drugstore? I mean, maybe some lemon and ginger or some, my grandmother used to make this soup out of onions, sliced real thin, garlic, and lemons, and honey. And she would boil that down in a pot till it made a syrup. And that, you would sip on that. It was curative. I mean, you couldn't, you couldn't keep a cold sip on that good old stuff.

And the wholehouse, you know, that they would have. Calamus root, uh, sassafras, alfalfa, all the things that were in our house, in our kitchen. They were used on a daily basis. And I think I must've been about 16 years old before I actually went to a doctor. You know, they had, there was a whole cabinet that was full of all kinds of, of leaves and bark and all kinds of stuff. And, you know, as a child, you don't really understand how precious that knowledge is.

Especially when you're blessed to have, you know, the old folks live with me. I mean, my, I was, uh, I was up in my 30s when my grandmother passed, so I got a chance to learn so much from her. And my mother, of course, carried on all that work, because my mother was a fierce gardener. She loved flowers, but she loved greens. We had greens every day, different kind of greens. It's harder to do that now. It's harder to have access to all the greens. But our goal is to reclaim them. You know, collards are important. And, they're clearly much more sacred than we ever knew. Because, the Heirloom Collard Project has its own life, you know.

Let me talk about one magical thing I found out about collards. So when I was a child, like I said, we had greens every day. It was all kinds of greens growing. And, um, my best friend from Los Angeles, one of my best friends is, her name is Lynn Potato Head, that's what we call her. My three year old daughter named her that because she couldn't say her name, but Tavia called her Potato Head.

So, she, she, uh, my mother took care of, uh, all my friends, their children. So she took care of my babies, my mother and my grandmother, and, and ten of my, uh, uh, closest friends, their kids. And so my friends could see, you know, when you're in the midst of something, you don't see it. But they said ours was the only house that was completely food if you were in the backyard.

You know, there were all kinds of fruit trees. I do remember corn. There was chayote growing on a fence. It was Meyer lemons. There was, you know, mustard, turnip, collard. There was crest,

we hunted for wild mustard greens. Uh, when I remember when the heels would turn yellow, when the mustard was blooming, there was just a plethora of wild things.

We used, uh, a lot of, um, eucalyptus in California because eucalyptus is a tree, but has these leaves. And they would put those leaves in alcohol and let them sit. And that would be a remedy. Uh, the farm workers did it. They made these curative remedies out of eucalyptus. But there were always things that were made out of, you know, whatever was around.

Also, my mother was a lover of flowers. She had orchids and she loved zucchini and she would do all kinds of things with zucchini. Crooked neck squash, sweet potatoes, sweet potato pie, you know. And, then because most of our neighbors were Asian and, and from Central Latin America, you know, we, we, um, we, we ate beans.

Beans was a regular thing that we ate in the South, but when we went to California, then we had access to more variety of beans. And I think that it made, it made you stronger. I think it made you psychologically stronger. It's a big old pot of beans when you come home from school, you know, and, and they would bake fresh bread. There would be cornbread and there would be crackling bread. And there would be biscuits and, and then there would be a dessert every day. There would be peach cobbler, nectarine, sometime it would be plum. There will be berries, all kinds of canned fruit, canned apples, apple brown Betty, everything was freshly made.

And then. You know, it was interesting how these memories come to me, just as I said that I could see a picture of my kitchen and there was a big juicer there and I remember they would make green drink. Now that was, I was a pretty big girl when the seniors started eating green water, having green water every day.

Do you know what it is? They would take everything green and they would go in the juicer and they would keep it in the refrigerator. So, there would be celery and parsley and whatever kind of wild greens they could find. There would be a spinach and, um, turnip greens and any leafy green and there would be like a lemon sometimes in there and, uh, it wasn't sweet. It was a drink, a curative drink that they drank every day. Now, you know, I should probably be drinking that, shouldn't I? I don't have a juicer.

Oh, carrots. They would buy carrots by the case when I was, you know, a teenager. But, of course, they raised all that stuff when I was a girl and they would just, uh, juice it and, and keep the green water.

And my mother did that. My grandparents did it. Those things, they were fresh, garden fresh. And it's something they produced enough of it to give it away. And we felt, we didn't feel poor. Because we have what we needed. So I always have the contention that gardeners and the role of gardeners in a society would change a lot of the pessimism that people have.

I was listening to a report in the news where people were saying that things are going so poor, this country's so, you know, they're so bad, you know, the future, you know, these are hard times. It was like, these are not hard times. Okay. These are not hard times. But people are depressed. They feel bad. They feel sad.

But don't you know, if they were like me and they came home to a peach cobbler at the end of the day, or they had some pound cake, you know, some homemade ice cream made with peach, they would make with peaches or they would, we would have black walnuts. We would crack black walnuts. These were jobs that kids did.

We had all these little hand jobs. We would have to string the string beans, you know, and snap them. And, and another job that children had to do. And maybe it wasn't so exciting, but we had to ring chickens necks. So we raised two, between 200 and 400 chickens. And, you know, when it was slaughter time, in the fall, they would slaughter, and they would have a hog, and we would have a cow, and all the family members would come around, and they would do this, these, these events, they would cook up, make hog head sauce, they would make hams, smoke hams, sausage, but everything was raised by them, the bulk of what they ate.

And to me, that sovereignty, that sovereignty over your life, when you control what you eat, and you can share with the people you love and you care about. Now, of course, people are poor. So if you live in, in a housing project and you don't have access to fresh fruit and vegetables, you don't have access to, to, uh, even a decent refrigerator.

Like we were working with homeless families in Charles County. They didn't have, there were no stoves, no oven. So if we gave them fresh vegetables, there was no knife, no cutting utensils. So they couldn't even cut up fresh vegetables if we gave them to them. So that's what makes you poor, is the inability to take care of yourself.

If you had a bowl of snap beans, and a whole bowl of black eyed peas that you had to shell, and you could eat them as you went. And a whole bowl of peanut that you had to, you are not hungry. You cannot be as poor if you have all the food you need. And I, I truly believe that one of the things facing America is the plague of being hangry. Mad and, and hungry. It's a nasty combination.

