

Debra Knapke, Narrator

Anneliese Abbott, Interviewer

July 5, 2021

Location: Columbus, Ohio at Debra Knapke's house

DK=Debra Knapke

AA=Anneliese Abbott

AA: All right! Today is July 5, 2021, and this is Anneliese Abbott interviewing—

DK: Debra Knapke.

AA: So Debra, thank you so much for taking the time to interview today! Why don't you start with giving us a little about your background in organic/sustainable agriculture and your specific connection/relationship to it?

DK: So for me, and I think I mentioned this earlier, my relationship started when our children were small. And my epiphany came when I had roses in the front yard and a just one-year-old daughter. And I thought about spraying them, and if she should touch them, and what that would mean. I had already thought about, before that, about how you grow vegetables and what kind of fertilizers you use, etc., at our old house. But it didn't hit home until I started thinking about our daughter and subsequent two children. So that was my beginning, and that was in 1983, '84. So that was my beginning of understanding that there had to be a different kind of relationship with growing things, that to me you just can't spray willy-nilly. And all of a sudden—and I met people who kept bees, who were beekeepers. In fact, the first time someone said they were a beekeeper, I said, "What? A bookkeeper?" No, bee, as in flying. Oh, those! That was in college.

So for me, I didn't call it organic in the beginning. In the beginning it was just what I called my awareness phase. And so for several years it was reading—like that whole shelf over there, I don't know if you can see, but the second from the top shelf—that is all my permaculture, organic, sustainable, regenerative. And that isn't all the books I have on that subject. I have books scattered, and I have some over there, and I have some up there. So for me—in fact, I just got this, and I can't wait to get into it. Will Bonsall's *Essential Guide to Radical Self-Reliant Gardening*. I have read an essay by him, and I thought, "Oh, I need his book."

To me, it's ongoing. It will never be done, this understanding of organic, sustainable, regenerative, living eco-consciously, gardening, etc. Because I am a food gardener, herb gardener, ornamental gardener, teacher, writer, etc. And it's all together. So that's the beginning, ish. (2:51)

AA: Do you want to tell us a little about, you had a garden/landscaping business?

DK: Oh, yeah. And that too—and there's a push-pull in there. Because you get a client—for me, people would ask, "Do you spray for bugs?" And I said, "No, I don't." I did get my pesticide

applicator's license when I was in graduate school. I went back to school in horticulture for my second master's, in ornamental hort. And took the pesticide applicator's thing, got my license. Never used it because I didn't like the idea of it. But I had this class, and part of the class was taking the test. So I did. My field, that was for my master's thesis on lavender, I did not use any herbicides to kill weeds. I used tilling, and newspaper, and rocks, and hoe. And I actually got a little bit of kidding about that. "It would be a lot easier, Knapke, if you used..." But I didn't. And that was in the early '90s, '92, '93 was my research field work.

So then when I went out and started being the Garden Sage, which started officially in 1994, but I'd been working before that, people would ask me about creating butterfly gardens. And then they'd ask me about spraying for the bugs that they didn't like. And I learned really quickly that I had to gently say, "Well, if you kill one, you kill them all." So it's this awareness. And I've been talking that way for years. And finally it's in vogue. Yay! But now, I pull no punches. I say, "You kill them, you kill yourself." In fact, I'll be giving a talk on Wednesday morning to a bunch of gardeners. I'll be preaching to the choir. But I'm going to be more honest I think than I've ever been about what our relationship to the earth should be as gardeners. Even if we're not gardeners. I'm not sure if I answered that question correctly. But in a business, I'm sometimes asked to do things I don't want to. And I don't do them. I say, "Well, there's someone else I can recommend, or I'm not the person for you." That's the short answer. I probably should have started with that. (5:34)

AA: Yeah! That's great. You want to talk a little, you were telling me about your research project with the lavender and how you didn't want to use herbicides on that. You want to say a little about that?

DK: Well, I had a research field. I didn't know what was in it before, so who knows what was in the soil. Wheat, corn studies, soybean studies, you name it, at Waterman Farm at Ohio State University. So I figured, I'll just have to pretend I don't know that there's probably a lot of stuff in the soil that I'll be exposed to. And I just wore my gloves and whatever, but I wasn't nuts about it. And I just decided that since I'd be in my research field a lot, and I'd be working in the soil, I didn't want to add any more. That wasn't my role, to add more stuff into the soil. And I sometimes wonder, and this is a question I've been asking more and more and more, with everything that we put on our land and our lawns. When people talk about tree stressors, and I'm really thinking this is part of the problem with sugar maples, which are showing dieback like crazy right now, along with climate change. But they're not pollution-tolerant, we know that. They're not pollution-tolerant, they're not chemical-tolerant, they're not salt-tolerant. And here we put them by where chemicals are put. So are we slowly poisoning them from the ground up? Are we stressing them so that climate change is affecting them and they cannot adapt? They're already sick.

