

Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project
Interview with Aneeqah Ferguson by Kaia Godsey
Conducted on June 10th, 2023 in Atlanta, GA

[00:00:00] **LuAnna Nesbitt:** The following interview is a part of the Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project. It was conducted at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia by interviewer Kaia Godsey on June 10, 2023. The narrator of this oral history is Aneeqah Ferguson.

[00:00:15] **Kaia Godsey:** For the record, could you please introduce yourself and your organization?

[00:00:21] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** Well, My name is Aneeqah Siddeeq Ferguson and I actually own my own business called Aunt Neekies! Ginger and Spice here in Atlanta, Georgia.

[00:00:33] **Kaia Godsey:** Alright. And could you talk a bit about some of your earliest memories around food?

[00:00:40] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** Growing up, I always remembered my mom making bean soup. It was a traditional dish in my community. It would be like the navy bean. She'd soak it overnight, and the next day she would put it in the pressure cooker. And when we'd come home from school, I could hear the sound of the pressure cooker and I could smell the beans as I approached the house. And that was always the sound coming home from school was the sound of the beans cooking for dinner and we had bean soup almost every night.

[00:01:13] **Kaia Godsey:** Did your family share that recipe with you?

[00:01:17] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** As I got older, I had to make the soup. So, but you know, in my community, we also had bean pie, um, the same bean. So some of the beans would go for a soup and some of the beans, my mom was like the official bean pie maker in our community growing up, one of them. And so she would sell bean pies on Friday after our prayer services and sometimes on Sundays if we had community meetings. So I recently, only recently learned how to make her bean pie, but growing up, I did make the bean soup quite often.

[00:01:53] **Kaia Godsey:** And when you were that young, did you have a concept of how the beans were grown or that process?

[00:02:00] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** I had no idea. I, I don't think it was until I was much older that I realized those hard dry beans were once on a plant. I had no connection to the land from what I was eating at that point in my life.

[00:02:17] **Kaia Godsey:** So I guess along with that question, where did your family source a lot of food growing up?

[00:02:22] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** In the beginning as far as my earliest memories of eating bean soup, um, I don't really know where they got it, but as I got older, it was just basically from the

grocery store. Yeah. I, you know, I think when I was much younger, I do remember my mother, I would say prior to being a teenager, we did a lot of shopping at the food co op, like where the healthy foods were in my town.

I remember my mom would always buy things that weren't in fancy packaging. It was just in a clear package with just like a typed label or a handwritten label on it. It was like, why don't we shop like other people shop? Like, fancy stickers and colorful labels. Why are we shopping in this little small community based store? My mom used to make our bread homemade. So when we would go, when we eventually started going to public school and we would take our sandwiches, our peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, the bread would be all soaked because it was like wheat bread and it was like dark and at that time that was when Wonder Bread came out and it was like the, the newest thing and all the kids had white bread sandwiches with thick peanut butter and jelly and I would bring out this little square, dark, heavy, wet sandwich made out of homemade wheat bread.

And people would say, "Oh, what was that? What is that? That's disgusting. Why don't you have real bread?" And so I would hide my sandwich under the table and lean down and take bites because I couldn't explain to them why mine looks so different from theirs. And my parents refused to buy Wonder Bread. We couldn't understand why they wouldn't just buy Wonder Bread so we could fit in.

But, uh, now I look back and I would give anything to have that homemade bread. But eventually my mom did buy wheat bread and stopped making our bread from scratch. But my earliest memories, too, of shopping were at the co op and making the homemade bread. Making meals without all the artificial preservatives.

[00:04:28] **Kaia Godsey:** Can you talk a bit more about assimilating into U. S. food culture and like what it was like to not fully fit into that?

[00:04:37] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** Yeah. So the interesting thing is although my family all the way back as far as I know, we are descended, you know, I always say like, not Native American like Indian, but we're native to this land in a sense of our ancestors came over with the first Africans who were bought over and enslaved back, back, back centuries ago.

But when my parents met in the sixties and got married, they really were a part of the black freedom struggle, that whole sense of trying to connect with our purpose and with our reason for being and knowing that it's greater than how society had devalued us as a people. And so a part of that searching, you know, my mom was from Georgia, Southern Georgia. My dad was from Pittsburgh. And so my father being from the North, going to school in the DC area, he really was in touch with a lot of the freedom struggle movements happening in the North. And my mom, she was from a small town Baptist community and she didn't know anything about any of all that.

