

Stories from the brainreels podcast

October 10, 2016

[music]

Introduction

CHERYL: Welcome to Stories from the brainreels monthly podcast about brain injury and disability with a focus on art, culture, and disability pride.

[music]

It's October, and that means it's a huge month for documentary film! OK, I just made that up. What actually is huge is that "Who Am I To Stop It" has officially launched with New Day Films, an educational film distribution cooperative for social issue documentaries. All the info and links you need about buying the DVD or streaming the film for colleges and other educational institutions is at WhoAmIToStopIt.com/Purchase. See you there!

The other documentary film news is that I wanted to share my KBOO Community Radio interview with Elaine Velasquez and Barbara Bernstein from mid-September. I talked to them about their film, "Gaining Ground," which debuted at The Hollywood Theatre on September 25th. The Hollywood is near and dear to my heart as the fiscal sponsor for my film. Please forgive my constant allergies sniffles during the interview and enjoy all the storytelling and conversation Elaine and Barbara were so generous to give.

In addition to sniffles, this show had a couple other interesting features. One is that it was KBOO's Fall pledge drive, so we stop several times for that. I cut out the pledge drive talk for the podcast, but you'll still notice little breaks in odd places. Also, just because the drive ended doesn't mean you can ignore KBOO. [Donate any day of the year at KBOO.fm](http://Donate.any.day.of.the.year.at.KBOO.fm). Thanks! The other interesting thing about this episode was some spontaneous disability access provided lovingly, non-judgmentally, and flawlessly by KBOO radio producer and host Pamela Santos. You wouldn't know it's there just by listening because Pamela integrated the access so seamlessly into the show. So that's why I want to tell you about it.

Jump back a few months to my first show on KBOO. I ended my first live interview early and somewhat out of the blue. Why? I can't read clocks well or integrate new information very fast, and I got lost looking at my question list. Did I ask that one? Did I ask that other one twice? Does it matter? Did they already mention it, so I shouldn't ask now? I had an idea in my mind of what time the interview would start and when it would end. But there's the introduction, the intro music, the sponsors, and the fact that the clock in the studio is slightly off from a real clock to account for a delay for broadcast. That delay is there to help you. And even though it's only like 40 seconds, it confused me because hours, minutes, and seconds on one display is too many numbers for me. I got lost in the clock and ended the call. My board engineer, Natasha, threw some music in there and filled the time. It was so embarrassing. For my second show, I decided to solve all problems before they could arise by pre-taping my interview. And guess what? Too short. I screwed it up again, and we filled the time with more songs. KBOO is well-known for being a learning ground for radio activists, but you really gotta get it together and learn something at some point, right?

So when it came time to do a high stakes show that fell during the 2016 Fall pledge drive, Pamela stepped in. She figured out the pattern: live show + Cheryl = bundle of nerves that needs a chaperone, timekeeper, cheerleader, and backup frontal lobe or two. Here's what she did. Pledge announcements

come at pre-set times during each show. One minute before it was time for me to transition out of the interview and into a pledge break, she held up a white sheet of paper. I would look at the paper, look at my watch, see nothing, and look away. But no worry, because at 30 seconds, Pamela held up a green sheet of paper. Best of all, when I saw that green sheet and wound up my talk within 40 seconds or 7 seconds, she pointed to the engineer to bring on the pitchers, and we transitioned out to them without hesitation. I truly do not know what I would've done without those colored pieces of paper, without Pamela holding them up for me, if I had to not only read the clock, read my watch, and read the chart to see when it was time to switch to the pitchers.

You might think wow, that sounds hard. I couldn't do it either. What are you complaining about, Cheryl? And you might think this is a weird story to tell and what's the big deal with an experienced radio host helping a new host? The big deal is that I used to be able to read clocks, feel time passing accurately, remember what people just said to me when I asked them a question, stay on topic, and all those things people like in a radio interviewer. But as you'll hear several times in this broadcast, I got lost during the conversation for no good reason other than information overload, it being the end of the day, and just that my brain shuts down sometimes when I don't intend it to. I do it All. The. Time. on this podcast. It's just that I edit it out. So you don't ever hear how often I forget what we're talking about, or I change the topic without meaning to. This is why live radio is so stressful. But Pamela is 100% dedicated to social justice. For this reason, she expects disability access be part of the environment. And for this show, even though she didn't have the time or the energy to spare, she lead that access without being asked.

