

Transcription of an interview conducted 23 April 2019

Interviewee: PAMELA LAWSON (PL)

Interviewer: JAREK ZABA (JZ)

Tolworth, England

Transcription: JAREK ZABA

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**[00:00] JZ: Errm. That's recording. OK can you just start by just er - just formally - th-the formalities of the tape. Just saying your name err - and err your date of birth and place of birth if that's alright.**

PL: Right yeah. I born in Chile. Erm. In 1972. So I'm 47 [inaudible]. Erm. My name is Pamela Lawson. And I started took over for the community allotment in the last year. The last year because it was nobody who can look after these anymore so erm - weeds and this and that, wasn't much going on.

**[00:41] JZ: Yeah, yeah. So erm have you - how long - w-when do you remember first sort of growing your own fruit and veg? Is it something you've had since childhood?**

PL: Oh all my life. Yeah yeah. All my life. Yeah. I do it on my garden. But because I need more space er this one is more suitable to grow more things in more - in bigger scale. **[01:00]**

**JZ: Mm-mm.**

PL: And we all try to exchange. For example if somebody produced too many corn then I will give tomatoes and they will give me corns and so much. They won't go to waste.

**[01:13] Mm-mm. Yeah. And er - is it - is it s- this sort of allotment culture. Does it exist in Chile? Is that something -**

PL: No it doesn't. [Laughs] No it doesn't. This is a concept er I think is in here and I-I don't know where else. It could be in different countries but in my country no because they don't have the problem of a space. They have so much space and the one who wants to grow things they go to live in a farm.

**JZ: Yeah, yeah.**

PL: There's no concept of city people trying to grow things in city areas y'know .

**JZ: Mm.**

PL: We have this one is 15 acres. Er and it's run by the council.

**JZ: Yeah.**

PL: So...

**[01:56] JZ: And erm. What do you - what do you enjoy about being out on the [02:00] allotment?**

PL: Oh cos it's quiet. Not today. [Laughs]

**JZ: [Laughs] Yeah.**

PL: But in general you can listen the birds. And erm it's a lot of going on here. Foxes and wildlife and trying to look after everything so we try to avoi-I'm avoiding to use pesticides or any chemicals at all. So we try to work within the nature. So if you want to avoid certain pest or things, chewing the veggies and grow [gelandulas] - which you can sit all along there. They're still not in flower but they will. Erm. And the [gelandulas] attract ladybirds so they are good for er - the other bugs within eating.

**JZ: Mm-mm.**

PL: Ladybirds helps.

**[02:42] JZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Erm. And err - what sort of - what sort of things are you growing here at the minute?**

PL: Well because er the last year here it was bit and pieces. They were pumpkins growing wild so I keep them. I keep all that I could keep and a lot of chard. We have **[03:00]** way too many so I get rid of one. Most of the chard and I just keep one. Er we grow pretty much err tomatoes. Which I can have plenty. Chard. And pumpkin.

**JZ: Uh-huh.**

PL: But it was the Chinese pumpkin so nobody likes it. Er is-is-is hard to er - is-is - doesn't have a lot of taste. So this year I'm growing the blue one which doesn't contain sugar. Which is very meaty and is the one that the Indians sells in the shop.

**[03:32] JZ: I'm just gonna record that background noise just for a second cos -**

PL: Yeah

**JZ: - I can edit it out easier if I just -**

PL: Oh right.

**JZ: - if I just erm caught it. [Pause]**

PL: This er gooseberries.

**JZ: Yeah.**

PL: And the other one down there is blueberry. Very good for anti-oxidants.

**JZ: OK. Yeah.**

PL: Very good.

**[03:56] JZ: Erm. Great. And er - yeah so do you say this was [04:00] quite a mess when you -**

PL: Yes.

**JZ: - first got here?**

PL: Yeah. Yes.

**JZ: Erm.**

PL: There was so much weeds. So much weed and it starts to take over different things so I clear and then - now I start to - eh manage more the number of things that we produce cos I have too many potatoes as well, that's another thing. I grow potatoes last year. So this time I'm doing it less so I can keep the numbers in control. And not loads of potatoes or loads of corn.

**JZ: And er-**

PL: Onions this year. Onions.

**JZ: Mm-hmm**

PL: Er raspberries in those three, four edges. And I'm growing sunflowers all along that fence to make like a [inaudible] fence, birds love them. Er and it's good for the bees as well. Y'know we got bees down there.

**[04:54] JZ: So erm. How long have you been on - on this site?**

PL: This is second year.

**JZ: Second year.**

PL: Second yeah yeah. [05:00]

**JZ: Were you anywhere else beforehand, any other - have you had any -**

PL: I help Julia Dennis which she had a plot in the other end.