But when they met, my father had, accepted to be in the Nation of Islam at that time in the sixties. Which was really non violent, community based movement, um, contrary to what people

think because the rhetoric was really like staunch, like, you know, we're going to defend ourselves, but it was a nonviolent movement. Weapons were not allowed. It was all about eating healthy, living healthy, being independent, not seeking government aid, not eating unhealthy food, processed items, being in charge of your own education and your diet, and so they were part of that until Elijah Muhammad died and his son, you know, Warith Deen Mohammed taught the community about what Islam really was about and that it wasn't a racial separated or racially charged experience. It was really a religion of peace and a religion that connects you to humanity. And so he slowly evolved hundreds of thousands of people from that race based thinking into more of a universal thinking.

Um, and so for me, when we were in the nation, we were so separate from the, you know, and I was very, very young, like maybe kindergarten and younger. Our food was very healthy. Our food was very independent. We had our own sources of getting foods and our own food supply chains. But when the Nation of Islam ended, or it didn't end, it evolved into more of a universal Islamic experience, we were more integrated into more mainstream American society. We weren't living in a separate Nation of Islam type thinking. There were offshoots that kind of rekindled the Nation of Islam that you hear about today, but the old movement from before moved more into mainstream.

And so our eating, you know, we were now in a public school instead of our separate schools. So hence me bringing my sandwiches, still some of the eating patterns of before. So yeah, so I would say as far as eating American foods, we always, um, under even Warith Deen Mohammed and more broader thinking beyond the Nation of Islam, we understood our, sense of being an American. You know Muhammad really instilled that pride as you are an American citizen. Your ancestors built this country. Hold this American flag with pride and make it stand for what it says it's supposed to stand for. Don't run from it, you know, hold it and make it accountable. And so that became really kind of the cornerstone of our presence here as opposed to, oh, we're separate. We're a separate nation. We were like, we're American and we're going to get involved and we're going to make this nation great, you know, not again, but make this great nation great. Like it should be.

Yeah. So, um, Yeah, so eating the traditional foods that people are eating in the cafeterias and things became a struggle because we grew up eating more healthy. You know, how do you still manage? So for me, as I got older, something with my business that I do now is I've gotten approval by the Department of Agriculture to make soups commercially. And you know, so your first question was, what do I remember eating as a child? Well, we ate soup like every night.

So for me and we were not sickly. We didn't get sick very often. We ate very basic food, beans and rice and some fish, some whiting fish. Not fried, just baked fish. Beans and rice and fish, maybe beans and rice and some chicken, not all these fancy foods. So um, yeah, so for me as I'm older now, I'm, you know, seeking a better, healthier life so even though I make all kinds of foods, soups is one of the things that I'm trying to bring to people and help them connect with as a health support. So I have a whole line of soups called super well soups. And that's where I actually bring to people who are healing from having delivered a child or healing from Covid or

dealing with blood pressure issues or diabetes. So I've been studying people dealing with colitis and certain liver challenges and kidney challenges.

So I've been studying how to make delicious soups for people who need to support. these types of health challenges that they're having, you know, low energy, low motivation. What can I do to give them something quick to eat? That will lift their energy and spirits.

[00:10:36] **Kaia Godsey:** Could you talk a bit more about soups for healing? What do you like to cook with to promote some of those benefits that you're talking about?

[00:10:44] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** Yeah. So the name of my company, you know, of course not unique is ginger and spice. So my company was inspired by my love for ginger cookies. My love for ginger cookies and soup. So soups were my first goal, but I found it was very difficult to get approved to do soups. The bar that they said to get approved for soups was so high. It took me a couple of years to achieve. So the lowest hanging fruit for me was to start with my ginger cookie. And my ginger cookie started, I started in 2021 with my ginger cookies and just what propelled me to just do it was the inspiration I got from COVID.

Ginger cookies bring so much joy, you know, to me, and it makes, it's joyous, not just because it's a delicious cookie. It's joyful to me because it actually connects me to a memory of my grandparents and just remembering my father at my grandmother's house, he would come home with a big bag of ginger snaps and we'd all eat them and have some milk or some ice cream. And, when I noticed the suffering from a lot of the elderly people during that particular period of COVID right there in the early part of 2021, I was just thinking of how many young people are separated from their grandparents because they were, you know, unable to visit them and these places that they were housed, and how many we were losing, frankly, so I felt like, wow, I'm going to do ginger cookies because it just, you know, and when I started my booth at the farmer's market almost everyone who came to my booth were like, "Oh, these remind me of my grandparent" or this reminds, they literally was saying exactly what I was feeling. And I was like, yeah, this is just what I wanted. I want people to think about the elders right now.