So I dedicate a ginormous thank you to both of my engaging and humble guests, Elaine Velasquez and Barbara Bernstein, as well as the silent access provider and all-around supporter Pamela Santos for making this show happen at all and happen well.

Even though this podcast specifically centers stories around disability culture, and the film "Gaining Ground" doesn't, to me, the connections are very clear. Michael Miller and I talked in the last episode about how when people get on their soapbox of telling other brain injury survivors what to eat and how to live to heal, very often, they don't acknowledge that some people simply can't afford to eat organic or paleo or whole foods or take expensive supplements. It's not always culturally appropriate, and if you live in a food desert and on a fixed income, forget it. Part of food justice is to recognize and honor all people and notice when your suggestions or advice or helpfulness are actually getting in the way. The people in "Gaining Ground" are all working on food justice solutions in their own way, and I'm really happy for you to get to hear or read about it.

This month's music is provided by Blue.Sessions.

[music]

The Interview

CHERYL: I am so excited to be talking to award-winning independent media artists Elaine [Velasquez] and Barbara Bernstein who run The Media Project, a local organization supporting independent media makers. Elaine [Velasquez] and Barbara Bernstein premiered their food justice film, "[Gaining Ground](#)," in late September, 2015, and I can't wait to find out how it's doing and what kind of calls to action the film is creating. Now Barbara, I know you have a show here at KBOO. Both of you, welcome to Bread and Roses. Thank you so much for being here.

BARBARA: Thank you.

ELAINE: Thank you.

CHERYL: So let's just start off. I'd love to have you two introduce yourselves in your own words and maybe talk a little bit about the issues that you're most passionate about covering in your work.

ELAINE: My name is pronounced Velasquez, and that's OK. Anyway, I'm a filmmaker. I've been doing it for 40 years. This is my second feature. The others, I've done a lot of gay rights, ballot measures to fight against OCA, good old OCA.

BARBARA: Oregon's Citizen Alliance.

ELAINE: Whoever they are. And other ballot measures that protected the environment. My first long doc--actually, I've done three--was about women. My first intent was to get on broadcast TV, people that had not been covered. And that was the thing about older women. And I guess I'm now an older woman. Barbara, why don't you talk a little bit about yourself? My films have been--just a second--my films have been broadcast on PBS nationally. I've won a lot of awards. Some of the pieces that Barbara and I did that were pro-gay or that were shown at the Museum of Modern Art. We've had a lot of visibility.

BARBARA: Also, I wanna mention Elaine's second film--which you didn't mention--which was a really wonderful film called "[Moving Mountains](#)" about the Yiu Mien tribe from the hills of Laos who came as refugees to the United States after the Vietnam War because they had worked for the CIA. So they were persona non grata in Laos. It was a very wonderful film and did very well. We traveled to a bunch of different film festivals.

ELAINE: Yeah, PBS.

BARBARA: And it was on PBS. I did the sound for that and also composed some music. This project is the first one where Elaine and I are more full collaborators. Technically, or officially, she's the director; I'm the producer. My role was basically to find a lot of the people that were in the film, and Elaine's role was to use the craft of movie-making that she's so good at to put all the pieces together and make it into a film. Before this, I've been doing radio documentary forever, and I don't know how many documentaries I've produced over the years that have been broadcast very widely. And we've both won awards doing our stuff, and that's what we've been doing up until we started "Gaining Ground," which we started five years ago.

CHERYL: Yeah, documentary film is a long process, isn't it?

ELAINE: Especially if you want it to be intimate, especially if you wanna gain trust. And then there were some stories, things that happened during our filming that we just had to follow it until the end and to follow the fires and a lot of GMO-- There were things that happened that we just had to follow. So it took a little longer.

BARBARA: And actually, we started, Elaine was kind of on my case 'cause the first year we were sort of film and really not filming and just kind of finding our way and interviewing our friends and anybody we met in the supermarket. No really! But we didn't really have a sense of where we were going. We sort of thought we wanted to do something about urban ag, which was kind of interesting. But as we started actually finding our way, we realized we wanted to do something that's much broader than just urban ag. So after about a year of finding our way, we found the people that were gonna be in the movie. Then

it really started honing in to these three different farms, two in the countryside in Oregon and one in Richmond, California.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah, and we will get much more into the film in just a moment. Because we are gonna take a moment to talk about our pledge fall drive and why it is so important and wonderful for folks to donate to KBOO. Barbara, do you have a quick word why you love KBOO so much?

