

## **PDX Garden Stories**

### **Interviews with participants in Growing Gardens Home Gardens Program Portland, Oregon**

#### **Interview with Tiza**

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**Could you talk a little bit about how you first came to be involved with gardening? You mentioned your grandfather...**

*Yea, I have really fond memories of gardening with him and him teaching me things and letting me try things. (0:20)* Like, Have you ever eaten a clover, the purple clovers? They're really good. If you get them at the right time they kind of have a sweetness, like a honey. And I remember him telling me, oh it's a weed, but it's an edible weed...

Just being in the garden with him, even if I was just standing next to him watching him, was just really fun. I love being around my grandpa and listening to him talk and teaching me stuff. That's the first time I remember doing anything like that. *That's the earliest memory I have of getting into the dirt was with my grandpa. (1:28)*

He lived at the property many many years, but I remember one or two years being out there with him. *My fondest memory is in the garden. I have other fond memories of him, but that's the one I hang on to the most. (2:30)*

**How did you come in contact with Growing Gardens initially? How did you start thinking about having a garden?**

This is the first place where there's enough room for a garden. So this was the first time... I thought about it before, but there's never any space. Now that I'm in Growing Gardens, you find out, oh, there's container gardening... and you think, oh I could have done this a long time ago. It's something I could have done if someone would have told me about it. How I got into it was, my son was in the Head Start program up here on 48<sup>th</sup> and Division and I was talking to a staff member up there, the staff up there is really sweet. And I was talking to her about some of the things I wanted to start doing, and gardening was one of them. And she actually came upon the website and everything and she actually gave me the information. From there, I contacted and filled out an application. I figured, what are the chances of me getting something like that, you know, but I did. (laughs) So, that was pretty cool and fun to do.

**Can you talk a little bit about the mentor program?**

Um, well the way it was explained to me is, it's a three year program and your first year you have a mentor—that's a person who will come to your house and help you with your gardening... planting, setting up your garden before you even plant, any questions that arise throughout the season, they're there to help you. And they try to hook you up with somebody who's kinda close to your house, so it's not that much of a travel time for anybody one way or the other. But, they just help you the best that they can. It's usually somebody that's participated in the program for at least a year or two.

[5:00]

### **Who was your mentor?**

Mirah. She was a really nice lady, very helpful. I could call her up anytime, email her anytime and ask her a question and she'd get back to me as soon as she could. I think she probably got tired of me texting or calling or emailing throughout the season because I had a lot of questions. But, she easily put them to rest. It didn't matter how silly or stupid they might have seemed, it didn't seem to bug her at all.

### **How has having a garden changed your life?**

It's changed really dramatically in my opinion. *We're eating fresher foods (6:09)*, obviously. And I am, I guess you call it, organic. I don't use any pesticides or anything. If I have a pest in my garden, I leave it alone. Last year I spent a total of 20 hours, and that's for the whole season... working in my garden. People are like, how can you do it? I didn't care if weeds grew. They didn't bug me. I let them go. I would just go out there and you just water. I was doing... like right now I told you I just planted yesterday, so I'm watering right now for every other day. As soon as they start to grow and get bigger, I'll start cutting back and cutting back. And then it will just get down to where I'm not really doing much other than seeing if there's anything that needs to be harvested. *But I know, like last year we weren't spending as much money at the grocery store, cause I had fresh stuff at the house. (7:10)* You know, the kids may not have liked what I was making, but it's all trial and error and I think out of every meal I made we only threw away one dish. (laughs) Which is amazing in my book, cause I usually flop everything at least once before I get it right. But yea, we spent less money at the store and I have four boys, my two older boys didn't really help me in the garden that much unless I was like, come on, you need to get out here, I need your help. But my two younger ones helped me all the time. I don't have a basket or anything, so I'd just put stuff on the ground and then trip after trip... But yea, *spending that time in the garden as a family was somethin kinda different. (8:12)* You have like family game night, no one wants to do that all the time. You know, and you can't really have that when you have two separate households. My two older boys are from a different marriage, my younger ones are from this one. So, they gotta go spend time over there, so it's not really feasible. *So, it was nice to go out there and have that as time and be able to do something together away from electronics, away from distractions (8:40)* and stuff. So, I noticed that was an increase. *I also felt better.* Like, physically. *Just being out there, being active in the garden, eating healthier, and just, I don't know, I just felt better. Everything... mentally, physically... I just felt 100% better (8:55)* being out there. So, that improved in my opinion. (laughs)

### **Do you enjoy the cooking aspect?**

[10:00]