So I've been thinking this way for at least the past ten years, that we really need to change our practices. And the lawn stuff has got to stop. [Sigh] And I'll stop there. Because otherwise I'll go on a rant. (7:32)

AA: All right. So do you want to talk a little more about your methods that you used and how you chose them and developed them, and some of the top people and publications that influenced you?

DK: You know, I'd read something, and I'd say, "Gee, I wonder if that works." So like double digging instead of tilling. So you weren't totally pulverizing. Well, first I tilled. Because everybody tills. That's how you learn. And I tilled. And I wondered about chopping up all the worms, just that simple thought. And then I tried double digging because they did that in England. Well, it doesn't really work as well in clay soils as it does in the soils of England and Europe. And then I've done hugelculture, I have that out. But that was more recent; that was 2010 when I tried hugelculture. So that's much more recent. That's part of all my permaculture.

I started exploring permaculture in the late '90s, but I didn't really have a guide. And in 2007 I took a class, every weekend for six weeks with Peter Bain, who is really understands Midwest permaculture. And it was then that my activity and forest gardening, and I took a class from David Jackie, and I'm still in contact with him. That was in 2008, 2009, I'm not sure. And I've been creating forest gardens, although my clients don't always know that. Here's a great tree, here's some shrubs—oh, can we get some food plants in here? Did you know pawpaws are edible? Spicebush, you can eat the berries. So I've been incorporating those principles into my design work for a long time, at least since 2007. And I felt like that was one of my final answers—not final, but it just built so much on what I was trying to understand with reading Rodale and reading Eliot Coleman. I'm trying to remember some of the other folks that I've read, too. *Gaia's Garden*, Toby Hemingway. He was a huge discovery for me in 2007, along with the permaculture course.

And then I joined OEFFA. I wasn't as involved with them initially. I joined OEFFA in the late '90s, Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association. And I became more involved when I went to, I gave a talk and someone from OEFFA was there. And he said, "Would you speak at our annual conference?" And I said, "Sure." He said, "We don't pay, but you get a conference in return." I said, "Fine. I'm into bartering." So I think I've spoken for about seven or eight or nine years, I'm not exactly sure. There was a couple years I didn't speak for various reasons. And I just tried to come up with topics that are gardening but into the organic/sustainable/permaculture edge. That's kind of my niche, there.

If you look up there, you can see the books. Bill Mollison and David Holmgren. And Fukuoka, I always say his first name wrong. Masanobu Fukuoka. And they're all up there. So those are my influences. Plus I read a lot. I'll be on the web—and you're welcome to look at those when we're done—and I'll see something that I have no idea what they're talking about, which is then another exploration and down a rabbit hole. Gosh, I wish I could give you more names. There's just been so many people. And so many mentors over time. All my teachers, and of course none of their names are coming to my head right this minute. Benny Russ. Biodynamic design. *Biophilia*, and that's E. L. Wilson. These are coming to my head as I'm talking.

But anyways, you probably will go to another topic, and I'll probably put in another name here or there. But then there's also the horticulture people, like Michael Derr. *The man* when it comes to woody plants. And then blending the science with sometimes the woo-woo. Because sometimes permaculture folks will go off the deep end, or someone will grab part of this and then they'll go off and do this. No, that's not really going to work that way. And I do call myself a scientist. But there's also a lot of art in it, too. And intuition. And figuring out what works and what doesn't. (13:07)

AA: So you've touched on it a little bit, but if you want to talk a little more about your philosophies, and kind of what's influenced you, and maybe how your philosophies have changed a little bit over time?