BARBARA: I love KBOO because it's authentic and real, and it relates to my life. And it doesn't feel like it's put in a can and sent from Washington DC to Portland.

CHERYL: And no GMOs.

BARBARA: And no GMOs!

ALL: [chuckle]

Food Justice

CHERYL: Tonight we're talking to Barbara Bernstein and Elaine Velasquez about their independent media work around a lot of different social justice issues. We're focusing in on their film "Gaining Ground." So we started talking a little bit about the movie, but let's talk more about it. You had a really riveting conversation on the Healthwatch show here at KBOO last September, right around this time, around the film's premiere. I really hope that all of tonight's listeners will go back and listen to that episode 'cause you really unpacked a lot of the stories of the people in the film and what they're working for. So that was so much fun to listen to. But yeah, let's really dive into the movie. "Gaining Ground" is a feature-length documentary film really looking at personal stories of some farmers making extraordinary changes in their farming practices to feed their local communities sustainably grown produce and grains. You're looking at urban farmer-activists in inner city Richmond, California, a small family farm in rural Oregon converting from commodity dairy to chemical-free produce, and a large farm in the Willamette Valley transitioning from grass seed to organic grains. So it's a nice mix of the different sizes and locations that people are in. I really am interested in food justice and food in general. Food is so yummy and great to have around and wonderful.

BARBARA, ELAINE: [laugh]

CHERYL: And I wish everybody free food all the time. So I've seen a lot of food films and food documentaries you know, talking about Monsanto and big ag and all these things, and things that you also covered in your film. A lot of films out there around food and health, but yours doesn't stop there with individual people's health. You spend a lot of time really unpacking food justice and especially racial and environmental justice, which really struck me when I got to watch the film the other night. So I'd love to hear from y'all about your interest in facing these issues head on around race, ethnicity, class, and gender, and not just sticking with individuals and their stories around health.

Urban Tilth

ELAINE: Well, we were very fortunate Barbara found Doria Robinson, who's head of Urban Tilth in Richmond, California, which has the refinery, the Chevron refinery right over their town. The woman who runs it, Doria Robinson, it's a wonderful program. It's not just that food is yummy. They have no access to decent food. They're a food desert. Safeway was closing, everything. So she's 13 gardens, and they're in the schools. The people who run this program are the youth, these wonderful young people in a very hard, violent kind of stark environment, 'cause they're underserved. Classic, like, Chevron doesn't

care. So it's a very, very inspirational program as far as what she does. And she is so wonderful. We find somebody who can not only do something wonderful but talk about it, and she brought in the racism and the lack of education and the kind of fight that we had. Then they were doing it, and she was empowering these young people, who had no sense of purpose at all, to lead their communities and try to talk to power. She is the reason that all that inclusive thing about how their education and how unfair, what they're given.

BARBARA: The thing that's amazing about Doria-- Well, actually we took a while to unpeel what made Doria, Doria. She mentioned that she had traveled around the world, and she had experienced an awful lot of very positive things. We found out that she had gone to Hampshire College, and it made a lot of sense because she did a lot of things that you kind of imagine people at Hampshire College do. For people who don't know what that is, it's a very progressive school. It's kind of like the Reed College of Massachusetts and probably more progressive even than Reed. So I thought well, OK, you went to Hampshire College. That explains why you do circles, and you do all this process. You're into yoga, and you're into all this good food. How did you get to Hampshire College? So a couple interviews later, we found out that she basically had dropped out of John F. Kennedy High School in Richmond, which was a really tough school--she described just how tough it was--and wandered around for about a year. Then a friend of hers turned her on to this alternative school in Berkeley. She found out she could get a scholarship, and she actually worked two jobs, and with a scholarship, got through the school and then was recruited to Hampshire.

ELAINE: And worked her way through it.

BARBARA: And worked her way through Hampshire and took five years to get through Hampshire. And had a hard time because she had had such a bad education until she got to Maybeck High School in Berkeley. But then the big question was why did you come back to Richmond? Because people said to her, "Why'd you come back to Richmond? This place is really hard and difficult. Couldn't you do better elsewhere?" And she said that this is the front line, and somebody's gotta hold it. She saw that she had the skills. At one point she said to us, "Well, I could've been in San Francisco or Oakland, but there's a lot of people like me there. I needed to come back to Richmond," which is where she's from. She's, what, third generation Richmond?

