

Oral History Collection

Katie Landaverde

Interviewer: Brayán Rebolledo García Date: May 1st, 2024

Place of interview: Denton, Texas

Brayan Rebolledo: Hi. My name is Brayan Rebolledo, and this
my interview with Katie --

Katie Landaverde: Katie Landaverde.

Brayan Rebolledo Awesome. All right, can you tell me a bit
about yourself, of like, your interest in
gardening, or like, if it's a hobby.

Katie Landaverde: Sure, um, so by profession I am -- I work
in public education, um, and I grew up, um, I grew
up on a farm, and, you know, my dad, my
grandfather, always had gardening, so I grew up
around a lot of gardening. Um, I don't think I was
particularly interested in it as a kid. Um, I kind
of dabbled, you know, like I'd grow one or two
things and kind of in college, and, you know, when
I was younger, I grew things here or there. I'd
buy, like, a tomato plant or two, just like, for
fun in the spring kind of thing. But I was not,
not really much into gardening until, really, about
four or five years ago, I kind of, I don't really
know what sparked it exactly, but I just kind of
developed this, this really intense passion for
it. And it's, it is just really, truly a hobby for
me, but it's, you know, it's a way that we spend
time as a family. We grow food. You know, it's

taken a kind of a large space in my life now, and I really love it.

Rebolledo: Yeah. Have you been involved in any like, community gardening projects, like, since you work in public education, do you think you had any plans like get kids involved in in these type of projects?

Landaverde: Yeah, so I wrote -- I've written a couple of grants for schools to get gardens. So, the first one was back in 2018 and then I wrote a follow up grant to that one in 2020 and really just to expand it, add some raised beds and fix, kind of, some of the drainage issues and watering concerns we had with our original garden, we relocated some things and expanded and added, like an outdoor classroom and outdoor space. But that was really the vision was to, you know, make sure kids had opportunities to garden and have that exposure.

Rebolledo: Have you just with that, yeah. Have you helped our, like, school gardens? Have you gone there yourself, just to see how the kids were doing with it, how the garden has gone? Gone along.

Landaverde: Yeah! So, I did have, you know, some experience the school where, you know, I was, I was teaching at the time, um, you know, with, with our school

garden. But I have visited a couple of other campuses just to kind of see how, how community gardens or student gardens work on other campuses. And I've seen a few different models, um, but, yeah, it's, it's, um, I think it's a really, it's a really great opportunity for kids. No --

Rebolledo: Yeah, because I work at Lake Dallas Elementary, and I saw how there was new plants. Now when I went to take them outside, I'm like, wow, these look very beautiful.

Landaverde: Yeah, yeah. We just planted those last Saturday.

Rebolledo: Yeah. She was like, hey, do you need to use the gym right now. I'm like, no, I y'all could go in and she said, I'm just putting all my gardening things in there so we can start getting it done. But what you call it? What can we do to help grow the knowledge of gardening to the younger kids that might take an interest to it later on as a career as well, like as farmers or agriculturists around that.

Landaverde: I think helping make it a little bit relevant to their lives, at least for me as a kid. I mean, it was cool, it was interesting, but I wasn't. I wasn't particularly passionate or excited about

gardening as a kid. And I think it's, it's true, because it didn't necessarily seem relatable to my life and my experiences. So, I think finding ways to make it applicable to kids and helping them understand why this might be important to learn. You know, I've certainly had a lot of conversations with my own kids now about, you know, sustainability, and, you know, it's really cool that we have, you know, some ways to produce our own food and, you know, think conversations like that, and then having them help out with, like cooking and things, I think, really helps make it like, a little more tangible, a little bit more relatable to them.

Rebolledo: Yeah, I understand that. Because what you call it, I tried growing a, well, this is me as a kid back then. I tried going to orange tree. I grabbed the seeds from an orange, I don't know why. I just thought this. I'm like, Oh, I'm a plant. I'm watering it. And then, just never grew up. I'm like, Oh, okay. I tried.

Landaverde: Yeah, yeah. I mean, my kids have certainly planted lots of seeds like that. They'll, they'll keep seeds from an apple and go plant them somewhere in

the earth. They don't. Really do anything, that's fine. Um, so it's the idea.