DK: Oh, they have. When people talk about religion, my church or temple is my back yard. And my front yard, sometimes. But my back yard is—you'll have to look out the window, because it's very different from the front yard. The front yard's my public face, even though it's full of gardens. It is more manicured. In the way back, that's what we'd call Zone 5, the woodland, in permaculture. And my religion is the soil, is nature. That's my spiritual base. I am a regi practitioner, I am a yoga practitioner, although I'm behind on yoga right now, I have so many other things happening. And they all deal with energy, with energy that is constantly around us. So not getting really woo-woo here, but the plants have energy, the soil has energy, water has energy, air has energy. And that is all part of who I am now. I grew up in a Jewish tradition. While that is very strong in my background, because you grow up and it influences you, I don't go to temple. It's not my way anymore. If I need to work out something that's going on and get to the core, it's into my garden I go. It was a lifesaver for me during COVID. But it's always been a lifesaver. When the world gets too much, I go outside.

On my car, and I think I might have mentioned this to you already, I have my only bumper sticker, and it says, "Nature bats last." And she does. So from a spiritual/religious, that's where it is for me. But I also feel that everyone has their own way to find. And my way may not be someone else's way, and that's okay. I have no interest in saying, "Oh, you have to do this too." No, you'll do it if that's right for you, or not. I think the garden teaches you that, that there's no one way to do anything. Anyone that tells you this is the way it has to be—well, other than do no harm. That one is non-negotiable. But besides that. (16:05)

AA: Thank you. So is there anything you want to say about your personal perspective and views on the connection of organic/sustainable agriculture to the broader historical and cultural context, maybe connections to other movements?

DK: Well you know, there's biodynamic. And some of that is very interesting and intriguing to me, although I agree with the underpinnings, I don't know if I agree with all of the stuff they do. Again, there are different ways for everyone. In the past when Robert Rodale started, when his dad started and Robert Rodale wrote it down. But you have people all over the world doing stuff in traditional ways. The paths of indigenous peoples, be they in North America, be they in Okinawa, in Australia, New Zealand, South America—oh my gosh, their traditions. I started getting into that in the mid-aughts, 2000s, because I was curious to understand what people did before. And of course, terra preta, biochar. Boy, that was a big explosion, everyone's trying to understand that. Burying charcoal, okay!

So there's connections. And of course I can't remember his name right now, I think I might have mentioned him when we talked on Zoom, Martin somebody that I discovered during COVID. I was exploring all kinds of webinars and things I had not heard of. But it was traditional people. So I read his book. I should have pulled some of these books before you came. But anyways, he talks about indigenous peoples around the world and their relationships to the land, and their understanding of the land. And some of it, they have their gods and goddesses, they have their traditions. And again, while it may not speak directly to me, it widens my appreciation of what people did to explain natural phenomena and to live on the land in a good way, in a respectful way. And that reinforces my desire to do the same. So world traditions, I'm still exploring. I'll be exploring that my whole life. That's not something I think you ever are done with.

There's another thing, just inserting it here, in yoga. This is David Suzuki, who said, "May you always have a beginner's mind." When you get to the mat, when you go into your practice, don't assume you know everything in your body, because things change every day. So when something doesn't work right, go back to the beginning and work it out until you get to where it makes sense again. And that's in the garden. When something makes sense and when it doesn't work, may you go back to the beginning with that beginner's mind and have it open, because when you start assuming is when you start making mistakes. There's that. (19:37)

AA: Yeah. Thank you. Do you want to talk a little more about your involvement with organic organizations, like how you got interested in OEFFA maybe, and any other organizations you were involved with?

DK: I had never heard of OEFFA until a friend mentioned it. This was in the late '90s. And we were talking about, I was using organic. He liked to use Miracle-Gro. The little blue stuff in a jar, you know, that has absolutely no relationship to natural ingredients. Well, it does, because it still is, as one person told me, "Nutrition is nutrition is nutrition." So if it's nitrogen, it doesn't matter what form it's in. I beg to differ, because salts and petrochemicals versus compost. And you don't always know what's in compost. But if you make your own, you know pretty well. So anyways, he mentioned it to me. I was starting to bake bread with Jane, his wife, Jane and Joe, good friends. And he said, "You know, the way you talk, you really need to join OEFFA." And I said, "What's that?" So he told me, and I said, "It's *what*?" So I looked into it, and I thought, okay, this is another thing I need to learn. And I joined. So I got their newsletters, and I kind of got into the culture.

It took me a little while to get in because it was another thing I was very firm, I was teaching at Columbus State Community College in the landscape program, I was writing, I was on the radio answering questions. I was still developing what I believed should happen in the garden in terms of soil, late '90s. I'm out of graduate school and I'm supposedly an expert. That's a very dangerous thing, because you're never. I mean, expert is a real fluid word, and it's all relative. So I slowly got to know folks in OEFFA. They slowly got to know me, and that's the best way.