ELAINE: At least.

BARBARA: Yeah.

ELAINE: Her family lives down the block, she's living in her aunt's house, it's very personal.

BARBARA: We actually met her mother [chuckles] at one of the events. So she's a really powerful person to have, and I feel like I lucked into her by reading an article that she was quoted in online about urban ag, actually, and figured out how to get a hold of her, emailed her. Immediately she said, "Let's talk." I called her. We had this amazing conversation. Then, she wasn't as easy to track down for the next four years. I mean, it was really hard to connect with her sometimes 'cause she's really busy. But every time we met with her, she just opened up. Elaine talks a lot about how it was a real gift to just share with us.

ELAINE: Well, she let us in. I felt like here are these two white filmmakers from Portland, and she really opened up and trusted us a lot. And then there are her people that are running the organization. It's just very inspirational.

CHERYL: Yeah, and what's really nice about what she's doing is that she's not an outsider. She came back to the community she grew up in. When outsiders like to come in and be white saviors and save the day, things don't usually go so well because you're not respectful of the culture that's already there.

The "Gaining Ground" Trailer

[\["Gaining Ground" trailer plays\]](#)

[hip hop music]

♪Yeah...urban tilth.

♪Grow your own know what I'm sayin'?

♪get down and dirty with it.

♪If you grow it...they gon' eat it.

♪Watch it, Watch it, Watch it Grow yeah.

♪Watch it, Watch it, Watch it Grow yeah. ♪

DORIA: When we first started that garden with just a few beds, but it was like, "Oh! What are you doing? Why are you doing that?" And they're like, "It's kinda trashy. Nobody wants to eat that food. It's out here." Six years later, 42 beds now. The food's constantly being eaten, and we were told not to do it.
[heavy machinery rumbling]

VICKI: Back when we milked cows, they ask what you were. If they couldn't smell it on your boots and already know what you were, and you told them, then they go, "Oh, OK." And that was about the end of the conversation. But nowadays, you say you're a farmer: "Well, what do you grow?" And then you say, "Fruits and vegetables without the use of chemicals." And all at once, there's a crowd.

HARRY M: He's been a chemical farmer for as long as I've been an organic farmer, and his wife has been on him for 16 years they've been married to get rid of the chemicals and grow some food.

WILLOW: I've never been comfortable growing lawns and golf courses when there's a worldwide food shortage.

HARRY S: We are grass seed farmers, and by damn it, we're gonna be grass seed farmers. We're not gonna switch over to organic farming, especially organic farming. My gosh. You know, I have to live in this community.

DORIA: We live in a classic food desert. It's a lot of concentration of people who are having a hard time, families that are in disarray, a lot of struggles with drugs and violence. We have a grocery store. The other grocery store's just about to move out. Safeway is about to move out.

VICKI: Maybe people have to change their eating habits. Maybe they gotta quit eating tomatoes in December and bananas year round. I mean, you could live on it. You just gotta quit wanting so much. And if the consumers could get that mindset, then I think we could get this valley back into something edible.

HARRY S: When we first came on board with planting organic food crops, I would try to avoid the coffee shops as much as I could and other farmers. I just couldn't take it. It was just a constant harassment: "Well, what do they have you doing now? What do those women have you doing now out there?"

DORIA: Some people ask me, "Why are you having an apprentice program, and you're training all these kids to be farmers? Are they really gonna get a job being farmer?" And I'm like, "You know, that's actually not the point. Growing food from a seed to a fruit is the best project management training you can possibly get."

[sirens]

NEWSCASTER: There continues to be a shelter-in-place for Richmond, North Richmond, and San Pablo due to a fire that was first reported this evening around 6:30 at the Chevron refinery in Richmond.

DORIA: Sirens started to go off everywhere, and I realized that the refinery was on fire.

[sirens]

HARRY S: You have some of the largest seed companies in the world doing their best to destroy our market. I just wish they would leave us the hell alone.

DORIA: Before the fire, talking about environmental justice wasn't a part of our main mission. And then the fire happened, and all of that destruction, all of that pain, and the response of the company of just really...not caring. It was just important for us to really hold this ground and say, "This is sacred. It shouldn't be polluted. This is where we come from."