Rebolledo: No, yeah, but more like growing more into, like the community, how you think we can help other people get more knowledge and of gardening, like, what? What can what can be done to get everyone more involved in like a community garden? Let's say --

Landaverde: Well, I think a lot of it is education. A lot of people are just like, oh, I don't have a green thumb. And they think it's, you either have a green thumb or you don't. And it's really, it's just, did you take time to learn some knowledge about how to grow plants or not? It's just, it's just having a knowledge base. So, we certainly need to, I think, do more to educate people. And I'll say this from personal experience. You know, I am a member of a couple of different like gardening communities and organizations, but I find it really hard to actually go to any meetings or trainings or things that are offered, because a lot of times they're offered just at difficult times for people who are working, you know, it's a lot of a lot of times they'll offer classes, you know, 2pm on a

Wednesday. Well, obviously, I'm at work, so, you know, things like that. So, you know, there are a lot of resources, and there's a lot of education out there, but it isn't always easily accessible to people. Also, a lot of times you do have to pay for things like that, and you know, that can be a huge deterrent if you're, you know, just casually interested in learning a little bit about planting a garden, paying \$200 to take a class seems bit absurd. Yeah, that seems, seems like a lot, especially if you're not fully committed, you're just kind of interested in exploring this as an idea. So, I think making education a little more accessible to people. I mean, obviously there's the internet, there's YouTube, there's, you know, there's a million things out there, so people can certainly, you know, do their own digging. But I think it helps make it a little more tangible and a little it encourages people to see things in real life and have kind of real conversations and interactions with people.

Rebolledo: Oh, yeah, because me, I know, because this, because I grew up in Wiley. I know over there, there's not much of a community garden, but there's schools

that do it like they do a small garden to the side with an outdoor classroom, but over there, there's not much of a community garden or anything. And when you just join groups, I don't think there's any groups over there, because everyone just stays from Plano over here. You think that that should be like, more broad, like everywhere else, where people can get more like, know more about growing foods like fruits and vegetables for themselves and casually, just save money for themselves as well in the long run.

Landaverde: Yeah, absolutely. Um, I mean, I would, I would love to see community gardens really take off and do better. I think it's for all I'm speaking for myself here, but I don't, I don't think this is a unique experience. You know, I've thought about that and really, you know, it would be really great to start a community garden somewhere, and to head something like that up. But it also feels very daunting. How do you how do you start a group? How do you start an organization? How do you find the space to do it and then get people to join? Do you need permits? You know that those when you really start thinking through the logistics, it all of a

sudden seems crazy, kind of, kind of scary. Like, okay, I can't just show up and start planning stuff in this plot. And, you know, guerilla gardening there. So, um, yeah, I think, I think it absolutely I would love to see community gardens expand, but also just training and resources for people, and how do you start a community garden would be, I think, something that would be beneficial to help a lot of people get those kinds of projects up and off the ground?

Rebolledo: Yeah, I feel like it should be. That's, that's like, that's a problem that or, like, something you get, we need to go, like, go ask the city, Hey, would this be viable? Like, y'all could, like, help start up a Community Guard, like, get it out there, have more people. Because with them getting it out there, more people will get involved and want to get involved, and actually put in time to it, to just, like, get everyone involved. Because not many cities really do much, they just go on with their lives and just do nothing, just like we could help the environment, just by growing a community gardening or something like to benefit the environment. Absolutely, yeah, and, but what? What

got you, like, into, like, gardening. Like, how did you said, like you the last four or five years? Like, you just got a spark an interest into it --

Landaverde: Again, I'll be honest. So, my interest in gardening did not start with growing food. It really started with, really, my true kind of passion that this kind of grew out of was, I really started learning about native plants, like Texas native plants and prairie restoration, and how to, you know, grow native Texas plants as a part of, you know, restoring our ecosystems that we're, you know, we're losing. So really, that's, that's how it started. To start with a couple flower beds of native plants. Native plants, and really kind of exploded from there. I fell in love with it, and kind of just kept expanding and expanding. And then, really, after probably a year or so of that, I really was like, Okay, now I want to grow food. So really, it didn't start with food, but I now grow both. I have a lot of native plants and flower beds and things like that that I genuinely enjoy growing and gardening caring for. But I also have a pretty large actual garden, you know, with things we can eat.