So I think that the work we're doing around food sovereignty and reclaiming our heritage, telling the good stories, people go fishing and they would have the fish fries, you know, even I did that as an adult because my friends didn't grow up with the kind of Southern tradition I did in California.

For my college friends and my graduate student friends, I had a fish fry every Friday. People come to my house. I would cook greens and cornbread and, um, and fry croakers and other fish that I would get. Did the same thing for breakfast. We would have the big old southern breakfasts on Sunday. People come to our house, you know, so, you know, all kinds of things.

So once we went to California, it wasn't all sausage and, and, and grits, you know, it was quiche. You know, and, uh, and omelets and other things, but, uh, the idea of families gathering, sharing, everybody brings something, everybody chip in and work together. Um, uh, I really think it's, it's, uh, one of the things I would like to study, how providing that food can help deal with depression and hopelessness and anger and fear that a lot of people are going through right now.

[00:20:29] **Chris Keeve:** So, um, So how do we get from the truck farm in North Carolina to the backyard garden in California and now to Maryland?

[00:20:40] **Bonnetta Adeeb:** So, my, my mother had five brothers and when her brothers went to the war, you know, eventually they would come home and she had one brother who's next to her in age. His name was Rovelton, uh, Boyd and he just refused to follow the social rules in North Carolina.

He would not bow. He would not say, yes, yes, I'm a gnome. He wouldn't, he wouldn't, he wouldn't behave in the way that southerners coming back from the war. And you know, there were a lot of hangings. That one of our cousins was lynched. So my family decided that he could not come back home.

So, he went to school in California, went to Berkeley. Graduated from Berkeley, and then the whole family went out to his graduation. And upon, uh, his graduation, they found out that Jim, there was not Jim Crow. They didn't, they were, no, I'm not saying that California was perfect, don't get me wrong. It had some issues going on, but there was not, Jim Crow was not in effect.

And so, my family came back and cooked up a scheme that they would quietly relocate to California. So, my uncle, uh, had a home. He bought a house in Berkeley. And then, one by one, the, the brothers and they, uh, ended up going. So, I went, uh, my mother, because my parents divorced when I was a baby. And my uncles kind of raised me, so three of us went together with my mother and we drove to California from Chapel Hill.

But I was only seven years old, six or seven, and so they couldn't tell me that we were moving. It was all coded language. We're going to see Aunt Callie, and they did the whole plan. It was very dangerous. The roads were dangerous when I was a child. And, um, you could not stop along the side of the road. You couldn't use public restrooms. So, my uncles had to drive around the clock till we got to Chicago. Chicago was the first place that we could stop that would allow us to have a hotel. And to be honest with you, it was a YMCA. It was not actually a hotel, but it was a, it was the first place that we could sleep.

And then, uh, we went from there to California and, and made a home for ourselves. And then eventually my family, with the exception of my mother's oldest brother and her sister, who's, who lived here in D. C., they all relocated. So I grew up there, and it was, it was difficult. My grandfather was a minister in, in Chapel Hill, and built a church and, you know, had quite a few businesses there. And we moved to California, you know, it was like starting over again. But, uh, wherever we were, there was a garden, trust me. And, you know, the food was always there. And, you know, I just, we always raised corn and I don't really understand it, but we always had corn. I do have photos of my mother's garden and, but it just meant everything to her to be able to sit out, you know, in the sun, she liked the weather in California more than I do, but she was happy there.

But there was a movement in Los Angeles called the La Raza movement, and so Mexican people said, wait a minute, this is our home, you know, and all these people have come in,

they've taken our property, they've taken our home, you know, they're invading, we want our land back.

And so I was active in civil rights and so was my grandpa was active in civil rights in California. So, um, you know, there was an idea that we needed to come back south as things that were lifting here as Jim Crow was lifting. And then there was a series of deaths in the family. And so when, you know, my, my husband, it was five funerals and we said, if we don't bring the kids back, they won't know their family.

So we decided to move back. And we didn't have to sneak out. We didn't have to come here. My mother didn't want to come to Maryland because she said it was one of the most racist states along the seaboard. When you got to Maryland, if you were traveling from north, because so much of our family went to Boston, Massachusetts, Pittsfield.

When you would travel south on the railroad, when you got to Baltimore, they would make you get out of the regular cars and go, uh, you know, they would say, get on back. And my mother, oh, that made my mother so mad. And she'd be all dressed up, because people used to dress up when they travel. And, they would make her sleep in the, you know, the third class cars.

So, and she said, Maryland, they treat you very poorly in Maryland if you're black. Like if you went into a store, you couldn't try on a hat. They'd make you put something over your head. They're really rude to people. So she didn't want to come here. But her sister had moved to Clinton. And, uh, my husband's family from New York had moved south, too. They had moved to Virginia. But this was a good place for us to be, to relocate and to raise our children.

So our baby was, uh, had her third birthday once we got here. And so we've made a home, and it was a good move. And we eventually moved to Prince George's County, better known as Pretty Girl County, uh, or some people call it the motherland. It is, uh, majority black county, and black folks live very well here. And we've made a home, and, being a teacher, my husband and I, we moved to Prince George's County. And, uh, this is an interesting place to live. There have been forced integration here. And, it's a large county, about, like, just about a million people here.

And, as a part of the forced integration program, to try to keep the white people from fleeing, they set up these magnet schools, and my husband had gone to school in New York City. He had gone to one of the special high schools. He'd gone to a music and arts high school up in Harlem. And so he knew the advantage of magnet, you know, those kind of, uh, schools, where there was academic focus.

And so, we were able to do that, and our kids got a good education. And in this place, our kids were able to roam wild, like I could, there's woods, and the creek is back there. They could run like little banshees wild all over the place and it was a safe place to live.