And I felt a lot of times I was a bridge, because there's the horticultural world, there's the farming world, there's the organic/sustainable/horticulture/farming world, there's people who grow plants to make them look good, so whatever it takes to make them look good. Then there's the man or woman on the street who just want a pretty posey. So how do you get them that pretty posey without driving them crazy with all the facts? I have the facts, but I have to be careful that I don't turn someone off. So I have to make it brief, funny, enlightening, etc., while standing on one leg. Because otherwise you lose people. And you can't get on a rant. I've done that. I can get on a rant. And I do that in the classroom. But I realized that when I was out in the public, you can't do that, because that turns people off right away.

And of course, ONLA, Ohio Nursery and Landscape Association. I became known as the "kind of nutty one." Because here's all these people. They're in the landscape business. It's the mow, blow, and go guys. It's the make-it-look-pretty. It's plant impatiens everywhere, even though that may not be the best thing to do. And I'm talking about relationships with the soil and organics. And you really, if you put that on the grass, that's going into the bed. So this is a dicot-specific herbicide, and it's right next to the garden bed. And if you get overspray—and by the way, when you put something in the soil, it doesn't stay right there. It moves, especially in clay

soil. In sand it goes down. Yay Florida! But here it moves. And it moves laterally. So if you're wondering why your impatiens look a little pekid [check spelling], and they just spread the herbicide that was dicot-specific. There I would get specific, because these folks need to understand what they're doing. And then I meet people who are doing lawn work and have no idea what they're spreading. Which drove me absolutely crazy. So then I became the anti-lawn person. And I'm not anti-lawn. I have a lawn. But I have a mixed lawn. I have violets.

So this is my relationship. So I became sort of the bridge. And then I was asked by someone at OEFFA to help them understand the hort industry because they don't understand it. They don't talk. They understood the conventional farming industry, because they'd dealt with that. But they didn't understand the growers in greenhouses. And yet, those lines are becoming very blurred. And now we have these big indoor farms. So my place, I've always felt, is the bridge. And with Gardencom—it used to be Garden Writers' Association—I'm a co-chair of the sustainability committee. So I am a voice for when you are writing about this stuff, understand what you're writing about. Make it truthful, and if you can, you've got to make it sustainable. What we do on lawns is not sustainable. From a point not only of killing things, but of using the resources the way we are. How much phosphorus do you think we have? Again, in Gardencom, I speak very plainly.

Again, I'm a bridge. I've felt that more and more. At Columbus State I was also, for a while I did take some ribbing from my colleagues there. I had to explain climate change when I talked about it in the late '90s. I got a lot of heck back. But I'm not getting it now. That's not necessarily a good thing, but at least they're not telling me that there's no such thing like they did in the late '90s. I had a colleague tell me there's no such thing as climate change. [Laughter] So there's that. (26:34)

AA: Thank you very much. That's great, all those things you've done. Is there anything you want to say, and I know it's kind of interesting because organic certification doesn't really apply as much to landscaping and horticulture. So I'm curious if there's anything you want to comment about organic certification or not.

DK: I wish we had some kind of oversight of lawn care, applications of what we put in gardens, what's done to mulch to make it something that becomes a product we put down on the ground that sheds water, becomes hydrophobic for heaven's sakes. I wish we had standards. We do have standards in our industry on how you plant a tree. But we don't have standards on how you take care of it afterwards. Why not? Why don't we have, "This is how you should water, this is how you should understand watering." And watering is a fluid concept, too. I have clients all the time, "How should I water this?" You want the short answer or the long answer? So I have some clients, and I will send them a text, "I want you to water today. You have a new tree, and I want you to water. I want you to water, put the hose down 20 minutes four times around at a slow trickle, 20 minutes each spot. Set the timer." It's that kind of thing.

I don't know that we ever will have standards in the hort industry because it has to come from within and they're not interested. There are people in the industry who are interested, and they do it themselves, just like they've always done it, just like indigenous peoples understood this is the right way to do it, just as organic farmers said, this is the right way to do it. Regenerative, sustainable, you can use all those words if you want. But what it comes down to is understanding what is the right thing to do that doesn't harm our soil, our earth, our water, our air. And the other organisms we live with. And it's not just the cute animals. It's the fungi, it's

the bacteria, it's the protists. We can't live without them. And yet people think nothing of putting fertilizers and synthetic conventional chemicals down on the lawn that essentially creates a desert. I wish I could understand that mindset, but I don't, at all.