So, but outside from me loving ginger you know, and in my soups, ginger is a key ingredient. Ginger um, root and turmeric root have a lot of anti inflammatory healing powers. And then the ginger is so calming for the stomach that it's just a key ingredient to, I would say ginger is like the key ingredient to everything that I do, whether it's my seven variety of cookies, they all are a ginger cookie with recipes and flavors and ideas that I was inspired by and created. And then all of my soups are a version of a common soup that you might have heard of, but with my spin on it with ginger and with the health focus as well.

[00:13:21] **Kaia Godsey:** I actually want to back up to talking about your grandparent. What are some of the food memories you have? You talked about that ginger cookie and ginger. Are there any other things that just evoke a memory of your grandparents?

[00:13:33] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** Food. So, my Georgia grandparents, I always remember we would visit my grandmother's house in southern Georgia, and they had a muscadine vine in the

backyard and they had pecan trees. So my grandfather would always have a bag of pecans ready for us when we came that we could take home and eat. And when we were just too rambunctious indoors, you know, my siblings and I, as young children, he would take us outdoors and we would just pick some grapes off the vine. And he was just an excellent gardener. They had meticulously kept their lawn and they had these tall stately pine trees that you just didn't see anywhere else that we lived. Yeah, so that was a memory of them.

And then my northern grandparents food memories We always went there at Christmas time, really. And they were celebrating their Christmas holidays and we celebrated with them. And I just remember she would have these like plants, like this red, I guess it's like a holly plant. She always had these particular plants out for Christmas time. And she'd say, don't let the kids eat it. These are poisonous. And I just remembered that. But as far as any connection to the land and things like that, because you know, Pittsburgh is covered in snow in the winter, that was the only living thing that I would see. And then, of course, we would enjoy the feast of Christmas. She would make a turkey for us because we didn't eat pork.

And yeah, so it was always a bounty of food. And the Christmas tree, of course.

[00:15:12] **Kaia Godsey:** For your grandparents that were growers do you still have a connection to those foods? Do you grow them or use those seeds in any way?

[00:15:22] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** No, I really didn't understand what was happening with food and with growing in our land or globally. That consciousness really didn't come until I was much, much older. I really wish I knew then what I know now because I certainly would have wanted some pecan seeds. I would have wanted some of the muscadine seeds and some of the other things they were growing.

Yeah, the muscadines, I would say, I have a connection to those when I see them growing. I always feel like I need to have some because my father would also, it was a tradition in the fall. He would always take us down to the border of Georgia, Florida to pick muscadines. We just all, he'd give us all a basket and we were living in Indiana at the time and we'd go down and see my grandmother and we'd always stop at the muscadine you pick, you take, you buy, farm. And we would come back with buckets of muscadines and he'd freeze them and deep freeze them. We'd eat them as little popsicles. So yeah, that's the thought of saving seeds. or whatever was not there. Um, it was an annoyance because there were so many seeds inside the muscadine and you had to eat around them. But I wish the message can come to younger people: that's not an annoyance, that's bounty. So save every one of them.

[00:16:45] **Kaia Godsey:** Do you remember any lessons that they would share while you were going through and picking things? Or if it was just a time for reflection while you were doing that?

[00:16:54] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** Was really a family tradition. I don't really know that there was specific lessons per se, but it was very good memories of a tradition we had and my father understood when this crop would be ready. Cause I was always like, how did he know they

would be here? How would he know this? But yeah, he would just tell us to watch out for snakes, make noise. You don't want to get bit. But yeah he wasn't a farmer or gardener. He always grew up in the North and I don't know that he ever did anything with gardening or farming, but he was a science teacher so he did have an appreciation for science and he really cared his messaging, not so much around the grapes per se, but around food was don't eat rotgut, eat the good stuff.

I grew up in an era of Kool Aid, it was very popular and we, it was just 10 cents an envelope. So we'd get our dimes and go get some and mix it with sugar and dip your finger in it. That was the popular thing for kids back then. My father would do, I guess, um, what did they say in the text messages? SMH, shake my head. He was like, no matter how hard I raised y'all to eat right, y'all got packs of Kool Aid and your mouth is purple. But, um, and he would tell us, he was like, okay.

He made fresh squeezed lemon juice with raw honey and oranges and limes. And that was what he drank for juice, but we would mix a gallon of Kool Aid. And he was just like, if you're going to drink that stuff, at least squeeze one lemon in it, make something real in it. And then we drink that gallon of purple, red, orange, green, blue, whatever that was we were drinking. And then we come to drink his juice because we loved his juice. And he was like, no, you drinking that rotgut and now you want to come over and drink this. You all need to decide what you're going to do. I tell y'all to make this, but y'all want to make that. He would always show us the contrast, but at the end of the day, none of my siblings like Kool Aid. We all like fresh squeezed juice. So I guess it was just something he had to put up with for us to grow out of.

