

Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project
Interview with A.C. Salaam by Tessa Desmond
Conducted on September 27th, 2023 in Farmville, NC

[00:00:00] **Tessa Desmond:** Today is September 27th, 2023. I am Tessa Lowinske Desmond with the Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project. I'm in Farmville, North Carolina. Thank you for sitting today for a conversation.

[00:00:14] **A.C. Salaam:** Absolutely.

[00:00:15] **Tessa Desmond:** Can you introduce yourself and tell me some things about yourself that feel important to share?

[00:00:21] **A.C. Salaam:** I'm A.C. Salaam. I'm in Farmville, North Carolina, as a return to my home territory. I am native Tuscaroran after my grandfather and great grandfather. And so I am home as far as, um, ancestry goes.

[00:00:43] **Tessa Desmond:** Tell me about some of those places that you call home. Where are homes for you? Where have you lived?

[00:00:50] **A.C. Salaam:** I was born in Connecticut. I know nothing about it because my mother left when I was a month old, so I grew up in New Jersey. And, uh, I grew up in Central Jersey, right across the river from Manhattan, where we traveled a lot. My mom worked in Manhattan, and so, um, that whole area was my area, Central Jersey, and, and the five boroughs.

[00:01:15] **Tessa Desmond:** And then, and where else have you lived?

[00:01:18] **A.C. Salaam:** And then, after, I, I went to school in New Jersey all the way through, including undergraduate school. And then I applied to six schools in the U. S. And my undergraduate school decided not to send them my prep work on time. And so I ended up going to med school in the Caribbean. And I think the universe gives us what we need, because when I was living on those islands, I learned so much about healing and the things that I actually wanted to learn as a potential healer, other than what the allopathic, uh, uh, how do you say, the was the type of things that I actually wanted to learn that I would not have learned in the six schools that I did not get into. I was learning from the local people on the islands where I lived.

I got a cold when I was on True Blue Grenada. And one of the Rasta's that sold me fish. He sold me the saltwater fish straight out of the, the ocean. I used to love those red snapper. And then he would come with the bucket, with the fish swimming in the bucket. Talk about fresh fish. You couldn't get fresher fish than alive. He would pick out the fish, he'd take it out and whack. And cut it open and clean it right there and bring you back the fish and I told them they love fish heads.

I'm from New Jersey. I freak out with the fish head. Don't bring me the fish head. Cut the head off before you bring it back to me. But um, I had a cold and he looked at me puzzled. He said,

ain't this a medical school? I said, yeah. He said, y'all studying doctor? I said, yeah. He said, so how come all y'all had colds all the time?

I said, well, I don't know. He said, well, how you have a cold when you have a black stage going right in front of your door? I said, a what? He said, a black stage. Now, I don't know what. What that thing actually is, because I haven't been able to find it, but it's a tropical leaf that looks something like a ivy.

And he said, I said, well, what is that? So he said, look, you take that, you cut the top, you put you boil you some water, you drop it in the water, wait for the water to turn green, but then you drink it and you go to sleep. So this is what I did. I woke up the next morning, mucus was coming out of everywhere, out of every direction, out of every orifice I had, ears, nose, eyes, every place, but the cold was gone.

And I was fascinated. I had to live with some people on Dominica because our dorm was outside of the season, was a hotel. So, Uh, between semesters, we was going to have to pay hotel room rate for my room. I was not doing that. I didn't have the money to do that. So, the uh, exterminator had been visiting and he said, Okay, well I'll take you to my girlfriend's house and you can stay there those two weeks.

I lived in a house with some people. Anything they want, the hospital was really small because it was unused. Any ailment, Any problem that people had, they ran up under the house and grabbed this, or got the soursop leaf, or got this, or got that, they knew which leaf to pull for what ailment. I learned so much from the local people.

Yeah, I, I, I, I studied and I did my allopathic stuff so that won't fail. But, uh, the type of learning that I actually wanted to do, the, the, the stars aligned and sent me to the place where I needed to find, where I needed to get that information. So, coming back here, um, of course, I went to school in other countries, so coming back, I wasn't welcome to license, but I still think the knowledge that I gained has, has, has advantaged me.

In personal ways. And I, I still like to want to have the knowledge to grow my own food. Grow my own medicine. Identify the plants that will heal me. Identify the wild plants that will feed me. If, if the time came that it needed to happen. Because I'm one of these survivalist nuts that they talk about. I do think that there are people mean enough to try to starve us out.

So I want Uh, I want people to be able to know, those that want to know, because you can't feed everybody, you can't give, you take the horse to water as they say, you can't make them drink. So there's certain people that's just not gonna follow and you're just gonna have to let them be. But the ones who want to survive, I want to help them and learn with them how we survive past whatever's coming at us.

[00:07:03] **Tessa Desmond:** You know a lot about healing.

[00:07:05] **A.C. Salaam:** Mm hmm.

[00:07:07] **Tessa Desmond:** What are some plants that you, that you really like that you use for healing?

[00:07:14] **A.C. Salaam:** Sure, you know, we, you can do some more things with onions and garlic. You know, um, you can pull the poisons out of your body by putting, cutting the onions in half and strapping them to your feet, putting your socks on and sleeping with the onions under your feet overnight.

It can draw a lot of the toxins out of your body. And make you feel a lot better. Putting garlic in just about everything is good. And people might not think you're pleasant, but that might be good too. LAUGHING Keep the unpleasant people away. Mhmm.