My mother, you know, was able to live here. We're out in a rural, you know, suburban area. So we were able to recreate a similar to lifestyle that we had in North Carolina and be relatively

close. We could visit the Carolinas or go to New York or visit family. So it's a good place for us to be. And have a garden. And that was the first thing we did was plant a big garden.

[00:26:56] **Chris Keeve:** What was in that first garden?

[00:26:58] **Bonnetta Adeeb:** The standard stuff was in there, mostly greens. But we had a problem because our first house was in, uh, Charles County and it's low lying in Charles County. So it, it, it floods. It's on the, our home was built on a flood plain. And so we knew not to, not to do that, to get off that.

So where we are now, we're at the top of a hill. But all of Southern Maryland, if there's a, a, hurricane that hits the mouth of the Chesapeake, this whole region will probably all be underwater. You know, it's all prone to flooding. But, when we had this house built, we put in a big vegetable garden here.

But there was a problem. If you notice, there's all these big trees. And we couldn't garden in the same way that we did in, in, California. So we had to use different strategies. So mother grew a lot more flowers here. It was easier.

It was a long time before we learned how to grow in all this shade. You know, it's like shade everywhere. And there's much more shade now than there was when we moved in. But now I have a perennial garden. And it's made up of all kinds of wild and wonderful things. I have asparagus. I have maybe six or seven different kinds of allium. I have leeks and onions and garlic and, and bunching onions. And I've got mountain mint, bee balm, sochon. I've got Elecampane and a sorrel and a rhubarb. So it's a perennial garden. So I'm finally learning how to grow under these conditions. So it's taken me a while. But, um, what better to do with my life?

[00:28:33] **Chris Keeve:** And I'm thinking about the, uh, the greens. I'm wondering if you would like to, to speak some more about that variety and about any greens that you've carried with you to, to your garden

[00:28:46] **Bonnetta Adeeb:** Yeah, well, um, one of the things, I have a little special bonus, uh, with my evolution about greens.

What happened was, there was a family who moved into the development down the hill, and, uh, my youngest was seven years old, and she's 37 now, okay? So, um, probably not supposed to say that, but that's how old she is. She, uh, they were riding their bikes down the hill. And they met this family and said, Mommy, mommy, these people move in the neighborhood and they are French speaking. They're African family who speaks French. You gotta come and meet them.

And we're like, well, we're busy right now. Oh, no, no, you gotta stop everything you're doing and go meet them. And so, we, we did. We closed up the house. We all went down to meet this family. And, uh, they had just moved here from Niger. West Africa. And, uh, so we were immediately locked like this, I mean. And what's so wonderful about that kind of folk, those kind of folks, is like, you know, there's people that you were born related to, and there's a family that

you choose. And the family that you choose sometimes can be as close, or even closer than, than people you were born into their family.

So, this family is a family of, uh, quite large family. The Middlesees. Uh, from, uh, Nyame, um, New Shire, uh, and, uh, Mimi was the mother, she had worked for the American Embassy, and her sister also worked for the Embassy, so they loved to cook. Now, it's years later we found out that, you know, they mostly had servants, but they all knew how to cook.

And what they were able to do was they were able to take our traditional southern recipes and show them how to, show us how to make them African. So, for instance, uh, most Africans cook with pork. But in, in, in, in West Africa, it's, Islam is the dominant culture and there are no pigs. They don't live there, okay? And so, uh, they use dried fish and shrimp and as the back flavor. So, but they use a lot of greens and they can cook any kind of greens. And then they do things a little bit different.

So they'll make, like, greens will be a one course meal. So I, I cooked it on Sunday. I made a big pot of collard greens. Antonio Brazelton came over to visit my daughter and I in, uh, St. Louis. And, you know, so I, it has about 25 ingredients with it. So it's something like an African sofrito. So it's got peppers and tomatoes and onions and garlic and thyme and all these different seasonings in it. And then, uh, you cook that, the sofrito down and then you cook your greens and you put your greens in there, and then you add to that peanut butter or aegusi, or you could use ground cashews or any kind of ground nut. It creates this delicious, creamy flavor, and it tenderizes the greens. So that was one of the problems with the greens as they got older and older at the, you know, they're tender when the frost hits them. Later on in the winter, they get a little tough. So by adding the peanut butter, it just made them so delicious. They also add whole shrimp or crab or oysters, anything, you know, like animal kingdom stew. You can put anything in that pot and you serve it over rice. It's a delicious, wonderful West African dish.

And then I learned how to make okra stew. Now we had always used okra. We had had made something like succotash. And then the people on the sea island, uh, on the coast of South Carolina make a gumbo without a rule. And so my family had made something like that, so, and because a lot of the people in California are from Louisiana, so, they thought they made the gumbobas better than, than ours, and, and, and, you know, our gumbobas is just as good as anybody. So, you know, just taking those things and adapting, using, you know, adding some West African things in there that I normally wouldn't know, such as adding palm oil. Palm oil is a preservative, and it also changes the color of it.

Black eyed peas. So taking black eyed peas and the dry peas, soaking them in water. Women's work, rubbing by hand all of the skins off the black eyed peas, and then pounding it. And it makes the most delicious, oh, these things. So you make fritters, depending on what spices you add to it, if you add a little turmeric, if you add a little garlic, it actually changes the color of these. Call them chin chins, these little balls of deliciousness, black eyed peas. You can make black eyed peas fritters.

So this was soulful, but you know, by me, uh, adapting using the Senegalese or the Nigerian or the Malian recipes that really broadened my understanding and helped me to reclaim those West African traditions that living in this place had robbed from us. I mean, we still cooked greens, we ate them every day, but they're more. It's delicious when you add French tomatoes or adding what the Caribbean people did with callaloo. They took those greens and they added okra to the greens. So it's yummy. They add the hot pepper, you know, so they'll add like scotch bonnets and wiri wiri, you know, always with time, the seasons, African basil, you know.