But, um, his messaging around food was always clear. He didn't go for artificial, buy a whole bunch to get a whole bunch. He was like, good quality. We weren't wealthy. We were not wealthy by any means, but he always bought foods that were better for you.

[00:19:30] **Kaia Godsey:** Can you talk about your diet now and you did a bit earlier, but some of the things, maybe if you've gone through a journey with your diet from eating at home to now, and how you've learned to integrate more healthy foods on a regular basis.

[00:19:46] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** Yeah. So growing up, we never really hardly ate out. My mom cooked and we didn't buy boxed or frozen foods. So when I went to college, I was like, "Oh, I could buy frozen dinners now. I could buy TV dinners like everybody else was doing. I could get a box and make a cake. I don't have to do this from scratch".

I was so happy to have these luxuries. I could go eat at McDonald's. My mom wouldn't take us to McDonald's and I went through that for a few years and I was over it. It didn't take long to be over it. My habits are, you know, I prefer to cook at home or eat foods that other people have prepared at home.

My diet is also, you know, if I'm going to eat a dessert or something, I want it homemade. And I've even gotten to the point where I try to find a really kind way of asking, "Is this from a box? Or did you make it from scratch or, you know, so I, I don't know, because if I'm going to consume the fat and the calories, I want all the good stuff, you know, I'm not going to eat a Betty Crocker

cake with frosting on it, if I can help it, a cake from a grocery store that, is not making it with the best ingredients.

So I think that's what I got from growing up is if you're going to eat something, you want to get ice cream, you know, the other thing with my father, get an ice cream that has ingredients that are things you yourself can purchase and make the ice cream with. If it starts listing things that require a science background it's probably not for you.

That's the habit I have now. And now even knowing about pesticides and you know, modifications that are being made to the genes of vegetables and fruits. When I make foods for my customers, it's more expensive to do, but I try to have the organic ingredients for everything. And at one point during COVID, it was hard to find organic flours, so I had to ship down to non GMO flour.

But now I can get my spices organic. I can get my flours organic. I don't have any problem getting it. It costs way more. I could go to a Sam's club or Costco and get a giant 25 bag of flour for like nothing, but I have obligated myself to what I like to eat. And if I don't like to eat that flour, I'm not going to feed the people I'm making foods for that. I don't like to eat bargain eggs. I like the best eggs. So I get the best eggs for my cookies. So my cookies cost a little bit more than another cookie, but I think people who care about what they eat, they appreciate that.

[00:22:39] **Kaia Godsey:** Can you talk about staying true to those principles when in a world where everything's competitive, there's fast everything? Fast fashion, fast food. How do you make sure you're not compromising on those values?

[00:22:53] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** I've lost a lot of opportunities because of that. I had a chance once, um, I was put in touch with someone who had this thing they were doing for local business people at the airport and they were interested in my cookies. And when I told them this is a perishable product, it doesn't have any artificial preservatives in it. They were like, no, I need it to stay on the shelf for at least two months. And I'm like, so I looked into like, are there natural things you can do? And there are certain things you can do that are pretty close to natural, but I just wasn't willing to do that.

So anybody can go and get any cookie that can last for a year on a shelf. They don't need me to add to it. I want to offer a fresh product that doesn't have nitrites, sulfites, all sorts of things in it that are not good for our own digestion.

So yeah it's tough sometimes because I'm like, "dang," but I'm not in it for that. And so that's what you have to remind yourself. It is a business. And so the business instinct sometimes kicks in, but I'm not doing it just because it's a business. I'm doing it because I was inspired to bring a quality product to people who could not otherwise access this particular type of product.

[00:24:09] **Kaia Godsey:** Can you talk a bit more about your love for elders and how you've built your business around that?

[00:24:15] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** Yeah. I don't know, I've always liked sitting down and talking to elders just as a person and when my youngest child was very young, we would go to our prayer services on Fridays and we would stop and talk to the senior citizens and he was maybe three years old and some of his best friends were 80 and 90 years old, he would stop and have a conversation with them.

He was just a kid who loved to have a conversation with older people. And so in fact, we'd call them on the phone, we talked to them. So that was kind of me and him, you know, me having that love in him really accepted in it. So the two of us enjoying that as an activity together, but on a career side, I always wanted to see how I could do something and I'm still in this train, I haven't gotten there yet, but I want to do something that connects me with providing services to seniors. My vision for my soups is that my soups can become a part of a meal plan for seniors. Because my soups come in two versions. You can get it pureed, or you can have it with more of the texture. And I know for seniors, many times chewing becomes a challenge and getting good nutrition quickly into their systems, especially when they're dealing with low appetite. That's a goal that I have is to be able to bring my soups to the attention of people who manage contracts that allow you to work with seniors to make it a support.