So I wish. One of my favorite songs is "The Impossible Dream." And then John Lennon's "Imagine." Those two are my banner songs. Imagine if people just stopped to think. So yeah. OEFFA has enough on their hands with certifying. And NOFA, up in the Northeast. And I'm sure I don't know other organizations, I just have friends who are members of NOFA, so I'm familiar with them. But it would be lovely if somebody would get into the hort side and say, "Here's some standards for mulch production and mulch laying." I mean, I say it until I'm blue in the face, please don't put more than two inches of mulch down on a bed. And fluff it a couple times in the summer, after we get big rains, because now it has crust. Please. So that's my comment on that. (30:28)

AA: Do you think one of the reasons maybe is that consumers haven't demanded it, or haven't even really thought about it? Because I know with organic food, that's been very consumer-driven, because consumers want organic food. But maybe they haven't thought about landscaping as much because they're not eating it.

DK: Yeah. And that's why forest gardens are so helpful, or when I put herbs in a bed and say, "Don't put anything in here you don't want to eat." And then one person, I'm trying to remember how he said this. He said, "I don't put any kind of fertilizer on my garden unless it has already gone through another organism." Something like that. In other words, manures. Some people don't like manure. It's stinky. And people haven't made the jump. In the neighborhood, I'm sort of the conscience. I get organic lawn care just in the front. There's not much grass left. Then Nate puts up a little sign that says, "Touch me, I'm organic." Just like the little sign of death that has the skull and crossbones, or "I'm poisonous now for 24 hours." It's a lot more than 24 hours, folks, especially if the dog or cat eats it. Or walks in it with his or her paws, and then licks their paws. So it's more than 24 hours, that drives me nuts. Another rant coming on.

And I've even told people in the subdivision, and there are more people who are not spreading icky stuff. But then there are bills of goods that people will come in their trucks, and they have "nature" in the name, or "green" in the name, greenwashing. And they tell your neighbor across the street that they're doing x, y, and z, and it's a lie. Because I can tell what they're spreading. And they're told, "You've got to hit it hard first, and then do the organic applications." And I've even said across the street, "You're mowing your lawn way too low. You're having more problems." She has a huge thatch layer. Well, what do you expect? The roots are trying to protect themselves. They're killing off some of it so that there's something there. Plants do that.

I have two books that I really, really, really love. One is called *What is a Plant?* by David Chamobitz. He's in Tel Aviv. And the other one is *Brilliant Green* by--they're both doctors, PhDers—by Stefano Moncuza in Italy. And they talk about plants as living entities that do these survival tactics, all this. Yeah. So I keep telling people, "Plants are not furniture. This is a tree. It's a living being." So I think when I talk like that, sometimes it helps. So I've become a plant evangelist, although I'm not so sure I want that title, because evangelist carries its own load of stuff. Words are huge. So I'll just be a plant person. (33:59)

AA: Thank you. Is there anything you want to share about your perspective on the relationships between the agricultural universities, especially the land grant universities, and organic/sustainable agriculture?

DK: They're doing more, finally. It's not enough, but they're doing more. I know Ohio State has hired more folks in there. And they're really moving towards that. They still have a turf program and teach all of *that*. But there is a change. There's a sea change. It's coming. I think we finally—we, and I'm just using this as a global term—we know we have to, we have climate change. We've damaged the earth. We know we have to do something. The sugar maples are marching north. It's obvious. You can't avoid seeing sugar maple skeletons. First it was the ashes, the emerald ash borer coming in in pallets. And that was human. And of course, climate change is also human. And our trees are suffering for it.

So the universities, especially land grant, they are doing something. But at Ohio State, and I'll say, I have three degrees from Ohio State. I will tell you, Ohio State still puts the stuff down on their lawns. Now Harvard doesn't. Harvard's using compost teas, at least they were. They started doing a small area to see if they liked it, and if it was tolerable. You know, there's that tolerance, that public face. Can't have a weed. Yes you can, just don't call it a weed. It's a useful plant. So Harvard and Yale are both doing that. I figure the Ivy Leagues, that means that Ohio State wants to be known as the Ivy League, so they're going to follow suit eventually. Of course they're not going fast enough for me. But they are moving. They are moving to that side. So that is good. (36:17)

AA: That's great. Is there anything you want to share on your perspective on the past and current trends in organic/sustainable agriculture? Anything like maybe why some things are controversial, or what the most important aspects of the history are to preserve and to teach to the younger generations.