CHERYL: We just heard the trailer for "Gaining Ground," the film that we've been talking about tonight. I think in the trailer we heard from Doria Robinson, Vicki Hertel, Willow Coberly, Harry Stalford. Did I get all the names?

BARBARA: And Harry MacCormack as well.

CHERYL: OK, great, and Harry MacCormack. So some of the people featured in the film. When we left off just a moment ago, we had started talking about race and the danger of the white savior coming into a community like Richmond and that that's not actually what happened. I'd love to pick up there and talk a little bit about [Urban Tilth](#) before we move on to the Oregon farmers.

ELAINE: Well, let me make it clear that Richmond is a people of color community, and Doria Robinson is African American. The community, the people she hires, everybody she gives the summer jobs and jobs to, and apprentices are all people of color. I mean, there are some white people there, but it's an underserved community of color.

BARBARA: And actually, Urban Tilth was originally started by a white guy with a great vision. He sent out an email to a whole lot of people about wanting to start this thing, which became Urban Tilth. Doria was one of the people that came to the first meeting and became a volunteer. I'm not sure how long it took, but within a short period of time, she was the head of the organization. I think, well, this white guy actually, I think that's what he wanted to do. It was his idea, but he wanted the community to come and take it over. And that's what they've done. It really is a project that's really owned by the community. It's an amazing rainbow of people. I mean, there's a lot of African Americans, there's a lot of Latinos, there's some Asians, there's a handful of white people, and it's very representative of the community of Richmond.

CHERYL: Great. Yeah. Sorry. A question started coming into my head, and then you saw on my face that it just left.

Sun Gold Farm

ELAINE: [laughs] Well, I would like to make sure that we talk about the other farms, the Oregon farmers who are taking on the challenge of caring about local, feeding our people local, healthy food. We met Vicki Hertel, our very first person, Barbara and I kind of discovered her together. The farmers were having lobbying at the--

BARBARA: State capitol.

ELAINE: --state capitol to get more rights for small farmers, and Vicki Hertel and her son, Chris Hertel, were there. We just thought, this woman is amazing. She's just straight out, flat talker. [She's the head of the farm](#). So we did our interview, and it was like--she was our first interview that's in the film, and--she was just wonderful. So was Chris.

BARBARA: Actually, we filmed them at this event in the rotunda of the capitol. It was really noisy, I didn't have a good microphone, Elaine didn't have a good camera. It was like you could barely hear the interview over all the din. Shortly after that, I got a good mic, Elaine got a really great camera, we went back to their farm, and Vicki made jokes about, "Oh, heck. They're here again!" But she was very supportive, and again, like Doria, very welcoming. We filmed them harvesting, we filmed them planting, we filmed them at every stage, transplanting. At one point, Vicki almost invited us to come spend the night and get up early in the morning and go through the whole thing, but her husband Charlie wanted a little more privacy than Vicki did. So we didn't do that, but we got there crack of dawn. We also follow Chris one time I guess, at least, to the farmer's market. Started in Veerbort, which is outside of Forest Grove, and followed him into Portland to the Hillsdale Farmers Market and watched him set up. He's still there at the Hillsdale Farmers Market, and I go there every week. He was reminiscing with me the other day about how he missed us being there filming him when he was setting up.

CHERYL: Oh, wow. That's really nice. And it sounds like a similar thing happened with Doria, that she was really open and really happy to be having this very empowering, hopeful work being documented.

ELAINE: Well, Vicki is just straight out, she's wonderful, and she speaks--I don't know. If you think what a farmer-- I thought at first, I'll say this, I thought at first she was a lesbian because the way that she looks. But a lot of country women look like that.

BARBARA: Actually, we told her that, and she said that a lot of people have thought that she was a lesbian.

CHERYL: [laughs]

ELAINE: Well, and her family, they've been farming there for five generations. Right now, she's running it with her son and her husband and some employees. They have a family, a Mexican family that works for them, has worked for them forever. They pay well, they treat their employees, it's very important to them.

BARBARA: And they grow about 100 varieties of vegetables. While they're not certified organic, they are completely non-chemical, non-pesticide. Vicki says that they're probably healthier and cleaner than organic because there's these loopholes in organic certification. And they have their own set of standards. And we've been out to the farm enough to know how clean their growing is. They do cover crops, they do crop rotation, they work a lot with the good insects and the good birds, raptors who

come and eat the mice. So they basically let nature take its course a lot in helping them farm. They farm with nature as opposed to fighting nature.