So when I started my soup business, I didn't use any salt at all in any of my soups. It was, I flavored it just with the herbs and the vegetables. As my clients grew, they were like, you gotta put some salt in here. And I did research on good types of salt and how salt actually is health supporting as well, but it's just the excessive amounts of salts and the poor qualities of salts that we use in foods.

So for me, I've found a middle of the road compromise and I tell people you guys have eaten too much salt. So if you need more, you got to add your own, but I'm not completely salt free anymore, but I can be because my recipes were designed salt free first.

So my goal is when I actually do get contracts and move into production is to have a salt free line and another line. Right now I just have one line because I don't have enough clients to break like that. But once I do, I'd like to be able to give for people who are on salt free diets to be able to have something good to eat that doesn't have a lot of crazy things to enhance it.

And then I also have a line of cookies that are gluten free and vegan. As well as I have one particular cookie that I have also modified as a 100 percent honey cookie, no sugar. So I have certain things that I do to be ready to work with seniors who are dealing with diabetes or hypertension.

So really it's just, um, my movement into soups has been just maybe two months now since my approval. So I'm kind of, you know, new all overin business. And so I'm definitely looking and learning right now how to move into these places.

[00:27:35] **Kaia Godsey:** Could you talk a bit about some health benefits you recognized from foods growing up and if you still utilize those things?

[00:27:44] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** Let's see growing up. I don't know. Maybe I'll trace it back to growing up. I would just say growing up I noticed that we didn't get sick a whole lot and we had a very basic diet.

So I've concluded now that maybe continuing to move around between foods very quickly, like, "Oh, today I'm going to go get this and for lunch and then for dinner" so you've gone to China, Mexico, Iran, India in like 24 hours and I don't know if that's too much on the body and I don't think that's really the issue.

I think it's how these foods are prepared and how they're preserved. So I think the body could probably bounce back from the movement between variety if variety was healthy, but intermixing that we have a lot of preservatives and processing types of secrets that we don't even know that are happening in our foods that are challenging us.

So now some things that I think of with diet, not so much when I was younger, but now that are health supporting in my food is I have a soup that I've developed. I have certain types of soups that I've developed when I have low energy and feel like, boy, I'm about to be down for about a couple of days.

This isn't good. I feel it. I have a certain type of, um, actually, um, I have a certain type of soup that I'll make and I have a certain type of smoothie that I'll make. And it depends on where I catch this at. If I'm deep into, it's already here, I'm already suffering. I'll make one recipe versus if I'm trying to prevent, I'll make another type of recipe.

So having low iron, I'll do this or low energy, I'll do that. Or headaches, I'll do this. And depending on where you catch it, how much time it cuts down from getting back on my feet. So definitely the concept of eating to live and your food being your medicine are, I think, two concepts that I really internalize.

[00:29:47] **Kaia Godsey:** When you are finding this stuff out, how do you go about researching the different benefits, what resources do you turn to?

[00:29:54] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** I would say the things that I just cited now are really just my personal experience with my own healing. But the second, and so my primary resources to motivate me and to be curious to go and look certain things up are just the people I work with.

So for example, I have a main soup that I make my signature soup that I started everything on with regard. So my cookie started around the ginger molasses cookie, a traditional old fashioned ginger molasses cookie. That was it. That was my whole business was that cookie. And after a little less than a year, almost a year, the other cookie varieties just started coming to me as inspiration for my soups. My lentil soup The way I put it together, the types of herbs and roots and things that I incorporated into it, the stories that I was getting back from my customers about like this soup saved my life. You know, I was, they give me all these testimonials, which I need to capture, and some of them are in text messages.

I keep saying, I need to pull them down and put them somewhere. But so these kind of made me think, huh, you know, you think it's just you that's experiencing these benefits. And I'm like, yeah, it's me, but I can't say this is really what other people would say. But when other people are telling me their stories, I'm like, huh? And finally, someone texted me once in the middle of the night and they had a family member in the hospital dealing with sepsis.

And they were like, you really need to sell your soups. I know you're working on your cookies, but you need to add your soups. We need things like this for times like this. Immediately the next day I showed up and delivered them some soups and told them to take it to the person. Thankfully the person recovered and came from the hospital.

It wasn't my soups. I can't say it was my soups, but I tried to introduce that as a part of healing to people who are in a position to heal. And the people who have told me not so much, they were in the hospital, but they were in bed not feeling well, have inspired me. And so I began to look up what are these ingredients about? And I began to talk to people.