Rebolledo: So, like, you have any advice or, like, how to, like, start at least a small, like, garden of food, like, like, growing of vegetables, like farm or small --

Landaverde: I think the thing a lot of people get hung up on, because if you start looking at gardening, it can, it can just feel overwhelming, like you have to learn all the things, right? Because if you really get into it, and you start watching YouTube videos and reading articles and stuff, it can feel overwhelming fast, especially when you start getting into, you know how to amend soil, and you know pH balances and soil like it can get scientific fast. And you're like, I don't know what any of this means. I just wanted to grow a tomato. I don't know. Never mind. And it can feel, it can feel daunting, and especially once you start pricing things, because especially a lot of times, I think people think you have to have really expensive tools, or, you know, fancy raised garden beds, or the best soil, the absolute best soil. And I mean, those, those things can help. And you know, you, you too, need some decent soil. Ish, but you know, there's ways to do those things on a

budget, and there's ways that, you know there's, there's really nothing wrong unless you know you truly have, you know, just full clay soil or something like that. There's, there's a lot of things you can plant just right in the ground, um, and you don't, you don't need fancy equipment, or, you know, garden beds or anything like that. You know you don't. You don't have to go buy a tiller. You can, you know, if you have a patch of yard in your in your backyard, you can, you know, it's it. You don't. You don't have to buy, like, a whole tiller, and, you know, build, build raised beds or things like that. You know you can do things like just collecting cardboard, laying cardboard out on your grass, layering a few layers of cardboard, and then mulch on top. If you do that, it'll kill off your grass and make really, really rich. It feeds the soil and makes really rich soil you can plant right into. And it'll kill, kill off that whole area and make great garden soil. So, there's, there's easy, cheap ways to do things like that. You know, grow bags are really inexpensive. You can buy 12 to 5 of them for, you know, 10 or 20 dollars and those are just little felt bags that

you can plant things in. And you can grow, really, almost anything in a grow bag. So there, there's really inexpensive ways to, you know, grow things.

Rebolledo: And you said this, like long time, like, right when we started out, you said that your father and your grandfather were into the -- what did they grow? Were they just growing plants, or were they growing food? Like, did they have a big patch of field?

Landaverde: Yeah, so, um, in both those, both of those scenarios, so my dad and my papa, they both had had gardens when I was little, and they both grew food, um, a lot. You know, that was really, really what it was there for, what it was, um, but, yeah, my especially my papa, he, I mean, he grew, it grew enough food to really, I mean, that was where a lot of, a lot of meals came from. Was straight from the garden. You know, we'd go pick green beans, and that's what we were having for dinner, you know, I mean, really, that's, that's where a lot of our food came from.

Rebolledo: And do you think, like, people should have more of like a garden for themselves to, like, help ease up on, like, spending money, even though, like,

it's gonna take time for it to grow. Do you think for them to just have a garden, them in the backyard, or just right there with their like light, like there, because I see, I seen people in my apartment complex, yeah, the grow lights, they have it on them. Do you think they should just have what? Have one with themselves, like, for personal use and save money?

Landaverde: Yeah. I mean, I would certainly encourage people to do that, and I don't. Think, you know, we're necessarily bound to choosing, you know, one over the other. Have own it, having a personal garden versus a community garden, you know? I don't, I think there's, there's valid reasons to have both, and to participate in both. You know, I think for me, at least, I mean and my family, I really enjoy growing things. You know, in some ways, sure, it gives me, like a little bit of peace of mind, of like we're able to produce. I mean, no, obviously we can't live off of our little backyard garden, but you know, we do produce, you know, food that we can eat and enjoy and that's like kind of a nice little peace of mind. But, you know, it's also, you know, we can cook with those things. And that's

really fun to be able to not just grow food but then prepare it and enjoy it. And, you know, serve, serve people things that you know, we grew.

Rebolledo: And just going off with the next question, do you have any advice for anyone in the north Texas region about gardening, how to start it up, or how to, like, get into it, just how to get any type of knowledge, just even by reading articles like, what do you think would be the best thing to start a garden in Texas?