**JZ: Mm-mm**

PL: And she's the one who teach kids.

**JZ: OK. Great.**

PL: So she's gonna get involved in that [inaudible].

**JZ: Yeah.**

PL: I'm just helping to create the space and provide everything what they need, the kids, for things to be happen.

**JZ: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.**

PL: Sorry but my English is not very good.

**JZ: No no no, it's great, it's great.**

PL: [Laughs]

**[05:32] JZ: Erm yeah. Er with the kids, how - do you think it's important to -**

PL: Exactly. Yeah it is - is very important to - that they can know how things end up in their plates.

**JZ: Mm**

PL: And it's good for - as well for I guess for the mentality y'know to feed on fast food. Which I think is a problem in this country. I see them very often buy them already done meals [06:00] which are full of salt and sugar.

**[06:06] JZ: Yeah so from a personal health point of view -**

PL: Exactly.

**JZ: And also sort of -**

PL: And in terms to deal with nature as well. This is very therapeutic. Destress. From the routine of the job.

**[06:19] JZ: Yeah. And-and from the point of view sort of the environment as well -**

PL: Yes.

**JZ: And carbon footprint and all that sort of thing?**

PL: Of course yes.

**JZ: Yeah.**

PL: Absolutely.

**JZ: Erm. And er how do you find the sort of allotment community? Is it sort of friendly? Do people talk to each other around here?**

PL: Yes yes. We are in general er 90% very friendly all of us and we come for the same reason. To have a piece of mind and enjoy growing things and - so we got erm - such a nice thing when you harvest something.

**[06:58] JZ: Yeah. What, it's [07:00] a nice feeling to harvest that you mean?**

PL: Yes yes.

**JZ: What sort of feelings is it - is it -**

PL: Oh it's because I - you take time and effort y'know. You work through the winter as well preparing the soil. Is not only a seasonal thing. Is the whole year around. And building which is part of my career because I'm a prototype designer. So I can build every - every kind of material.

**[07:27] JZ: Mm-mm. Erm. And is there a particular thing you enjoy growing? Like do you have a favourite?**

PL: No no no. I am learning every time which to grow er - I grow things that I'm gonna eat for sure. Things that I don't like are usually don't grow. That is not much, is just cauliflower that I - that I don't like much. [Laughs] Other people's plant cauliflower but that it's pretty much. If I can grow something I will.

**[07:57] JZ: And are there - are there many that are sort of er [08:00] difficult to grow? That-that you've encountered difficulties with, getting them to -**

PL: Yes. Carrot for example, they very difficult to grow, you really need to netting cos it's a different kind of bugs that attack the carrots and other things as well, is not only the carrot. Erm. But sometime and depend on the weather and the conditions and the water and the soil they don't grow very well so from 20 you probably get four or three if you're lucky and some of them - some people they grow much better so sometime is - is just the luck of erm - the way of we work the soil y'know. How good rich is when compared with manure through the winter so we make them ready for the summer to be rich.

**JZ: Mm-mm.**

PL: And try to move the beds. Not physically. In terms of growing. Because that's a permaculture way. Because **[09:00]** if I took - if I plant potatoes there and I - we planted again then I take the same minerals that already taken so if we move and rotate with different things the soil can - of like erm recover.

**[09:16] JZ: Mm. Mm. And erm - just going back to th-the people that who - who - your neighbours here.**

PL: Yeah.

**JZ: Is it all sorts of people that you -**

PL: Yes all sorts of people.

**JZ: Yeah.**

PL: Young. Old. So on. Middle like me. [Laughs] Middle age. [Laughs]

**[09:45] JZ: And erm you mention you have a husband. Does he get involved at all?**

PL: Yes. Yes. He love to do garden. But he look after my garden. [Laughs]

**JZ: Oh at home.**

PL: Yes. And some time he come here to just help bit on - bit on - bit of pieces like I need to sort out the bolt that is - I don't have the strong to put them in place. Is just silly things.

**[09:58] JZ: Mm-mm. Mm-mm. [10:00] And er - this - this year in particular, w-w-what are you gr- I mean are you erm. Er, yeah, have you - is it, is it -**

PL: OK. It's all ready - cos you go by the - depending on the month. Y'know. We usually start with garlics. And early March err they start to have shoots of asparagus. I don't have asparagus. But I have the garlics

down there. And this year I'm gonna have that netting things. Er basil. Er coriander, parsley. Chive. And rocket. Which the rocket is fantastic cos it grow like fast.

**JZ: Grows fast?**

PL: Oh yes. Very fast.