So I have a YouTube channel now that is I'm working on. It was started as a YouTube channel, but now it'll probably be more like a podcast because most people don't want to be on camera. They don't mind being on audio, but not on camera where I'm actually listening to people about their experiences with soup not so much my soup, but eventually I would, I do want to hear from people with my soup as well, but that's not really the purpose. I'm just like, it's, you know, what's going on. So hopefully by this fall, I'll be able to release the first couple of, of podcasts around that as well.

[00:32:43] **Kaia Godsey:** What are some of the things that you are listening for when you're having these conversations?

[00:32:51] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** Something like your questions as well. It's like, wow, what are your earliest memories? How does this fit into your family traditions, your community traditions, or is this a part of it? Or is this something you yourself stepped away from the way you were growing up and moved into this path? So just trying to see where, what these connections are for people in their experience, as well as their memory. And then following the trails that they take me down, like, Oh, I didn't think about that question, but I want to know more.

[00:33:25] **Kaia Godsey:** And can you talk about things that you like to grow? I know we talked a little about your garden progress, but what are some things that you like to grow or that are on the horizon for growing?

[00:33:36] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** My mom had a garden once growing up. I really don't remember what. I think we grew corn. We were in Indiana. But my first garden ever was, you know, I just dug this big, maybe 10 by 10 square and planted like carrots and watermelon, just whatever I could think of and nothing grew, you know, a little watermelon grew, the ants ate it before I knew. The carrots, they never got bigger than little baby carrots, but it was just exciting. I just went out and I had a ceremony around the carrot. We went inside and ate a carrot.

But, so when I actually grew again more recently for the first time, it was actually accidental. So I had dug a garden like before and I wanted to plant a garden, but I didn't know what to do, how to start. What do you do? I'm like being very scientific about it. I got to go to classes first. So I need a helper or a teacher. And meanwhile, potato was inside just sprouting away. And I was like, gosh, I don't want the fruit flies to get this. So I took it from the paper bag and set it on the dirt outside on my garden dirt.

It rained and rained and I got super busy. And all I know is about a month later, I saw like branches coming out of the bag. And I was like, "this is impossible." So a potato plant just grew out of my "I'll get to it later" bag. So I just knew I had a garden and I didn't have time to get a teacher or learn anything. I just needed to do something.

I had this big old pot with one little thing growing. And so I threw some turmeric out there and some ginger out there and covered it with dirt and laugh. And there's some, I mean, I don't know what else, but the turmeric was bountiful that year, big bulk of turmeric grew, some ginger grew. I didn't realize it was actually good crop too, because it wasn't as big as the turmeric. I just thought maybe it didn't do well.

And then I got inspired. Now I'm springing into action. I'm sprouting sunflower seeds. I put those in the ground and put 'em out there. And so that was 2020. And so when I harvested, my ginger was nice, my turmeric was amazing and I just took it for granted.

So the next year I was, I'm do the same thing. Nothing grew. Well... tomatoes. I did go get seedlings. So tomatoes and cucumbers grew that year, but no turmeric, no ginger, no potatoes, none of the things that just grew, but I was hooked. And so now every year I try to do something, even though I don't know what I'm doing at all. I learned a little bit more each year from doing something.

So, yeah, Yeah.

[00:36:11] **Kaia Godsey:** What is something that you want to grow more prevalent in your garden?

[00:36:16] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** I really, really, really want to grow my ginger and my turmeric and I really want to grow, the hibiscus is so pretty. I just can't believe how pretty hibiscus is.

So I didn't, I mean, not even just for eating, but I just love the beauty of it. So I want some hibiscus growing.

I want an edible. What do they call it? Permaculture? Like I want a landscape that I could eat everything or if I can't eat it, I want it to have a purpose to protect the food that can be eaten. Like I'm learning from your garden here.

[00:36:52] **Kaia Godsey:** Can you talk a bit more about your path into becoming a business woman?

[00:36:58] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** I've always baked, I've always made soups since I was very young and I never aspired to be in the food industry, it was never an aspiration. My parents had a restaurant at least twice, um, at different points growing up.

So we had to work in it and I was like, never interested in going into the food. This, it just wasn't an interest. I would bake for people. I would take them presents and cookies or take them a gift of soup, but it never really occurred to me to do it as a business. But something clicked for me.

Like I said, with the ginger cookie and connecting it to, I just literally baked a batch of ginger cookies one day and said, you know what everybody is sad, everyone is locked into the house because of COVID lockdown, our senior citizens are dying and I don't know why this is just sad and I have this batch of ginger cookies that makes me smile and it makes me think of my grandparents.