Ask me that on a really hot day. I don't mind cooking. I'm not even a fair cook. I just have my own way of doing things. I try a recipe... I'll follow it to the t 9 times out of ten, and then I'll adjust it from there so that it becomes this whole other dish. It is pretty weird. I can sometimes just make something up off the top of my head. Sometimes it's a flop, sometimes it's not. But, we eat it anyways usually. Like I said, last year there was only one dish we took one bite of and were like, uh uh, out the door with it, not happening. (laughs) But yea, I'm not really that good of a cook or anything, but I manage. Don't ask me about baking 'cause I don't even do that. I can't do it, I burn everything I bake. And I'm not kidding, I burn meat when I put it in the oven on broil. It's crazy. I'm not a very good cook... but you know, I do pretty good considering that tall thing you just saw, that's my oldest. So, I must be doin something pretty good. I don't consider myself a good cook. I'm not a poor cook, I know that, but between poor and fair, somewhere in there, I think.

**Is there anything else you would like to talk about as far as the impact that the garden has had on you or how it's changed how you view food overall?**

It definitely has. It has changed my view. I kinda like... I wouldn't say snob or anything, but *when you taste fresh food... it doesn't matter what it is. I don't know if it's just because I'm growing it or what, but you taste the freshness of the food when it's coming out of the ground or from the farmer's market or something, you taste that freshness of it. Compared to, when you go to the store, I dunno, it just kinda loses flavor, I guess. It doesn't taste the same to me. So, I kinda dread the winter 'cause I don't have... I have to go back to buying.... I wanna call it used food. (Laughs) and it's not used, I know that, but it just, it doesn't taste the same, it doesn't look the same and so it's like, kinda dreading that part of it. When planting season comes around, I kinda get excited and I drive everybody nuts. (12:47-13:50)* This is my second year with the program, but this year I was plotting things out and asking everybody, hey is there anything in particular you want in the garden this year. *So it's kinda exciting just to even think about it... growing and the possibilities, trying different things, but I think the biggest thing for me is just the flavor and the look of food... (14:04)* compared to fresh food to store bought. I don't know if that really answers your question either.

**What about the people you share your food with, are they excited about gardening now, too?**

One of the families I shared food with last year, they have their own little garden. So, I didn't really share too much with them, but it was just nice talking to them about it. We're really good friends anyway, so it's just one more thing to add to the conversation for us.

[15:00]

It just gives us one more thing to talk about and like, hey what are you doing this year and oh, what are you doing this year... you can grow this and I can grow that, you know. And she actually said that this year she is taking her garden out because it was just getting to be too much work for her. She said last year it was getting hard to maintain the garden 'cause they have an

above ground bed, so it's just been hard to keep the dogs out of it and maintain it and stuff like that, so they actually took them down this year. And she's like hey, if you have any extra, I'd really appreciate it. I'm like, I always have extra. We had extra last year and this year I planted more. So I'm like, okay, but you gotta come over and help.... she goes... oh... okay. So, I mean, there's that trade off. One of the other families, one of them is disabled, so moving around is kinda a little hard for one of them and the other one works the graveyard shift and they have a little girl. So, I talked to them about it, but because of limitations and stuff, I don't know if they're going to follow through with maybe getting a container garden of herbs or something.... They're excellent cooks. I haven't come across anything I don't like that they've made. And they were really excited about getting some produce from me, too and made the comment again about the taste of the food and stuff like that, like I've already commented on. The other family, I don't think they'll garden. I think they like the food, they appreciate it, but I don't think they care really. It's mostly a bunch of guys, so they just kinda... their tar street workers and paving... they're just like, it's food, you know... (laughs) So, I really don't know about them, but I know the other two are kinda excited about what's going to be happening. They don't really have a lot going on. Right now, neither do I. They're [the vegetables] in the ground, doin their own thing. Like I said, growing, you never know what they're gonna do... are they gonna take to the soil or are they gonna die out. So, it's one of those guessing games. Except for the strawberries. They're doin really good.

**Is there anything you haven't grown before that you really want to grow?**

I want to grow more fruit, but there's only certain ones that I want to grow and I'm kinda scared to grow, too, at the same time. Because, like blueberries, blueberries I hear are very overwhelming. They're like blackberries. You have to really maintain them. Like I said before, I did like 20 hours all combined if not less in my garden last year. Eventually, I just want to be able to just leave it alone. (laughs) I don't know if that's something I'm really gonna be doing. If I can't contain it in a container I probably won't try it. Unless, I get some help maybe or something. I don't know, it's a lot of work. I you're going, gardening is a lot of work... well yea, gardening is a lot of work, but when you get it going, there's really not that much to it. There's really not a lot, because when you get your plants growing and everything, there's not a lot of room for weeds or anything to grow. At least that's my experience from last year. I hope to have it again this year.

[19:00]