And then the other thing was all the amazing grains. So, so like something that's. If you go into, uh, West African store, you ask for broken rice, that's the African rice, you know, the way that you, when you take the hull off it, it breaks it, so it's broken, so you use that to make chibujin, which is fish and rice, the most incredible dish, um, or Jollof, you know, which is another rice dish that's made with broken rice with tomatoes. It has that same roux in it, you know, tomatoes and peppers and onions cooked up in that sauce to make that Jollof rice.

So what I found out that many African Americans, they didn't know anything good about Africa. They didn't know anything good about their traditions. They actually bought the hype that we came here not knowing anything. I mean, we fed this country, you know. We don't not only raise the food, but we cook it. And we help to develop the, the cuisine and the flavors that is American. And so this work, you know, I taught geography, human geography. I taught world history, U. S. history, I taught government, but they always added food and, and these things in because they touch the brain and the spirit in another kind of way.

Everybody's got to eat, right? And so it's a way also to, to bridge cultures. You know, how do you, what do you do with Ganga peas? You know, how do you make your gandules? You know, what do you add? You know, what's in your sofrito? You know, so these conversations are community building, but they're also about building a body of nutrition. So, I'm really interested in Ujamaa moving forward, doing the research about what are the compounds that are available when you eat certain foods together?

So there is a guy who's the director of the Center for Human Nutrition, the Center for Children's Nutrition. He's at the University of Arkansas, I think it is. But he is, uh, he studied in, in East Africa. And he says that there's certain combinations of food that Africans eat that provides a tremendous of protection for the immune immune system. So during COVID, one of our growers is the director of the Center for Human Nutrition, Naomi Fukagawa. And so she put together a whole group to begin to look at grains and, you know, how do grains play this role?

So we started out looking at sorghum and, and I'm trying to think what was it, it was, it wasn't rice at that time, but we ended up moving, growing basically towards a millet. We were looking at the millets. Millets are a little bit more difficult to grow here. And the processing it was a little bit different and there's appeared, Chalmers written a book It's called Yolélé and he talks about the, the grains and also the lost crops of of Africa talk about these important grains that came. Slow foods has a whole thing they do on the lost grains.

So we know that every society, every civilization has its own grains. We also know that most of the grains that are available to us have been genetically modified. So we and wheat and corn in this country are genetically modified, you know? So I would rather kind of know what I'm eating. I want to eat what my grandmother ate.

I believe you are what you eat. You know, um, those foods were delicious and they created whole grains. I want to look to tradition, using techniques, strategies, technologies to develop new crops for the future. But with the understanding that, that this knowledge, this indigenous knowledge is a, is a powerful source that can help us and maybe even save us and have some impact on saving the planet. So I hope that, you know, as we bring the diaspora together and we share across these, these silos, that we offer more knowledge and more support and, and more sovereignty. Just looking at the people trying to get on boats to go to Spain or Italy, you know, it's, it's a massive challenge, but who better than us, right?

We are mighty. Our ancestors built the pyramids. We can do this, right?

[00:38:18] **Chris Keeve:** So how I'm, I'm, I'm thinking about, or I'm wondering how, how that critical approach to, to geography and to, to the exchange of food, right? I'm wondering how that has manifested in the, the land work and the farmwork that you're doing here.

[00:38:40] **Bonnetta Adeeb:** So, you know, it shows up in a textbook called the Columbian Exchange. That's how it is. And it's the triangular trade. And it talks about how food moved across, you know, oceans and all this. And so, you know, it's super important that we honor the people. The seed savers..

So when, when we talk about the three sisters, and I'll say, yeah, and people don't even know what that is. You know, and I'm like, yeah, but you know, indigenous people gave us tomatoes and peppers and potatoes and sunflowers and a whole host of other amazing things. What would the world be like without tomatoes right now?

You know, it's like, you know, that those were bred by Aztec, you know, who found these wild things and develop them. And, you know, that was science. It maybe wasn't rocket science, but it's science. So, one of the ways for us to, to honor the land is by looking at what is natural to this land, what's indigenous to this land, recognizing that, look to see what's symbiotic, what grows, what's a companion. You know, and so I think we have an opportunity to heal, and it's, it's something I'm really excited about. It's something that Ira and I have talked about these collections, where we look at teaching about food ways through a discussion around the cultural roots of those particular collections of food, such as, I just mentioned about the Three Sisters, people have heard of that. We call it the Three Sisters Plus because the world would be pitiful without what Indigenous Americans have given us.

But it's the same thing with African foods. You know, you have, uh, you know, the millets, all the great millets you have, we're reclaiming rice, it's the African rice, not the Asian one, our own African rice. We're talking about okra, we're talking about African peas, which used to be called cow peas, but I will not tolerate it being called cow peas anymore because that's human food

that came with us on slave ships. Those, those things are African things that are nutrient dense, that are amazingly delicious, and we, we, uh, eat them in ceremony.

We still have black eyed peas for New Year's. We, we can't have New Year's without black eyed peas. It's still our tradition. We just didn't understand the significance of that. And then watermelon, and then okra. Okra as a leaf. You know, yeah, we ate the pods, but we forgot to eat the leaves. I think there's a woman who is the director of the World Farmers in Lancaster, Massachusetts, and they're immigrant farmers, about 300, 300, pushing 400 farmers, growing indigenous African crops outside of Boston, Massachusetts, in Lancaster. Farming those crops, developing their own markets and selling their own traditional foods. And one of the things she said to me, as we were talking about seeds, because she never considered seed a commodity. But what she said to me, she found it so interesting the way African Americans throw away the primary crop from the peas, which is the leaves. And keep those tight, you know, keep the little beans, which is a secondary crop. And, uh, she says, you know, and the same thing with pumpkin and, uh, all those, and with sweet potatoes, you know, we're throwing away the primary crop, which is the green, which is so nutrient dense and protein rich and all of that.

So, you know, that, the way she said it, it was like, you know, you know, yeah, y'all got a lot to learn. And you know what, she wasn't wrong. We have a lot to learn, but we also have a lot to share, and I think that the whole spirit of the, of cooperatives, and I haven't talked about that much, but I just know that Hillary wasn't wrong when she says, we're stronger together, you know, it takes a village, we really, really need to function as a community because it takes a lot of hands on deck.