Landaverde: Well, obviously our climate here, is a lot different from gardening and other places. So, we actually have, we have the ability to grow a lot of things really well here, but we have to be very mindful of our climate, and that actually gives us somewhat limited Windows comparatively compared to other places where we can plant things and grow things. So really, just kind of being mindful of that. So, for example, you know, really here we're not completely out of the frost. You know, danger of frost until late March, maybe or even early April, sometimes some, sometimes mid-March. But, I mean, it's a little unpredictable, so it can be difficult to plant things outside that, you know,

or frost tender before that date. But also, we don't have a long time before the heat really sets in. By mid-May gets hot and the temperatures keep rising. So, if you want things to have time to get established and really established roots, you have a pretty narrow window to do that. So, I think sometimes, maybe people get frustrated when they try to start things from seeds, especially outside in like April or May. Because if you go to the store and you just pick up a packet of tomato seeds, it may say, plant outdoors, you know, in April. Well, well, that's not necessarily the best advice for where we live. It's not impossible. But, you know, trying to start, start seeds indoors, you know, as often as you can before the fear of frost or, you know, don't there's, there's really no shame in going to a garden center and picking up some, some seedlings that were, you know, were started a couple months ago, just because we have such a narrow window there. So, I think that's something to be mindful of. We do have, for the most part in our region. I'm talking widely in DFW. We have a couple of different eco regions here, but you know, a lot of people around here have,

you know we're in black line prairie, so we generally have pretty good soil, but it can be very heavy. And a lot of people, you know, I have a lot of clay at my house, and I think I know it's very common. So just being mindful of, you know, what, what type of soil you have, it doesn't have to be quite so nitty gritty, although you can take a soil sample to your local office, and they will sample your soil and, you know, give you some readings on it. But really, just to get started, if you go outside, you know, just kind of dig around in your soil a little bit, you know, and see how, what, what type of soil you have, because if, even if it is really heavy clay, it's not, it's not impossible or difficult to amend that soil. So just being mindful of what kind of soil you have in your light conditions, making sure you find a nice, sunny, sunny spot.

Rebolledo: No, yeah, because honestly, this Texas weather is unpredictable. One day it's very sunny, then next day it's cold in the morning and cold the rest of the day, just like last month in April, just that one Saturday, it was just freezing cold. Yeah, and then, and then, especially the rain, because

there's times it's, it's a light rain, it's just normal. But then there's other times where heavy thunderstorms are going on. And especially now that we're like, we're like, we're still in the middle, like tornado season and everything. You think those heavy winds, especially if a tornado comes by, would affect the crops, like anything --

Landaverde: Absolutely, I mean, you know, I haven't, I haven't had an actual tornado come to come. Through my house, you know, with a garden, but, um, you know, we often have, you know, pretty good winds or hail occasionally. So, you know, that can certainly, that can certainly damage, damage your plants. You know, I had some plants with hail damage a couple weeks ago, but they'll generally recover from that kind of thing. I'll lose plants here or there too to weather. But if you're mindful about planting times, and especially in the summer of heat, being mindful of that and being mindful of what plants grow best in what season. So especially, you know, I think people get frustrated because they're like, well, I planted, you know, they'll kind of tell me what they planted in the spring. I'm like, oh, those would have grown a lot better in the fall,

that kind of thing. So just being mindful of when different plants do best here in particular --

Rebolledo: Oh, yeah, because then people are like, oh, I want to eat my food. I want to get all this ready, just for this certain time of year. Like, let's just say, some girls' pumpkin or something, they try growing it in the spring, or like, the summer, just trying to get it up and running before everyone has their hands on a pumpkin. And like, oh, I got the biggest one. No, I got the smallest one or something. But, and --

Landaverde: Pumpkins do actually take, take quite a bit of time to be ready, like usually, 90 to 120, days. So, if you want to Halloween, pumpkin plant it, plant it in June --

Rebolledo: Yes. But even though the weather gets like in June, like here in Texas, it gets very hot, and I heard that this summer is going to be drier than last summer, so just being mindful of how to treat everything around and getting around how dry and it's going to get in the summer. But, yeah, but what foods do you think we can cook using garden grown veggies?

Landaverde: Um, well, you can cook, I mean, almost anything.