CHERYL: Yeah! I'll tell you, when they mentioned, "We keep the flowers over here on the edge to bring in the good bugs, and then the birds come out when we're tilling--" I probably said the wrong word there, but when they're working in the field, the birds come out because they're rustling up all the little vermin and bugs. And my jaw dropped. It just made me so happy to hear about that. And that's something that really stands out in this film too is you know, it's not all this text on the screen with the statistics and the scientists coming in with their soil samples. The whole thing is so personalized, and yet at the same time, you can see that it's not specific just to them. They're talking about issues that are issues everywhere. But then, when you have this personal element, it just makes it so watchable. When it was over, I thought it was five minutes. Where'd the time go? 'Cause you're just so getting to know the people so well.

BARBARA: That's actually one of Elaine's strengths is Elaine is really good at drawing out personal stories, and she's done that in all of her films. I'm a little bit more of the intellectual, statistics, science person. So I thought it kind of worked out with the two of us together.

Stalford Seed Farms and Greenwillow Grains

ELAINE: And then there's [Stalford Seed Farms](#) and [Greenwillow Grains](#). You see the story, the film is a lot about change, the bravery. These people just taking on, going against the grain, against big ag. And Willow is an amazing person, Willow Coberly, who wanted to grow food. I mean, Harry, at first, I was afraid to interview him. He sounded like a monster.

BARBARA: Harry Stalford, that is.

ELAINE: Harry Stalford, her husband. I mean, he's just really, "We're grass seed farmers!" And he's wonderful. He's wonderful. He's really transformed. He's using a lot less chemicals on the commodity farm, and then they've been expanding and doing very, very well on their grains. Willow has developed the seeds that she got from, fortunately, fortuitously, from what, UC Davis, and has developed them to our climate. It's just there's information there about how food is grown. We're so disassociated from: Walk into a super market and don't think a thing about it. This film made me, I learned an awful lot. I wasn't interested in the subject matter when Barbara wanted to do this. Barbara's an environmental mainly subject matter person. I said, "Who wants to be a farmer?" I mean, I'm from New York City. I couldn't imagine; it's such hard work, which it is. But they love it. These farmers absolutely love what they're doing, and it's such a gift.

BARBARA: The other thing that we really wanted to do was to connect people with the farmers that grow their food. I think by telling these personal stories, it helps people to understand the human beings that are providing their food and how important it is to support them. I think that's kind of at the center of really rebuilding local food systems as opposed to having everything global. So that you appreciate why you don't wanna buy asparagus from Chile in the middle of the winter or strawberries in December. Understanding the seasons and what season produces what kind of food and to appreciate the people that are providing that for us.

CHERYL: Definitely. So...[chuckles] I start picturing the food as you say it, and then I'm like, "Hmm. Oh yes, we're conversing about this." It was interesting--Harry?

ELAINE: Harry Stalford.

CHERYL: Harry's journey because he was so opposed to this at the beginning. It was fun watching his journey, but his journey really was driven by his wife, Willow.

ELAINE: Mmhmm.

Focusing on strong women and people of color

CHERYL: So when we come back from the break in a moment, I wanna dive into this idea of there were so many strong women in the film and strong people of color, which you don't often get in documentary.

ELAINE: Well, we didn't plan it that way. I mean, those were the stars. Vicki is just the leader of the farm, and she's really likeable. And it's obvious her power. And then with Harry and Willow, we interviewed Willow first, and that's when we talked about how scary Harry was and recalcitrant.

BARBARA: I tell you, he was just a myth. We didn't actually meet Harry until several months later.

ELAINE: When we interviewed him, he was so welcoming and such a pussy cat. I mean for us, not for Willow. So then with Doria, Doria was just a gift. Barbara was looking for someone in urban ag--urban agriculture--and she found Doria. And on a first conversation, it was so obvious this woman is amazing. She's so articulate, and we got more into personal stuff. And I say we wanted a community-- Were we looking for a community of color, as Producer?