It takes a lot of minds, a lot of intellects. I had a friend who's an engineer, a PhD in electrical engineering and, and systems engineering. And he used to always tell me how smart my husband is. He said, that's like one of the smartest people I've ever met, you know. And you know, and you guys could do a lot together.

He encouraged me and my husband to, uh, we were always starting little businesses and stuff. And he said, but in order to build a company, you need about 20 minds. Everybody allowed to bring their own talents and their own gifts that, that corporate, in order to produce something new, to be inventive and creative, you have to have all these different talents that come together to do that.

And, you know, I, I feel like we're getting there. I feel like, you know, we have a lot of really, you know, if we look at our administrative team. You know, it's about 20 people. We have new people that are coming all the time saying, I can do this, I can do that, I have this skill, uh, you know, I can bring to it, is there a place for me in the discussion about how to improve or redesign the food system. How are we going to meet the needs of large scale growers? How are we going to meet the needs?

I mean, I think our focus has been on small growers, gardeners and small farmers, but we believe it or not, we still have a lot of black farmers who could produce a food in large measure that could feed thousands of people, but they can't do it. They can't feed us with Roundup

Ready corn. I'm sorry. We, we can't eat, we can't let our families eat that way. We have to have clean food and we have to find ways in which science can serve us. We can't exploit labor like agriculture has done historically, so we will need technology to help us with some of that.

We can also develop a different scale. Scales and how we operate, like small growers can produce value added stuff and do a lot of really creative things in order to create an income stream for themselves. But the work that we're doing, I strongly believe, can pull together all these different levels of knowledge, engineering, mathematics, science.

Just had a young doctor come in who's looking at, you know, her patients and their nutritional needs, looking at ADHD and other things. How can nutrition Uh, be improved. We've got all these kids who have food allergies, you know, all, all of this, we need all of these people and all of this intellect and anybody who wants to be creative and positive and work collaboratively. We can do amazing things and we can, we can adapt just like a sweet potatoes are adapted to grow in temperate climates and now turmeric and ginger, you know, all the wonderful yumminess from the Global South, you know, adapting it. Cause right now, in North America, it's tropical.

This summer has been a tropical experience. The weather has changed. And, uh, many things, crops that could grow in regions, you know, in the Global South. Can't grow there now. Navtali Duran, who's a Oaxacan chef who works with the Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust, told me that the Oaxacan pepper that we have can no longer thrive in his homeland because of climate change.

So, but we can grow it here. Um, the ethics around that, you know, like, what should be our relationship with the seeds and the people who developed this? How do we honor them? And we need to hear from them. You know, we, we need to, we need to hear from them about what they, what kind of partnership, what would be valuable and useful for them and for future generations.

Thinking, you know, and I've learned that from indigenous scholars, is thinking seven generations down the line. What do we need to do? And collard's gonna play a role in that. Everybody wants some collard greens. And people really like my collard greens. You should taste them sometime. They're really, really yummy.

And so, you know, so we, we're on another generation of stewards and how we're working, what we've learned and how do we reclaim a loss. It's both an art and a science. So that requires more from us as, as the, um, as volunteers. We're all, you know, we're all volunteers, you know. The Heirloom Collard Project doesn't belong to any one organization. It belongs to all of us that are working on it. There's about eight or ten organizations working on it.

[00:46:45] **Chris Keeve:** So, speaking of collards, I would love to hear more about how you came to the work that you're doing with collards now.

[00:46:54] **Bonnetta Adeeb:** So, I worked with high school kids for many years, and one of the things that we were doing was, we were doing marketing, actually around cigarette restitution funds. We were working to talk about deprogramming people, you know, toward cigarettes, how

there were all this advertisement, you know, we do, we, we work for, on campaigns. I did it for maybe, 10 or 15 years. As a matter of fact, we are still doing that work. We're still working on, on, de glamorizing tobacco. But what we learned was we learned some propaganda techniques that were being used by the industry to addict younger and younger kids. You know, they use colors, they use flavors and all these different things.

And so my work with young people was developing these counter campaigns to, to work, to inform the community that they needed to be aware that people were using them, you know, as replacement smokers. You know why? Because grandpa dies and now I need you to smoke and buy cigarettes from me because, because my product kills the people who use it. So that's how we kind of came into doing this advertising work.

And so campaigns, developing campaigns is a super important strategy. We have worked on for many years in terms of informing and influencing the culture and helping people to maybe consider making some behavioral changes because that's what we're all after we're all after getting society to do things that are healthier for the planet, healthier for their bodies, or better decisions. So, one of the things that you learn early is that if you are trying to get people to listen to you, what you say has to be relevant. It has to touch people on some level. In some way to make them think that what you're really you're selling an idea is about them.

So that is the reason why collards is so doggone helpful because everybody has some idea about what collards means to them. Collards are a known commodity. Now, I must tell you, of the young folks and, and even adults, so many of these people have never actually tasted collard greens. The, the idea of collard greens was lost to some families when they moved to the north.

It's also, there's a lot of indigenous families, and certain tribes use collard more than others. So, southern tribes use them. And, other tribes use wild greens, like mustard, you know, and other things that they harvest, like cress, it's so delicious. So, and some people would mix it. But what happens is, that when you have a conversation around collard, there's a belief that that's something that belongs to black people, that it's, it's our food.

Collards and black eyed peas, sweet potato. Now there's about, uh, 12 or 13 more things. String beans, new potatoes, watermelon, black eyed peas, you know, corn, you know, grits, you know. There are a few things that everybody reads. Crooked neck squash. Zucchini, that every family, you know, kind of agrees to as basic food.

But collard seems to be the most salient. It's, so, as I would talk to people about what was culture, what they, what they wanted. When I was asking people what they wanted, that was the most popular green. Much more popular than any other green that would come up. And so, when I was working with the Cooperative Gardens Commission, they were donating seeds, but they weren't donating the southern varieties.