DK: That's a big question. So I think it was about four years ago, at an OEFFA conference, somebody stood up in a talk and said, "We need to move towards regenerative as our word as opposed to—not opposed—instead of organic. Organic's still there, but we need to move towards regenerative." And after that talk, I'm standing outside. And I talked to several different people. And one person was incensed. "How can you get rid of organic? That's our basis. And what's this regenerative stuff anyways? Now we have to think about everything? We have to think about the birds and the bees?" I looked at him and said, "Yes!" Regenerative means healing. Because we have destroyed. We have degraded. To me, I'm sitting in that talk going, "Yeah, yeah!"

And regenerative is one step past sustainable. So you have organic, and then sustainable raises the bar, and regenerative raises the bar again. And people don't like to change. So historically, we like being where we're at. And we also, not only do we not like to change, we don't look forward enough. We're right here. Next week, tonight I'm making supper and I'm doing this. And next week I have some appointments and I'll get to that. Regenerative is long-term thinking. Organic is, too, but not as long. Regenerative combines our past, our present, and our future. We screwed up, what are we going to do now so the future our children have can grow food on this earth. Or live. Even just live. Organic was more of the past and present. Okay, we've got to fix this. But we're in the present. Sustainable was moving towards the future, but it wasn't far enough. Regenerative I think is that step that we all have to take.

So to me, it was a natural progression. But I heard a lot of people at that conference getting all head up about, “Well, what are we, we’re going to be the Ohio Regenerative Food and Farm Association now? We’re going to be ORFFA?” I heard all kinds of stuff. There were people who were upset. Because we were changing the rules. But like I said, it was a natural progression. It’s the future. And I tend, I tend to be a holistic person. I force myself to do detail work because that’s what I do, as a teacher, as a writer, whatever. Drill down into the details, find the research, whatever. But then it is, “How does that fit into the whole?” And regenerative is, sustainable regenerative is more holistic. Organic is, but it was the first step. (39:59)

AA: Is there anything, do you want to go into more detail, like I know we talked before you kind of told a little more detail of your story, like in 1984 was when you started thinking about organic?

DK: Oh, yeah. And also, I was growing food. I was growing herbs. When you’re growing herbs, you don’t want to put something on there you’re not going to eat. In the late ’90s I started not putting the leaves. Initially, we did put our leaves down there because they would be picked up by the township and taken away to who knows where. But I started in the late ’90s saying, “Well, why don’t I just put it in the back?” And when you look in the back, you’ll see where my first areas were where all the leaves went. And then I did this one, because I had these big trees. We planted all these trees that you see on our property except for a maple in the back and a black walnut in the back. Those were here. The previous owners like to golf. And so they liked grass.

So we planted all these trees, and trees have leaves. And I didn’t have a name for it until I went to permaculture classes. But you want to keep your energy on your place. So I started thinking, “Why am I sending leaves away? I need to keep them here.” And then when I did that, after several years in the back, in the spring and fall when the soil is more moist, I could dig with my hands. So that was a practice of keeping it here.

And then of course rain barrels. Rain barrels, we have three put together in the back. They’re probably between 55 and 60 gallons each one because they’re not all the way to the top. Then I have one that drains the other side of the house all the way in the back, it’s 135 gallon that’s halfway dug into the ground. With my gardens, the water is directed into the gardens. And when water comes down the slope, it slows down. And just as green infrastructure for stormwater control, which I taught as part of curriculum at Columbus State, you want to slow the water, you want to filter it, because that’s what the land does. And if you can, keep it on the property. So I try to. Because if it goes away, then my gardens don’t get watered. So that’s selfishness. And it also doesn’t then go into the Olentangy and overwhelm our resources, our natural areas. So I’m doing my little part to do that. (43:02)

I don’t remember what other details. But I’ve tried just about every other technique. I’ve used all kinds of mulches. Because I teach about it. And you can’t, unless you do it or you observe it somewhere, you can’t teach it. At least in this business, for me. So when I say something, it’s because I’ve succeeded or failed at it. I don’t know what else I talked about. I didn’t take notes when I talked to you, so I have no idea what I mentioned.