[00:07:57] **Tessa Desmond:** So, you were in the Caribbean, you learned about healing, you came back and eventually you came to Farmville. How did that happen?

[00:08:05] **A.C. Salaam:** My mother was born and raised in Farmville. She was the salutatorian of her class. Her best friend was valedictorian. I go visit her at the nursing home when I can. And, um, my mother used to tell me about what her mother used to grow, and they had chickens in the backyard, and, and the only thing they went to the store for was flour.

What's it say? Flour. A sack of flour, or something, something. And that was it, because everything else they had, either in the yard, you know, and, you know, uh, plants and animals, uh.

[00:08:48] **Tessa Desmond:** What sort of things did they talk, did she talk to you about in the garden that they were eating?

[00:08:54] **A.C. Salaam:** She didn't. She didn't go into details about it. She just said the only thing we had to go to the store for was a sack of flour, a sack of sugar, maybe milk, something like that. And she said everything else Mama had in the yard. And, um, we would come. You know, like, every year, because we had an annual family reunion started by my grandmother. We would be here every year. It just wouldn't be very long.

[00:09:27] **Tessa Desmond:** When you moved back to Farmville, did you start gardening?

[00:09:31] **A.C. Salaam:** No, but I tried. I have a plot of land that I wanted, that I kept saying, saying, Why don't you come? We can, we can, we can plant stuff, I got a whole lot over here and everybody was looking at me like, yeah, right. And then I, I, I talked to the people at the church across the street and they said, Oh, that sounds nice.

And so they started their own garden temporarily until they just decided they didn't want to be by that. How the energy got to these two, I don't know. Because I was asking all kinds of other people and they were just looking at me like, you know, I don't do that no more. They got our grocery store. So, um, evidently, the energy was out there. They got together and, and did it in the spot that they did it. And they said, well, do you want to be part of this? Of course. Yeah. Cause I was trying to do it next to my house and didn't nobody want to be bothered. So.

[00:10:34] **Tessa Desmond:** And so when did you start gardening in the community garden?

[00:10:37] **A.C. Salaam:** When they started 2016. Mm hmm.

[00:10:41] **Tessa Desmond:** What have you been growing in your garden?

[00:10:44] **A.C. Salaam:** Whatever I can get my hands on. I got to get my hands on some seeds, I put it down there. Or if somebody give me some starter plants, I put it down there and see what comes up. And, uh, I just, I just look and see what's going to happen.

And then if I see something down there, I say, oh, I wonder what that is. So I let it grow for a while to figure out what it is. And then if it comes up that it's useful, great. If it comes up that it's choking out the stuff that I want to grow, then I'll rip it up. But it's all experimental because I haven't the first idea of what I'm doing.

And that is the fun part. I'm learning the whole way through.

[00:11:25] **Tessa Desmond:** I got to walk in your garden this morning. Let's like pretend we're back there and just describe what we're seeing.

[00:11:31] **A.C. Salaam:** Yeah, but we had, I got a lot, my basil grew so abundant. It was, and it smells so great. You walk past it and it just comes out and meets you and then I got my sage and I have always loved sage from childhood.

I ate the sage sausage, not because of the sausage, but because I love sage. Once I learned that I could have a sage and a tea and didn't have to worry about the sausage. I was in heaven, okay. And I had my sage, it was hard growing at first, so when I moved it and it started growing better, I, just great. And the main thing is, don't touch it, don't touch it. Just let it grow. Let nature do what it does. Get out the way so that mother nature could do her thing and she makes it abundant for you. Absolutely. Going in there picking with this and moving with that and stuff wasn't growing when I decided. So, okay, let me see what happened. I had. Uh, a watermelon couple, a couple summers ago.

And I think it was a portion of a watermelon. I had about a handful of seeds that I had left. I put it in a styrofoam container. I had it sitting on the counter. I forgot about it. Then this spring I said, Oh, when I'm over here getting, let me grab these watermelon seeds too. I just dumped them next to the, the trellis that I had sitting on the side.

There's watermelons all over the place. And I love it. I love it, I love it. I have forgot. I didn't do it. Matter of fact, Zach told me, he said, you got some watermelon growing over there. I said, I do?

He said, yeah, they're pretty big too. They're all over. They have spread all around the area. And they're delicious. Oh my God, I had one. I ate myself silly. It had me go, it had me, I had me releasing water like every, every hour. Because I ate the whole thing in one day. But I'm enjoying it. I am having so much fun learning what Mother Nature will give us, if we just take that first

step. You take one step, I'll take two. That was the promise scripture gave to us. So just take the one step. Don't think you know everything. Get out the way and let God work. Yeah.

[00:14:13] **Tessa Desmond:** Is there anything else you want to share this time?

[00:14:17] **A.C. Salaam:** This time? Oh, I'm, uh, the more people I can share the enthusiasm with to want to take control of their own sustenance.

Like they say, it's few, it's few and far between, it's only a handful. But if me and that handful can do it, we will make it. The rest that don't want to do it, we'll go wherever they go. But, at least a handful of us will make the attempt towards survival and pushing ourself forward and giving it to them. And I'm so encouraged by the young people that are here that talk like me.

You know what I'm saying? People my age look at me like I'm stupid. But then I look at people 20 years younger and they be like, yeah, ma, blah, blah. So I was born with the wrong set of people. I was born about 20 years too early cause my set of people came 20. Okay. Cause my set of people came about 20, 30 years behind me.

Yeah.

[00:15:35] **Tessa Desmond:** Thank you for sharing.

[00:15:36] **A.C. Salaam:** Absolutely.