We weren't getting, you know, uh, much okra or any of the greens. We weren't getting the squash that people, even patty pan was that little round squash that a lot of families had, the

scallop squash. Those weren't the kind of things that were being donated by the organic seed industry. And so we realized that it's because those were northern communities and they, it wasn't their tradition.

But in all of those cities, just about in any urban city, urban center you go to, be it in Massachusetts or Vermont or, you can buy greens. There's a store somewhere that's selling you collard greens and selling you Crookneck squash, they're selling you sweet potatoes, everything you want, you can find it.

Historically, families who were still farming in the South would bring up food or the kids would go home to the South for the summer and bring back food when they came. Also, there, there were trucks. Now in Baltimore, they still have the Arabbers, the trucks that bring the fresh food from the farm into the city.

Have you ever seen an Arabber truck? You should see these things. They're amazing, horse drawn carts that are hand painted with all this beautiful regalia on them. And the Arabbers are the street merchants that go down the street and they have a, they holla, and when they holla, then people come out of their houses and they buy fresh fruit and vegetables.

Now they are still, not many of them like they used to be, but people used to buy their greens from, from, farmers that were in the surrounding communities. Or we come up with watermelon, they come up with by it by the giant trucks full of them. And people had access to their greens. But as we move further and further away from it by integrated schools, you know, all the different things that people not going to church anymore. It was served at a Sunday dinner. It was always green, usually collard greens served at church at that meal. If there was a funeral. There was always collard greens and cornbread. You know, certain things were just dominant. And as we move further and further away, people maybe have never tasted them.

I'm always surprised when I meet a 30 or 40 year old adult black woman who's never tasted collard greens. And I have to try to figure out how, how did they lose that? But here's the thing. They want to taste them and they think I should be eating them. And if I'm growing anything, I probably should be growing collard greens. So what we realized was that even though it was something that was eaten at New Year's, maybe, or wasn't eaten as much, there was still a cultural connection. It still represented something.

And the reason why collards is so important is because their ability to provide green, fresh vegetables during the cold and winter months. And so, it just makes all the sense that after everything else has gone from the garden. What's left standing? It's those collard greens. So to me, when I saw the heirloom collards, and I realized they were all that beautiful biodiversity, some were blue, some were white, with white veins, some were, were yellow, some were cabbage heading, some were tall, the glazes there. Those are some pretty vegetables.

Now, I've got a winning formula now. I've got something that is a beautiful vegetable that is going to come at a time when other things are not available. That's going to last. People can harvest it for months and months and months and it will continue to thrive. And it has a cultural

connection to the people, a historic connection. And it's good for them. It's a nutrient dense vegetable.

So, we had the opportunity to participate in the trials in 2020, and I may have told some folks this story, but I got a call from Reggie that said, uh, Bonnetta, we're looking for people to participate in these trials. Every person who participates will get three different types of collard and you grow them out and then you participate in, you know, trials. There'll be a day where everybody gets together, they taste them, you'll see how they grow. And we're using something called Seedlink and you pour it back to it. Can you, do you think you can find six of your, your friends that are, would be interested in collards?

Well, what we had been doing during COVID was we created this group called the Tiller Corps, these kids that went out and installed gardens in people's yards because, you know, a lot of elderly people were not getting out. They weren't getting enough sunlight. They weren't going to the grocery store. They were afraid. And, you know, people were dying, they felt that the vitamin deficiency from not being in the sun was a problem. And people were lonely and this would give them some exercise, something to do. And of course it's good for the environment. There was a lot of reasons why people wanted to garden.

So I guess we, there's about 50 gardens we, we helped to install during the first year of COVID. And so I said, well, I think some of the growers who were, who got the gardens might be interested in collards. Well, I called six people and everybody said, yeah. The first six people I called all said yes, they wanted to participate in it. And then I heard the stories for each one of them that came through. So, it was interesting because many of these, almost all of these people were college educated people. Most of them had never gardened, but they had all grown up in a family that gardened.

So, most of their stories were around being in the garden with grandmother, being in the garden with my grandfather. They, or my parent, my mom's garden, or my dad's garden. So it was a, it was something that they never initiated, but it was something that they grew up, it was part of the context of the world that they lived in as children. And, and there was a sweetness, a memory, that was a positive, a productive memory. Good times of being out. A positive look on childhood, from being, those experiences in the garden. So, we knew right from the beginning that there was something incredible about collard. No other, nothing else could bring that kind of just interest and joy. And, and a kind of, sentimental, it was sentimental, the conversation around collard.

So, everybody got their collards except for me. Mine never came. So, what happened was, somebody in the doggone post office found out I was getting collards, and they stole my, I'm pretty sure they stole my collard seeds. I didn't get my collard seeds. So everybody else was participating and in the collard study, I couldn't. And so finally Reggie came and she brought me, uh, she brought me some start. They were late getting in, but I was able to at least participate in that. And so that made me think, collards is something people want. You know, they want to hold on to that. You know, that's something they need. You know, that's something people consider valuable. Collards are a good thing.

And then, so that was my first participation. Then there was something kind of, something kind of fancy about collards too, because look at the people who thought collards were cool. Yeah, Michael Twitty. Well, I knew Michael Twitty as a kid, but yeah, so a lot of fancy people were attracted to this project. And, uh, Michael Twitty, I heard Michael Twitty was doing this whole presentation on collards at, uh, Monticello. So it was like, this is nice. These people, this is serious, you know. People are doing incredible work.

So I had known Michael. Michael was an intern to one of our board members, Dr. Diana N'Diaye from Smithsonian. While he was doing his internship at the Smithsonian, he designed an edible landscape. I'm still on to it. I'm still so enthralled with these structures that Michael was able to build.

He also worked at the African American Heritage State here at Accokeek. He came and that was, uh, they did, they did it a few years. That's when I was just in an advisory role for them. And they were trying to get more people of color, more African Americans to visit the park. So I suggested, we were doing Juneteenth, I suggested they could do like an Afri African American history event.