BARBARA: Yeah, we were. We were interested in having an urban ag program, and there was one in Portland that we were pursuing: [Village Gardens](#). We spent a little time with them, but it was actually after we had met Doria and been filming at Urban Tilth. But I didn't originally think about Richmond, California. I knew that Oakland is a center of urban ag. So I thought we'll find this program. There's a very well-known group called City Slickers in Oakland. They turned out to be very hard and inaccessible and not really excited. Then I found out about Doria, interviewed her, and I thought an urban ag program in Richmond, California. All I could think about Richmond was oil refinery and big tanks on the hills and pollution. So I asked Doria, "Well, isn't it kind of contaminated to be growing gardens in Richmond?" And she said, "We get our soil tested all the time, and we're very careful about that." She was so inspiring, and then every interview we had with her just was more and more inspiring. So we decided this is the urban ag program we're gonna focus on. But one reason why we came down to the Bay area was we really wanted to show people of color. We didn't wanna just have a white urban ag program, which there's many in Portland. Village Gardens is the one program in Portland that does actually have a lot of people of color involved in it. It's in St. Johns, and it's kind of the edge of North Portland. They are co-sponsoring our screening at The Hollywood Theatre next week, and Brad from Village Gardens will be at the screening. He'll give a little bit of a description of what they're doing.

ELAINE: When you make a film, it's like a gift: you find these wonderful people that have a depth to them. We look for depth. Doria was a gift, and they all were. It wasn't like, "We're gonna make a strong woman film." It just happened to be.

CHERYL: Yeah, that's great. And I mean, you really see that you captured--with the people you ended up with--you did capture such a sense of the area where they are and the history of their families and their communities. So they're great representatives for a documentary. I mean, not everybody wants to be filmed. Not everybody wants to talk on camera even though they know they're doing great work. In the case in Richmond, it looks like there's a young Doria coming up, Tanya Pulido.

BARBARA: Yeah, she's wonderful.

ELAINE: Yes.

CHERYL: So another strong woman of color really coming up and embracing this local, healthy eating, grow it yourself, cook it yourself lifestyle.

ELAINE: Well, the other thing was she thought of herself as one of the bad kids. She had a terrible education. She was like this very girly girl, is what she called herself. She was this glamorous, beautiful young Mexican American woman. And yeah, she just got a degree from UC Berkeley, and she's just transformed so much with the support and the love and the program there. We saw that with Sherman too, who is an African American young man who's building a forest in the flatlands.

BARBARA: Edible forest.

ELAINE: Edible forest, yeah. And that's pretty miraculous. The stuff they're taking on isn't real small. They really are trying to get the community. There's so much community involvement of people coming, and they take care of the gardens.

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

BARBARA: Actually, it was a fire, a big fire, in the Richmond refinery in 2012, which we happened to be in Richmond when it happened. So it changed the course of the movie dramatically. We filmed for a week after the fire, and we were talking with Tanya about the lessons that they learned from the fire. She said, "Well, if I were to do it again, I would've gotten around"--there was a community meeting the night after the fire--"I would've gone and gotten everybody's contact information, which I didn't do. It was just an opportunity that I lost for community building. It was interesting to watch this young woman being so self-critical in a very constructive way and understanding how you do community organizing.

ELAINE: And learning, and really learning.

BARBARA: And learning. We watched her learning over the next four years. And she's wonderful now. She's graduated from UC Berkeley, and she's got a couple different jobs in Richmond. She's being a community organizer.

CHERYL: Yeah. Oh, that's wonderful. You know, some of the young people in the Richmond community also talked about if you just watch the news, you just hear about us, you think that none of us do anything, we're not going anywhere, we've got nothing going on. But look. We are. So they really appreciated the opportunity to share their stories and show the positive, empowering, affirmative work that they're doing.

Watching the Film

CHERYL: I would love to hear about where people can see the film. I understand they can see it very, very soon.

ELAINE: Yes, the Sunday after this--September 25th--at 7:00 pm at The Hollywood Theatre.

BARBARA: Which is at 43rd and Sandy. We're also taking the movie around the state. So on September 29th, it's playing at the Skylight Theater in Hood River, right in downtown Hood River. On October 6th, it will be at the Bijou Art theater in Eugene at 7:00 pm. On October 9th, it will be at the Columbian Theater

in Astoria, which we're very excited about. There's a really strong community working to sponsor that. Then, on October 25th, it will be at the Varsity Theatre in Ashland and on November 17th at the Sandy Public Library in Sandy. Also, we have tickets as thank you gifts. I don't know exactly how much you have to pledge, but I'm assuming it's something like \$60 or \$75, and you can get a pair of tickets to the screening of "Gaining Ground" at The Hollywood Theatre a week from Sunday, September 25th.

