

Jaz Boler

All We Can Save-102

### All We Can Grow

Growing up, my great grandma raised me to be a steward of the land. Most of my weekends were spent in a straw hat and dirty “garden shoes.” I learned about how rewarding growing my own food was, and found that the growing process of plants is the most beautiful thing the land has to offer. Soil health was something that she taught me was if not one of the most crucial parts of the process, on the list of being so. I remember how much time she put into managing the soil for her big backyard garden. It was so important that it was one of the components of gardening as a child I could not be as involved in. Now that she is older, she doesn’t grow her okra, tomatoes and beans anymore. I think it would be heartbreaking for me to go visit her backyard. The garden that fed us in the summers and taught me more than a class ever could back then, is probably dried up and simply dirt now. Anyways, it was those days that inclined me to be outdoorsy and a true daughter to the Mother of all Mothers, Mother Nature. Although, I had a hard time connecting with this element of my identity because so many other identities were pushed on me that I had a difficult time relating to. My family wanted me to dress and behave in a fashionable and feminine way, refraining from getting dirty. They constantly told me I dressed in a way that suggested that I didn’t care what I looked like, something that was grave to them, considering they prioritized their image. They always reminded me that (in their eyes) my poor looks were a reflection of them. Something that also really irritated and hurt me was they constantly would tell me that “if you were a boy” it wouldn’t matter if I wanted to dress more laid back or get dirtier, but because I’m a girl I couldn’t do those things. My family

fed into stereotypes that deepens the gap between boys and girls, that allows boys to go through life more comfortably than girls. They constantly talked down on black people and referred to the low-income, predominately black and brown areas as the “ghetto” “bad” areas. They talked down on black people and reinforced common stereotypes in conversation. This is just one example of an element of my life that made growing up really hard for me. Navigating my way through my identity has been a difficult journey as I’ve grown up being taught certain things, but the entire time not relating to it.

A huge part of the climate crisis is addressing social disparities, dissipating stereotypes, and encouraging everyone to embrace their true identities without substantial distraction from the material world. Technology, social media, and out-dated, ignorant stereotypes only push us further and further away from connecting with the natural world. When a girl is taught she needs to be feminine and not dirty, she is naturally distanced from the great outdoors. When people of color are stuck in generational poverty, they’re excluded from decision making, healthy environments, and accessible healthy food. When people are encouraged to embrace their identities without direct influence from the material world, they’re able to have a clearer vision of what’s important to access healthy, fulfilling lives. Of which, must include sustainable living for a healthy, fulfilling planet.

A documentary I watched recently, called “Seaspiracy,” unravels the many elements to commercial fishing that are directly related to our survival. It was the most informative, jaw-dropping film I have ever seen and I noticed afterwards just how much my understanding of climate change has shaped my day-to-day life. I watched the film with a boy I had really come to like in a romantic way. Towards the end of the film I was almost on my toes eager to ask him what he took away from it. We had spent everyday together laughing, loving, and creating

memories with our dogs. I loved having him around and he held such a special place in my heart but suddenly it seemed like all of that fled when he responded, “It was informative but...” and basically explained although it was interesting and informative it did not mean or speak much to him. I responded, “what is information without challenge?” I went back and forward with him pleading for him to just want to make a change even if that meant consuming less fish, or at least admitting that he should. He continued with a “they need to stop” it’s their fault” and maintained the mental block connecting him to them. I thought why would they stop getting richer, if we’re not giving them a reason to and I thought about all the men I’ve spoken to that have this same stubborn mentality. I really reflected on this conversation with my roommate and we talked about the power of being a woman. That women have a more proactive approach to climate change, that women are more likely to choose majors that reflect their passion compared to men who tend to lean towards capital-centered majors, that there is a line connecting the patriarchy to colonialism to capitalism, it’s insane. But we ended our conversation concluding we can’t accept the “fuck men” mentality.

A lot of climate work is unconditioning. I learn through observation and unravelling. I’ve been wondering why men always have the upperhand in frustration but now I know that in order to push for change, I have to work with everyone that I can to break down the patriarchy that holds down both women and men through toxic masculinity. One of the biggest things I have picked up from being in college is just how conditioned we all are. I am thankful that my major has challenged me to be a critical thinker and question all that has been presented to me. The conditioning I have experienced has really shaped how I see the world around me and come to understand myself as well. I am an abolitionist. Addressing climate action has guided me down a path of discovery and the more I discover and question, the more I see how clearly

reform is not enough- it never is or was. It becomes more and more clear that for purposes of sustainability, fulfilment, justice, peace, and everything else I could want from life on this planet, we must rewrite the script. I am prepared to re-write the script, I am inspired everyday to become more and more of an advocate of abolition work. If a film like Seaspiracy could not impact someone because of how severely conditioned they are, maybe it is not a question of their morality- but their will to embrace a new idea, to break tradition, and be a part of a solution- the result of unconditioning.

When I ask myself what my place is when dealing with the biggest existential crises in history. I think about the little girl who worked summers in her great grandmother's garden, she had no idea that those memories would plant seeds in her and that now, over a decade later, I would manage a plot at the community garden and want to farm post-college. I think about how many seeds I could plant in people and in my community (literally and figuratively), and I remind myself that sometimes seeds take a while to germinate, but once they are planted- at some point, they usually do. It was not overnight that I became vegan, or an abolitionist, or a super-vocal activist, but in time, because of certain seeds planted in me, I am now. And with that in mind, I am constantly inspired.