Oh, yeah, speech language pathology, too. That was an eye-opener for me. And that was before our daughter was born. I had two little girls whose dad was exposed to Agent Orange in Vietnam. And they had classic language development issues that speech language pathologists in general were seeing in children of parents who were in Vietnam. To grasp that Agent Orange changed the DNA, mostly dads in Vietnam. And they came home and had children, and these

children had language development problems. And they were similar across the board. That's a scary thing.

And then when I was in graduate school I took a class, one of my fellow graduate students said, "I need something that is not hort-based, a horticulture course." So he said, "Will you take this women nature writers course with me in comparative lit?" So I said, "Sure, that sounds like fun!" I had already read *Silent Spring*, I read it years before. But we read it again, and we discussed it. See, I never discussed it with anyone. And that was a huge eye-opener. And just adding in to everything. All these pieces add in. And then discovered other nature writers for me, Annie Diller, Grennell Ehrlich. And then getting into some of the Native American writers and *The Sacred Hoop*. That's an anthology of writers. And then a book I have, *All We Can Save*, that was in a recent climate change conference that was put on by Washington University in St. Louis, which was phenomenal. It was so good. It was over five weeks during COVID. They usually have a big conference, but they did it online. And it was just phenomenal. Oh, I did mention *All We Can Save*, climate change.

And I truly believe that if everyone just took care of their own stuff—and there's another word I'm not using there—if they took care of their own stuff, this world would be better. It's like in backpacking, a little backpacking thing when you pack your backpack. If you take care of the ounces, the pounds will take care of themselves. So if each person does something, plants trees, refuses to use products that aren't organic or sustainable, says no to acquiring more stuff. Of course, we sit here in my house, and here's all my stuff. My books, and whatever. But we've significantly slowed our acquisition of stuff. But we had acquired quite a bit already. So it's all of that.

Rainwater control, I mentioned that. Oh, yeah. Oh my gosh, we talked about all this? I'm impressed. I had totally forgotten what we—yes, about being part of Green Bridges, with the Herb Society of America. And that is because we have all these little tiny islands, and our animals and insects can't survive on these tiny islands. So now if everybody landscapes, then the possum doesn't just live in my yard, but can move to other yards and get ticks here and ticks there and ticks everywhere, and have more possums. And they really don't want to interact with us. So they keep to their own. Of course we freak out when we see an opossum. And it's just sitting there shaking in its own little boots. And we have this lack of understanding. "Oh, I'm going to befriend the deer." No, you're not. There's that other thing, too, that nature is benevolent. Guess again. It's a bug eat bug world. I'm just rambling here, you can cut me off at any time.

But it's all connected. And I think that's the bottom line. It's all connected. If you touch one thing—that's John Muir—and it's all connected. I'm making a hash of it. And then there's Paul Derac, a physicist in the 1920s or 30s, who said, "You move a flower and it touches the farthest star," or something like that. But whatever action you do, and in physics they get really out there. You move molecules on the earth and it reverberates all the way out to the farthest star. And I think if people understood that or accepted that. But I also think we're so busy. We're so busy just trying to live sometimes, that looking at that long view is farther than we can do. I don't want to make it sound like people—well, people can be stupid. My granddaughter says I'm not allowed to use that word, because "stupid" isn't a nice word. Ignorant. We'll use that one instead. And not thinking. Unaware. Unawake. Not woken. And waking up is a long process.

I think COVID might have helped with some of that waking up. I think some of the best and some of the worst came out in us during COVID. And more people are gardening. Which means more people are understanding. Because a lot of times, there's the farmer, and yeah, my

food came from over there. But we don't understand that. We don't connect him to us. We don't connect that tomato that was grown in California with us. Or Mexico. Or Canada. And we should be. Again, it's that connection thing. And I think more people are making that connection now. That's a good place. I don't know if there's anything else I should have said.

AA: If that's where you want to end, unless there's some last final thought you want to say.

DK: I can't think of anything, but if you look around my room you can kind of see where I'm at. My plant books over there, my huge reference books on the bottom shelf, they can't go on the upper shelves because the shelves already are bending. You look, it's understanding botany. And I have botany coloring books, one for each of my grandchildren as they get older, a different way to do it, color it, and maybe it will go in. So there's just a lot. I have not read every single of my books from front to back, but I have gone through them and know essentially what's in them. And from time to time think, "Oh, I need to read that all the way through." But I would like to show you at least the back yard, because that's a different face.

AA: All right. Well, thank you so much for sharing all that! (52:07)