THIS WAS
TOMORROW

FI GARRARD

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In conversation with Enrico Policardo
Kesoberi, near Newlyn, Cornwall
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Edited from the recorded conversation.

01 Who are you, and where are we?

I'm Fi Garrard, and we're at Kesoberi Community Farm, just on the edge of Newlyn, in Cornwall.

02 What is this place?

We bought 20 acres as a co-operative, so it's owned by Kesoberi Housing Co-operative. This place is here to be a sanctuary. We bought it to set up an intentional community - to live here, but also to grow our own food and provide services to the community.

I'm talking for everybody a bit, but for me, Kesoberi has always had a spirit. We incorporated it in 2012, and the spirit of the organisation and what we're trying to achieve has always meant looking at every single part of our existence - our spiritual lives, our emotional lives, our physical lives. A completely holistic project.

The way we found this land was exceptional. Three of us in the group were doing a shamanic training together, and we started journeying together, and we got this very strong image of a woodpecker - that we needed to keep pecking away to find the land. Then I looked over the hedge from the land opposite and thought, this would be good. And forgot about it. Then it came up on the market. The day we all came to visit, every single one of us either saw a woodpecker, or an image of one, and there was a woodpecker actually flying in front of us, towards the land. When we got here, we all just knew. I've looked at hundreds of pieces of land in Cornwall. When we found this, it was like: this is it.

It was on for about £200,000, and we offered that, and they turned it down because we were a group. The estate agent wouldn't talk to us. We kept calling. We journeyed to get the figure, £208,000, and eventually that was

accepted - but we only had £140,000. We just knew we'd raise the money somehow. So we put the offer in, and people turned up saying, I'll lend you this. […] We just raised the money. It just happened.

And then, when we bought it, it was like we'd manifested it into reality and suddenly - oh my goodness, now we need to plant trees, now we need to look after it. It became too much, and the whole group […] collapsed.

03 How long had the group been going?

A long time. Even before this we'd had a different housing co-op idea - we moved to Cornwall properly in 2005, and I made a little flyer saying, does anybody want to live in an eco village? I look at that flyer now and think, that's so sweet. We formed a little group, we were all young and excited, and then, realising how much work and time and money it needed, and that people needed homes, that group fell apart.

Then me and Richie had children, and when they were little, good friends moved down and we thought, let's just do it - let's set up a housing co-op. That's when Kesoberi was incorporated […]. That group lasted a while, then our two friends realised they had elderly parents and couldn't be here, so it went on the back burner. Then a new group formed, around 2016 or 2017, and we were together a good eight or nine years, meeting regularly, socialising, doing all the boring admin.

04 So this land came after that?

We saw the land opposite, and realised we loved being here in Paul. We started to negotiate with that landowner, but his prices were crazy - grade two agricultural land, and I think he wanted £20,000 an acre when it should have been about £10,000. So we forgot it. But I'd looked over the hedge, going, this would be cracking. I knew from years of experience that what we wanted

was agricultural land on the edge of a village, with houses on one side, so we could go for rural exception planning, with a Section 106 agreement - outside the village boundary but close to it. Then an affordable housing scheme.

It got immensely complicated, because me and Richie own a house, so we don't qualify for affordable housing. Pretty much everybody else did. But the affordable housing people said it was a good sign, and we took that massive jump. There was no doubt in my mind. I still have no doubt.

It had all been potatoes - heavily, industrially farmed for years. They sprayed the potato plants to kill them before harvest, harvested, and left the land completely barren. Proper brown field. It felt like the whole land had been abused for years. We journeyed quite a lot, and I often got the spirit of the land as a very small, very sad kind of spirit.

Buying it felt like constantly pushing - physically pushing to make it happen. And that has been the project the whole way through. There's been this unbelievable resilience needed, and determination and stamina, a keep-going attitude, a radical trust, and an ability to feel into the wider, deeper purpose of us being here.

We completed on 19 August 2023 and made all these plans. We decided to plant 3,600 trees over the winter, to get trees in as soon as possible. During that tree planting there was a massive split in the group, when people realised how physical and hard the work is. We had three massive planting days - eight hours of full-on heavy work. I love tree planting, but it's hard. […] This is all around January, February 2024.

[…] I was like, who the hell is going to invest £90,000 in a project that's falling apart? No one's going to do that, are they? That'd be madness. […] But he turned up at the land and went, yeah, OK, do it, here's the money. And

then we were still about £50,000 short. […] And that gave me the little push I needed.

We bought most of the people out, and then I was just broken, for a good year. We came up here and let the land heal. It was like we were all broken together - the land, and me and Richie, and Martin, who'd come out of a previous community. And the land started to come back. It started with pineapple weed, and that year the whole field was full of chamomile. The scent, and the space - it was amazing. I couldn't believe I was watching this kind of healing.

At the same time as the land was healing, I sought out a counsellor and did some untangling, and then I ended that with a big bit of spiritual work - a whole load of sessions with a shamanic practitioner. I journeyed deeply into it. If I can say one thing that makes any sense, it's my experience that every single element needs to be taken care of for it to work: the physical work on the land, the emotional work on the land and in myself, my physical self, and the spiritual practices. […] I feel that's what it's been like here.

05 What have you learned? If somebody wanted to do something like this, what do they need to take care of - as a person, and as a group?