CHERYL: So that's wonderful cuz you're supporting the station too and supporting the film and coming out. And y'all will be there, I assume, doing a Q and A?

ELAINE: Yes. Yes, we are going to do a Q and A. Vicki Hertel will be there, Chris Hertel will be there, Harry Stalford and Willow Coberly and Harry MacCormack, who started [Oregon Tilth](#).

BARBARA: If you wanna get more information, you can go to our website, which is [MediaProjectOnline.org](#). You can also go to us on Facebook, and I don't actually have-- It's [Facebook.com/gaininggroundmp](#) or something like that.

CHERYL: There's a dot. [GainGround.MP](#).

BARBARA: Oh, OK. But actually, if you go to [MediaProjectOnline.org](#), you can click on our Facebook. You can "like" us. You can also go to our Facebook event and sign up. Advance tickets are on sale right now at The Hollywood Theatre website. Again, there's a link to that on our website and on our Facebook page.

CHERYL: Great. So I wanna thank y'all so much for coming. Would you tell us a little bit about the music that we're gonna hear at the end of the show?

Ashel Eldridge's "Green da Block"

BARBARA: This music was written by a Berkeley composer whose name is Ashel Eldridge, a friend of Doria Robinson's. We were looking for music that had the same beat as "Cupid Shuffle," which we couldn't get the rights for, for less than \$17,000. So we needed to have some music that fit the sequence, which was filmed when the kids were dancing to it. So Ashel created this incredible song called "Green The Block," and it's really about Urban Tilth. It was actually much more effective than if we'd used "Cupid Shuffle."

CHERYL: Wonderful. Well, thank you both so much for coming to talk to me on Bread and Roses tonight. Have a good night, everyone.

[hip hop music]

♪Yeah...urban tilth...Grow your own know what I'm sayin'...get down and dirty with it...If you grow it..they gon' eat it..

Watch it, Watch it, Watch it Grow yeah..
Watch it, Watch it, Watch it Grow yeah..
Watch it, Watch it, Watch it Grow yeah..
Watch it, Watch it, Watch it..

Till the Earth and Drop a Seed down..
Grow your own and Tell me how you feel now...

Till the Earth and Drop a Seed down..
Grow your own and Tell me how you feel now...

Got seeds all in my pocket...
At harvest time we gon' clock it
No Gmo's no high fructose no Cheetos going in my rocket
Living outta they system
Illness come we resist them
No shots for flu
Who they talking to?
don't they know I grow my prescriptions.

Mo green for the team betta grow that
No food on the block betta grow that.
Cops lock try to stop that know that
Do good for the hood don't go back,
to the prison where they hit em like lo-jack
In the middle of the street where we plant that
medicine be the light like Edison, No insulin, that's the evidence..uh.

Green the Block
Green the Block
Green the Block
Greeeenn...

Green the Block
Green the Block
Green the Block
Greeeenn...

Green the Block
Green the Block
Green the Block
Greeeenn...

Green the Block
Green the Block
Greeeenn...
Greeeenn...

Till the Earth and Drop a Seed down..
Grow your own and Tell me how you feel now...
Till the Earth and Drop a Seed down..
Grow your own and Tell me how you feel now...

From empty lots to parking spots and back yards we hack hard
The soil is the soul and this garden is where I meet God
This labor is my lover

The Earth is my cover
Planting Justice with Phat Beets
Dropping seeds till we crack streets.

From empty lots to parking spots and back yards we hack hard
The soil is the soul and this garden is where I meet God
This labor is my lover
The Earth is my cover
Planting Justice with Phat Beets
Dropping seeds till we crack streets.

Watch it grow
Watch it grow
Watch it grow ..yeah!
Watch it grow
Watch it grow
Watch it grow ..yeah!
Watch it grow
Watch it grow
Watch it grow ..yeah!
Watch it watch it watch it watch it
Till the Earth and Drop a Seed down..
Grow your own and Tell me how you feel now...♪

Wrap-up

CHERYL: Thanks for joining me for another episode of Stories from the brainreels. Find more handy info on brain injury and disability art and culture on my disability arts blog, WhoAmIToStopIt.com.

[music]