So they had Michael come, he did these big outdoor cooking things. And so, you know, here was Michael Twitty talking about collard greens. So, there was a little, collards are fancy, okay? Yeah, they may be slave food, but something about 'em that's pretty doggone interesting. We knew we were onto something and then, because whenever you get a lot of yeses, that's an indication that you're doing something right.

And so, what we looked at developing a cohort of stewards and over the course of years, we've come up with about three different categories for growers, people who have never grown, saved any seed before we call them seed savers, and they can just grow at their leisure. But people who are experienced growers, be experienced farmers, who know how to manage crops. Even if they haven't grown collard, that's a good candidate for us. Uh, but we found that the people who had had the most training for seed saving were actually master gardeners, people who had been through gardening programs. So, uh, we had some cohorts of people that could really, uh, work with Ira to save these varieties that were gonna languish in seed jail. You know, they were just sitting there, nobody knew where they there, they needed to be a program, a project to get unlock these collards and get them out in the community.

So we had that event, a big event in, I guess it was 2021 or two. When was it? It was two Novembers ago. Maybe, uh, where we did a re thinking of the whole collard project.

Were we satisfied with what we accomplished? Well, heck no. You know why? Because people still act like they're surprised when I tell them there's more than one variety of collard. And we had 120 varieties. I had people sending me collards from the Azores. No, we're not finished yet because people don't know enough about collard.

You know, so we have a lot more work to do. Plus, as a school teacher, I had struggled with my gardens because most of the crops you plant in the, the spring, but they, you know, harvest in

late summer, schools out. The school authorities didn't want me bringing all my little children back in the building during the summertime.

I actually got a grant to manage our farms because we had demonstration of farms at school. Okay, so, uh, what we found out was that most of the stuff we planted, it wasn't ready when the kids got ready to leave school, so they would plant all these things and they, they were too immature in, in May when school was out, and the tomatoes weren't really coming in until after the 4th of July. The kids didn't get the stuff.

So, uh, the school gardens had, they had that challenge. Collards solved that problem. It was, and the, the, Biennial brassicas can be planted when school starts in September and harvested when school's out. It was a perfect crop for the school year. So all the struggles I'd had with all my school based growing products, we had the one garden with the iFood Forest in which we had looked at doing, using collards for alley cropping there.

But, um, but that was again, not the primary reason, you know, the primary way to use collard, but Growing collards out and we eventually came up with this concept of collards for kids in which they learn that the six types of collard, they, they plant them as soon as they walk through the door in school, and then they participate along with their teachers. They learn seedlings. They learn how to keep data. They learn how to make observations and they learn all the things that you need to learn if you are learning how to breed. But here's what we learned from the kids in, in Wisconsin.

There was a tremendous market. People would buy those greens, they would buy every collard those kids could raise, they could sell. So it was a big boost for the ag programs. So I'm on the board, uh, for, uh, Prince George's County ag programs. I work with the state middle school ag programs. And so I have those opportunities to get, to get my ideas out there in terms of what projects could have a cultural connection.

Also, most of the white teachers were complaining that the kids, uh, say that when they want them to grow gardens, they're trying to make slaves out of them. You're trying to turn us into slaves. You're not going to put me back in slavery. That's what they tell their teachers, but they're growing something that's meaningful to them or something they could sell. Now it's not about turning them into slaves, it's like turning them into little business people, into entrepreneurs.

So we really think that collard and the, the, uh, we have a first cohort that we'll be planting in August and September. Very exciting. We'll have schools from, from Berkeley in Stockton, California to Massachusetts, after school programs in New Jersey, ag programs. We have a elementary, we have middle schools. I love one of the schools is George Washington Carver Elementary School in, in, in Kentucky that Paul is working with. And we have a preschool that has an ag program, a Montessori school that teaches three and four year olds how to farm. And those kids will be farming collards this year. Going to be very exciting. Stay tuned.

[01:03:28] **Chris Keeve:** I'm thinking about the woods, , and I'm thinking about what you mentioned around in your childhood and of what your family had, had, what stories your family had given you about the woods and about foraging, but also how, about how, how you felt connected to that space. I would like to invite you to maybe spend a little bit more time thinking about that space and thinking about how that, how that approach to, to wild plants, wild edible plants, wild medicinal plants, but also to the landscape itself has maybe as enforced how you approach land work there.

[01:04:11] **Bonnetta Adeeb:** Yeah, well, you know, my mentor for all these demonstration gardens is, is with the U. S. Forest Service and, uh, he's somebody that you should interview. He's amazing. His name is Michael Hill. And, he's like me. He's, you know, I always have a thousand ideas. He's the same way. He's a landscape architect, though. So he knows how to do all these really beautiful drawings and stuff. And so he and I came up with all these ideas.

He actually worked where Paul worked at Accokeek, and as a matter of fact, remember I told you I was consulting to them, and they did the African American History program? So, so they should have paid me. They didn't pay me. But what they did is, they let me, Michael Hill, they let him come and help me set up all my demonstration gardens at, uh, in, in Charles County.

And so we developed all these programs. Really exciting stuff. So, what we realized was that black people had a completely different relationship with the forest than white people have. So, uh, U. S. Forest Service is all, and Conservation Corps is always trying to get black people out to the woods. And black people are, are, are scared of the woods. They're afraid of the woods, and they don't want to go outside, and they don't want to go in the dark, in the forest, you know, because, especially kids who live in urban centers, they didn't have, they didn't grow up doing that, going into the woods, what's in there for them? But I was growing up, so there was stuff in there, there was, there's mushrooms in there, there's all kinds of stuff in there that I want.

I'll tell you another thing about the woods. In the south, it's extremely hot in the summer time. And when you go into the canopy of the woods, it's 15 or 20 degrees cooler than in the deep sun. The woods is the most comfortable place to be. It's much better. So what we were able to do is, on my campus, at Thomas Stone High School, I had about 10 acres of woods, and it had all kinds of wild things growing in there.