And it makes me think that everybody needs a ginger cookie, and everybody needs to at least be thinking about their grandparents while they're eating this ginger cookie. And I literally went and just began selling ginger cookies. And the response was just amazing that people were thinking what I was thinking when they saw my cookies. Complete strangers saying, "Oh, this makes me think of", and I'm like, yes. And so that's what motivated me is just, I don't know. So it wasn't even like. Like, if I had thought deeply about it, I would have said, wait, you said you would never go into food but it not because I don't like cooking.

I love cooking, but I just felt like, gosh, that's such a hard industry to be in trying to please people and what they want to eat. I mean, we are so picky. We just are never satisfied. Can I really, would I really want to do that? But because I wasn't doing it from that angle, you know. It's like, you either are open to a ginger cookie or you're not.

People would come by and be like, oh, I don't do ginger. And I'm like, I respect you. I get it. But, I have changed so many minds about ginger. And that's always fun. When people come to me and say, I don't do ginger. I'm like, well, at least sample. Just a little piece. And I'll choose one of my varieties that I think they might like, and they're like, "Oh my gosh." and then they buy a cookie and then they come back. It's really fun changing people's mind about ginger.

[00:39:35] **Kaia Godsey:** What advice would you have for someone who is starting out, maybe somebody who has a passion and isn't sure where to follow it?

[00:39:45] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** Yeah. It's like those potatoes in the bag in the garden, just let it grow. Just run with it because we pursue, I've pursued college, I have graduate studies, but nowhere in my education was any of this, you know, nowhere in just the standard educational pathway is how to follow your passion and how to make it. How to make it with your passion and how to make your passion make something for you.

I'm not by any means saying that we should just disconnect ourselves from reality and just "oh, I'm going to follow my passion, you know, I love gazing at clouds." you know, that's what I'm going to do. Find a way to connect it to a way to take care of yourself. So if you're gazing at

clouds, you can take great pictures and maybe they could be screensavers or maybe they could be those healing videos for people who have trouble relaxing.

So to me, I think there is a way to make your passion work for you. But for me, it has to be connected with making things better for humanity. If you can convince yourself of how what you're doing is going to make life better for your fellow human being, somebody, then maybe you can make a way with that.

Yeah, so it just can't be about you. It has to be about how you are added value to your community. And then I think you have something.

[00:41:20] **Kaia Godsey:** Yeah. Speaking about community, I feel like that's been very important for your life story. How do you think about community? How do you practice community building?

[00:41:31] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** I think about community. I think at the heart of community is connectivity, because I guess at the heart of the word is unity, right? And things are not united if they're not connected. And so I think it's re rethinking what it means to be community. I mean, we, we probably in a very elementary sense have thought about community as our racial comfort groups, right? Or our peer comfort groups. Or our socioeconomic relatable circles that we're in. But our first community is just our human existence that we share. And how do we get, how do we distill it back to that, you know? And I think gardens are how you do that. I think that's our universal language.

And in most scriptural stories and perspectives is the whole story of man's creation began in the garden you know, with Adam and Eve. And then because of the fact that we have a lot of things to learn. to work out, we put on earth to try to figure it out so that we can get back to the garden.

So I would say, if we think of community and come together around shared spaces where our basic needs for food, nourishment, and not just nourishment of our insides of our body, but nourishment of our mental and spiritual health comes from the beauty that God put in nature. So I'm not eating everything here, but my spirit is eating and soaking up this beauty of this garden. So I'm getting filled up, you know?

So I think our first concepts of community have to be challenged and rebuilt. And I think the work that you guys are doing around the garden is a way to help us to purify our understandings of community and get rid of all of the corruptions that have entered from our insecurities and our bad experiences with each other as people, and we should create new experiences around the beauty in nature.

[00:43:30] **Kaia Godsey:** You have already answered this question, so it might have been a full answer, but if you could elaborate more about your own spiritual or religious connection to gardening or about maybe a larger spiritual or religious connection.

[00:43:42] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** Yeah. So in Islam, like I said, my parents were a member of the Black Freedom Struggle back in the 60s. And they didn't understand a lot about what Islam was.

They heard of something called the Nation of Islam. And the Nation of Islam was a group of very sincere people who had just had it with the racism, you know, and just the terror that they were experiencing in the South and in the North. Just because of the color of their skin. And so they were drawn into a philosophy that taught them positive aspects about self, positive aspects about community building, positive aspects about eating right and educating your own children. But it didn't have the full understanding of what Islam, from the religion of Abraham and the religion of Noah and Jesus and Moses, because Islam is an Arabic word, and the proper word is Al Islam, the Islam, and it means the peace, the peaceful surrender and a peaceful surrender to God's power and majesty. And it's not a political movement. It's a connection between mind and body and spirit that comes from a surrendering and an acceptance of the beauty that we're experiencing here in this natural world.