So, for me, I grow, I'm gonna tell you what I grow. So, I grow squash, beans, cucumbers, kale, onions, radishes, carrots, tomatoes, cantaloupe, watermelon, bell peppers, jalapenos, tomatillos, strawberries, garlic, tons of herbs. So, you know, basil, rosemary, tribes, oregano, mint. So, lots of things. So, you have tons, tons and tons of combinations. I can tell you some of my favorite things that we make. So, my husband grew up in Mexico City, and he is absolutely the cook in our house. So fresh salsa is amazing. So that's, that's great. I can go out the garden and grab some serranos or jalapenos, and, you know, tomatoes, onions, and you know, he'll, he'll roast them and make a fresh salsa. So easy little things like that are great. Um, I specifically grow tomatillos, just so I can walk in and hand my husband, like a whole handful of tomatillos and tell him to make me enchiladas. And that's the best. So, yeah, I mean, you can, you can do so much with, with growing, you know. I mean, I listed a bunch of things. So even just growing, you know, 234, different things you can do. There's a lot that's really versatile.

Rebolledo: Oh, yeah, that's all good. No worries. But, um, just moving on to the next thing, the kids gardening. How do you think we should like incorporate more of getting their hands dirty, getting them to know more about the environment just by gardening or something around the route.

Landaverde: I think kids really want to know the why behind something often, so sometimes, when we present information, but we don't tell them why it would be important for them to learn, or why they should care, it's hard to, you know, for it to seem relatable. Um, so, you know, and with my own kids, you know, we're we, we have a lot of conversations about, you know, sustainability and, um, things like that. And I think, I think for them, they always have lots of questions. And I think that really helps it make it a little more relevant to their lives, and especially, you know, if you can get them involved in in harvesting and planting seeds and kind of walking through the process like my kid, my kids are, and they didn't, I'll say this, they didn't used to be super interested in gardening with me. It's really just been in the last year or two. And I think it's because they've

seen me do it now for so long that it took a little chance. Yeah, but it took time, you know, there were, there were a couple years there, I'd be like, you guys want to come help me? Like, I'm gonna plant seeds. And be like, no, you know. But now, you know, my kids all the time, like, I'll come home from work, and I'll be like, are we gonna go work in the garden? When are we going outside? Like they're very interested. Or, if I'm out there working, they'll come out and be like, what are you. Doing, like, how can I help? And so, you know, just getting them involved in little things, just even pulling weeds, you know, or explaining what you're doing and why and how, how things work, and really kind of explaining the process and pointing out, you know, any, any interesting things you can, I think, makes it a little more relevant to them.

Rebolledo: No, yeah, because most of the kids I work at was there in alphabets. And like Dallas, they always ask, why, why? Why? And we, we explain it in our own terms, where we already understand what [unintelligible] said, but them saying, Oh, but why? And I feel like that, like we should more introduce more like a simple idea to them, of like,

why it's important to garden, especially now that many people are bringing up climate change and everything and how that could, like, just even starting a small garden could benefit us in the long run. Do you think, do you have it, like, any ideas on how we could start, like, workshops before those kids, like an after-school program where they could go and just garden?

Landaverde: Yeah? I mean, honestly, there's actually a lot of really great existing resources. I think the biggest issues a lot of schools run into is just finding staffing to do it. You know, we all know the stress is on public education right now and on our teachers, so it's it can be very difficult to staff programs like that, but if schools can find, you know, a person to run it, I think I'll add this too. I think a lot of times, teachers are maybe hesitant to take that on. If they don't have any personal experience with it, they think they have to be a master gardener in order to lead some type of garden club on a campus. But you can really start without having any experience and really just learn along with the kids. So here, here in Texas, the Airm and the AgriLife program and 4h they have

lots of programs, and they're really great about supporting schools and getting gardens up and running. They'll help sponsor clubs. So, there's a couple of different, you know, you can do just a garden club, or, you know, they have some options where they'll help support you in kind of a garden cooking club combination where we're teaching kids to grow the food and then also how to prepare it.

No --

Rebolledo: Yeah, because over there in Lake Dallas, I know they have a cooking club, and I've seen kids who -- they get off, and they were so excited about what they made. I feel like, if they knew where that food came from, and then using that same food that they grew themselves in their own cooking, like creation that they made. Yeah, then they'll come to appreciate how gardening and all the process and not the long patience to wait for just a single plant to grow up. Yeah, yeah, exactly.

[End of Interview]