Now, my grandmother had told me that there were blueberries, and I knew there were blackberries, and there was nuts, all kinds of things in the woods that you could eat. And so, when we moved back east, yeah, I grew up in California, so they had different stuff in the woods. When I grew up back here, I had a desire to go back and explore that.

So with my partner, Michael Hill, we were able to develop this program, uh, this forestry program. So we built forest trails and, and we did, we talked about forest farming, demonstration trails, the, I got tremendous support from the U. S. Forest Service and Conservation. And then, and that led me to many more opportunities with Chesapeake Bay Trust and EPA and other things.

Then I'm, I'm also, I work with Howard University with the Center for African Studies. And there was a book, one of the winners of the Kaaba Book Award, uh, was a book on Wangari Maathai. So, you know, she had already passed, but all of these Wangari Maathai scholars came to this Kaaba event, and so she, it was right up my alley. She is like the Fannie Lou Hamer of trees, and so I realized that I could make a connection with the forest by telling her story, her story of women's liberation, her story of empowerment, her story of the forest as food as, as a woman's place, as a spiritual place, and a place of empowerment. She was the first environmentalist to win the Nobel Peace Prize. She is the freaking bombdigity. So we named all of our forest projects are named after her.

So I've been, I've been, I've been doing this work since about 2006 with the forestry. And that's, that's how Paul and I came to work together. Because he became the education director at Accokeek. And so he and I are standing in a field going like, kids should know this stuff. They should feel comfortable growing their own food. They should be comfortable in the woods. They should feel safe in these places instead of afraid of these places. And so we stood there one day and said, we're going to do something about it. And where do we get started? And so we just started talking to people about reconnecting to the world on, you know, and using the school building, the school site, as a place of learning, as a place of growing, food, and reconnectedness, using that kindergarten concept that all learning should start in the garden, which they don't even follow anymore in Germany. Cause, uh, I have a niece in Germany, she just went to first grade, she didn't learn crap about gardening, I was so disappointed. She's gonna learn, no, they don't do it anymore in Germany either.

But it's a, it's a brilliant idea. You should, a learner should start in the outdoors. It's should start there. And, uh, we have 13 sites, where we're building food forests. We've already installed three of them. And the National Arboretum is working with us on that. I mentioned the fact that they're helping us find them.

So, and we've gotten several grants. We, Chesapeake Bay, we got a small grant from Chesapeake Bay. I think they're going to give us a bigger one. But when people find out I'm doing this work, I'll be honest with you, they just send me money and I can't even tell people I'm working on forestry. They love it.

And black people. A lot of black people believe that there's herbs and healing in the woods and they're not wrong. That's what our ancestors do. They call them, they call it root medicine. Zora Neale Hurston wrote about this. This is important stuff to recover and all these young folks like you are really, y'all are much more connected, you know, I guess we were so busy not wanting to be servants like our parents were maids and butlers. And we wanted to dress up but you know, working at a desk is boring the natural world, you know so we are building a forest nursery and we're building a fruit, nut and berry orchard out at Tateman but the plot doesn't belong to us, so we're not gonna be able to put stuff in the ground, but we'll be able to donate to the other schools.

We have, um, nine other schools that we're working with, and we'll be able to, uh, sell, you know, all the berries that we have in the Ujamaa collection. Now we're planting that all out. You

saw all the, the trees I have here. All of those are destined. And, uh, there again, I got so many donations. I had to stop telling people I was doing the work because they've been sending all kinds of stuff here. People love this work. They're attracted to it. They think it's the right time to be doing this.

Uh, the National Recreation, Outdoor Recreational Conference. I spoke to them and what we realized that, that when black people go into the woods, they want to go in there for different reasons. They're not just going in to hug the tree. They, if they do, they want to take some maple syrup out of it. You know, it's a, it's a resource for them. But as we tell the stories of worship and, and, uh, uh, the stories of how runaways sought the woods, as places of hiding and protection, the Dismal Swamp. There's a lot of good stuff there that can, that can reconnect us to our heritage.

[01:10:45] **Chris Keeve:** Do you have any lasting thoughts or, or resident thoughts that have been, have been kind of floating around in your head in this process?

[01:10:57] **Bonnetta Adeeb:** Yeah, I do. So, you know, Tamara, my really good friend of mine passed away, and she really loved, she loved the garden, she loved the trees, she knew all those wild things. She walked through the woods with her. She knew all that stuff. She was a youth director. You really love kids. And, she was so proud of us, you know, packing seeds. She used to bring her nephew over here to do that work. And, you know, I just hope that I can institutionalize my, my dreams so that after I'm gone, you know, I won't be the callous. You know, this is not, you know, the, the work is important to the community and, and, and it will continue.

So I really, um, the word one of my friends gave me was codify. We need to codify our ideas and our work. So they can be translated to future generations. So that's what this project is doing. It's codifying the mission, and it's helping me become more clear in how I tell the stories and simplify the language and, communicate the ideas in a way that can connect up to multiple listeners so that everybody sees a place for them in the Ujamaa family.

So, if you're a tree hugger, I know this lady who really loves turtles. She loves her some turtles so bad. Okay? Does she have a place in the Ujamaa? Well, if she, if she tells us where to go get them turtles to eat them because of the No, I'm kidding. Uh, yeah, I mean, possibly. You know, if she's willing to understand that when you talk to black children and you tell them that you've devoted your whole life to an animal, but you can't really stand them, that you're going to have a problem there. So, the environmental justice piece, that's where it comes in. That, um, we understand that some people love the natural environment, but we live in the built environment. And we have to protect our resources together. Human beings are not just going to disappear. You know, we, there's, the will to live is just amazing. So, we will find a way to survive, and, uh, but why not thrive? Why not do it in a way that is beneficial to the, the living, you know, planet, to the mother? You know, so she won't drop kick us like she did the dinosaurs. You know, so we won't wear out our welcome.