And what God has given us through his revelation is something that is to put us in a sense of peace, to help guide how we build community with each other. You know, how we navigate difference because in my religion in Al Islam, like I said, not Nation of Islam, but actual Universal Islam. Following the example of prophet Muhammad, which we believe is God's last messenger, it teaches that the purpose that God created our different colors and our different languages and our different forms is so that we can get to know each other. So he gives us a puzzle, a task. It's like a maze, something to figure out in our time on earth. And if we accomplish it, well, just like with any maze or task or whatever, you have rewards and to accomplish it, you need help.

You need guidance. Like, how do I deal with this? We're dealing with the struggle. How do I deal with that? So that to me is what revelation is. That's what the holy books are, is a way to help answer questions that we run into as we're trying to figure this whole thing out. But even if you don't read a written revelation, we believe that God revealed everything first and inscribed it into his creation.

So it's written in the flowers, it's written in the trees. It's written in the skies. It's written in the celestial body. It's there. And it's consistent with the beauty and the purity in his message and revelation. And whatever is not consistent must have come from man's intervention in, interpretation of or corruption to what God had delivered to us in his written word.

So for me, my earliest memories and what my faith teaches me is that, it says God created man to be the Khalifa, which means we're supposed to be the one who receives all of this creation. And it's not Khalifa in a political sense. So many people like I'm the Khalifa or the Khalifa or whatever this, but no, you, each of us are charged with being, um, like a guardian to this creation and a guardian is someone who protects and maintains and nurtures and is a steward, who's not going to be excessive in what you take and it's given in what you put back.

And so that's our responsibility. That's what we believe. And so for us we're supposed to not do anything that's going to jeopardize the safety of creation, you know, we're supposed to be kind to animals, even in our meats that we eat. Like when we eat, you know, God has said when you slaughter an animal, slaughter it in a way that we call halal, which means that if you want to eat lamb, then you don't go and shoot it or hit it on the head with a stick. You take it and you have the sharpest knife possible such that just the knife touching the lamb, it's, you know, you

slaughter it right there at its, neck in such a way that it doesn't have any pain and that it dies peacefully because if you create stress for the animal, it's going to be in your food and it's not good for the animal and it's not good for you.

So even how you raise the animals, they're supposed to be raised humanely and you're not supposed to slaughter more than what you need. You're not supposed to be excessive in what you do. So the balance is what God talks about a lot in our Holy book is the balance. Um, And the balance in how you follow your religion. The balance in how you live your life. Yeah.

[00:48:31] **Kaia Godsey:** Could you talk a bit about the processes for when you are producing your baked goods or your soups? What processes you go through and what processes you think even scaling up are important to maintain?

[00:48:43] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** Yeah, so for me before I bake or cook anything, I always say a prayer and I always ask God to give the people who would eat from what I have the best of these ingredients. And if there's anything lacking in the ingredient, if there's anything that has entered into the manufacturing or supply chain in any way that I'm unaware of, that he protects us all from any of that. And so I always just do that because I'm like, it's a very spiritual thing to prepare food for the community.

And I think that we should take it very seriously aside from just making sure your space is prepared for that, but to also enter into it with the mindset and I stay in that spiritual zone, as I'm preparing the food and, when I'm cleaning, I'll enter more into like, "Oh, okay, I'm playing my playlist, my music," whatever.

But when I'm preparing food, I'm in a very spiritual space.

[00:49:38] **Kaia Godsey:** As we wrap up, is there anything that I haven't asked or that you just feel compelled to share?

[00:49:44] **Aneeqah Ferguson:** I would just say one thing I am excited about is I'm excited to see the African American community, at least in Georgia, and maybe this has happened in other places to reconnect with the land um, again, but on in this way, because I think some of so many of our ancestors suffered through compulsory working in the land that we lost generations to see the dignity and working in the land.

So I think because of that stigma of the history we had as being enslaved people in this country, so many of our ancestors. So many generations in between freedom and today didn't want anything to do with the land. So that was one thing. And then I think the other thing is the traumatic experiences of how so many of our people were separated from land that they did value and did want to keep also separated us from the land.

So to see us finding little small niches of, of land and just small places and just valuing it and honoring it and doing something great with it. It's very exciting to see. So I, kudos to Spelman and what you all are doing here.