**[10:43] JZ: Yeah. Yeah. Erm so you mentioned the - what is it, the Chinese pumpkin you mentioned that wasn't so popular?**

PL: No it's not so popular. It's white and it doesn't have any taste and it's very watery. So not even the chickens like it. [Laughs] **[11:00]**

**JZ: [Laughs]**

PL: Yeah.

**[11:03] JZ: And did you say you've got -**

PL: I'm gonna have pumpkins. Yeah I've got chickens but not here. At home. So I feed the chickens as well. They love chard. Er. Corn. So I will put corns - the corns can be together with some other plants like this - in this case with pumpkins they get on well together. So I will put them together and the other bed we haven't decide but this one is pretty much taken. It's still got place for tomatoes probably. Again. [Laughs]

**[11:36] JZ: Yeah, yeah. Err. What was I gonna say - completely forgotten.**

PL: We grow runner beans the last year.

**JZ: Oh yeah?**

PL: But they were setting up for Hampton Court er - Hampton Court Flower Show. And they they they win a medal.

**JZ: Oh right OK.**

PL: Yeah, yeah.

**JZ: Oh right. What for?**

PL: It was kind of like the design things **[12:00]** cos we put them in this kind of things.

**JZ: Mm-mm.**

PL: They were like one to another and we create like this kind of like er pyramids with cans. And they grow in perfectly well cos they are climbers. Runner beans.

**[12:15] JZ: OK. Great. Erm. And er yeah so in terms of er sort of wider society - do you think it's important that people grow their own food rather than go to the supermarket or anything like that?**

PL: Yes of course.

**JZ: Why do you think it's important?**

PL: In terms as well - much more nutrition. No chemicals. Er. It's proved that for example organics eggs like my chickens they have much more vitamins and minerals than the ones in the supermarket. Because all - everything that we buy in the supermarket they're super super super treated chemically. The garlicks, they are bleach. **[13:00]** The salads that you have them bleached. Everything. So it tastes better and is more nutritious and it's - it's always better.

**[13:13] JZ: You mentioned that there's the bees there as well?**

PL: We have bees down there. In the panels.

**JZ: Yeah. Yeah.**

PL: It's two - two panels. And you can have a look because we - we put a window there. So the kids - when they come over. They can have a tour there with the bees as well. And I think they will have er some kind of like explanation about the bees and how they produce honey and how they made it and how it - how they work it. Through the honeycomb. All of that.

**[13:43] JZ: OK. Great. So they're there for sort of educational reasons?**

PL: Yes. Of course yeah.

**JZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Erm. Great. Errm. Er oh yeah and - and sort of - could you just explain again so what you were doing in terms of providing things that are helping to teach children about - [14:00]**

PL: Yeah. I-I-I build those three beddings wooding that they are just in the back of the - that er - greeny things. [Inaudible] And then if they can - if they want to use the soil here they will - we will provide them the soil. They are already done like - ready to plant. We're just waiting for the weather, get better, so that's why they choose probably middle of May.

**JZ: Mm-mm.**

PL: And I guess they will just try to put potatoes and I don't know what else they - they decided already but I-I don't know nothing about that.

**[14:37] JZ: Yeah, yeah. And do you know much about the ShedX project that - that's happening here?**

PL: So on, yeah. And I help them from time to time in different buildings things. Like this one for example. Er ShedX help me to build.

**JZ: Yeah.**

PL: So I make the base. And they help me to put them up.

**JZ: Mm-mm.**

PL: It's pretty easy. Simple. Not a big er requirements so **[15:00]** we have to screw the base. Because the glass is very heavy and needs to be solid.

**[15:06] JZ: So you have er building experience as well?**

PL: Yeah yeah cos I'm designer.

**JZ: Yeah.**

PL: Prototype designer. So I basically I know how to work with fibreglass and I can weld and work with wood and so on. Everything - single metal.

**JZ: So have you found that's quite useful here on the allotment site?**

PL: Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah.

**[15:27] JZ: What other things have you used those skills for?**

PL: Yeah we - er we got erm a welding material that they pretend - the ShedX they pretend to do a kind of like double up a workshop there so that the people can come and build things cos you know er the people who have allotments they need all kind of building things - starting from fencing or sheds, greenhouse and so on. Bedding. Plants. And - so it's kind of like a good - a good help to ha- to have **[16:00]** that done. Eh. And I offer my help er whenever they need it.

**[16:08] JZ: Great. Great. Great erm is there - is there anything else that you think you can err - wan-want to talk about in terms of er the subject? Allotment gardening or growing your own fruit and veg. N-no?**

PL: I don't know.

**JZ: [Laughs] Yeah, yeah. No. No. Yeah in that case yeah I think that's great.**

PL: Thank you.