There was a lack of structure. One of the most important things - which I knew before, but didn't know how important it was - is sociocracy. A structure where everybody knows exactly what they're responsible for and what they're not. That's what we did when we formed this new group: we really embedded sociocracy. There was a point with the old group where people were livid because I'd planted a tree. You can't plant a tree! Well, I can. We need enough autonomy and freedom to make decisions, and to know the limits of that - this area is my responsibility, and if I want to make decisions about that area, I go to the group that manages it. We all did

sociocracy training, and it gave us that structure. In the old group the boundaries between people were so blurred - people wanting to fix each other, people wanting power, not feeling OK in their own power. It's about putting in physical boundaries, isn't it? What's yours and what isn't.

And alongside the physical structure, the mistakes I made personally were around my […] being responsible for everything. It all caught up at the perfect moment, and I went, oh, it must all be my fault, I'm really sorry - I took all the emotional blame […], and everybody went, great, we can chuck it your way. I didn't have enough boundary around what was mine. Even though I knew it wasn't mine. So essential was my own journey around what's not mine, handing it back, and getting clearer.

06 What's the plan going forward?

It's changed quite a lot. We were going to do nine affordable homes, then sixteen. Then local people found out about sixteen and got very cross. So I think we're going back to nine, and we've got a pre-planning application in. The whole way through I've felt it's not really up to me. The land will dictate what happens and how. One of our members really wants to live in a round hobbit house. I don't care at all - as long as it's really small, really simple, as ecological as it could possibly be. We've thought about straw bale, cob. Richie's a builder, so timber frame, probably looking fairly normal. I want slightly more comfort.

So we're at this weird juncture. We discovered AL1 planning - Cornwall's low-impact policy, a bit like One Planet Development in Wales - and met the person who wrote it. And last year I got a grant to do a massive piece of work with an organisation called Resonance. […] The grant meant we could write a financial plan for the project, and we had an unbelievably good financial analyst, Jacob Lee, who came here and wrote an incredible plan of how it would work financially to build sixteen homes, a number of them affordable.

And then we tried to get a loan from Resonance, and at that point I realised the beast that was opening up in front of me. […] To make it affordable at what they believed was an acceptable scheme, we'd have to borrow £3.2 million to build our homes. To do that we'd need a grant. To get a grant, we'd need a registered provider - a big company. And to get a registered provider, we'd have to sign our site over. Relinquish control. It happened really quickly, with this little carrot dangling - that we could borrow enough to build our barn and get started. And then we found out we weren't even allowed to build our houses ourselves, because they wouldn't lend us the money if we were the builders. They didn't trust we could do it. So it was: we can go down this road, but it's the corporate road. We won't even be able to manage our own houses. What's the point?

So we started looking at AL1 planning instead. What if we just move on in statics, write the management plan, and grow 60% of our food - which we want to do anyway? Should we just do that? We're in unknowingness at the moment.

07 Have you thought about something like that happening on this land?

When we moved to Cornwall, we saw these landlords. There are loads of communities in Cornwall owned by one landlord. […] And […] they have the responsibility and they can tell people to leave whenever they want. People live there and work the land and get disillusioned that they can't have any real power. That's why we set up a housing co-op - so power would be distributed, and we'd all work it.

08 Is this the future you were dreaming of?

It's never how you think it's going to be, is it? As a teenager I imagined what the love of my life would be like, and the reality is always so much harder. It's so much harder than I could have imagined, and it's so much more incredible - literally incredible. Not credible. How possible things are. And the feedback around magic and sacred manifestation and serendipity - it's there all the time, and I think it's accelerating in the world anyway.

It reminds me of that idea in Native American culture: if you have a big dream, you have to go and do it. Me and Richie had a big dream at some point, and it's always felt a bit like, oh God, we've got to go and do it. We're stuck with this one. That's how it's felt the whole way through - we can't get out of it. Maybe that's why people fail, because it's actually felt as a burden. You've been given this task your whole life, and there's no getting out of it. You get out of it when you die. […]

09 What would you tell someone about to take a radical choice?

You can never know what it's going to be like, can you? But you can't not do it. What's the alternative? Not going for your dreams, or not believing it's possible - that's got to be worse. The stuckness. That's the whole thing about emotion: it's movement. The whole journey is about getting unstuck - with capitalism, with money, with people, whatever it is. Let go. Get unstuck, all the time. Let go of all the things holding you back.

10 What's something you really love?

Flowers. They blow my bloody mind. They're such joy. My front garden - that's going to be the hardest thing for me to leave […]. Every year one new plant goes, yes, my turn. I'm just a little tinkerer. My job is to go in and go, you're taking over a bit. It's like music. It's like creativity. And I'm rather over

the top about asking people what they think of the garden. I wake up every morning and go and stand in it and go, oh, you're so good. I can't think of anything that gives me more joy than flowers.

[…] It's all there is, isn't it?

11 Is there anything I haven't asked that you'd like to say?

What just came to me was care. When you were talking about the seed and its conditions - in there is the caring for that thing. Taking the time to deeply care for something, and having the opportunity to.

And for some reason I'm going to say the Shambhala warriors. Do you know the Shambhala warrior prophecy? It's such a cracker. It comes from Joanna Macy, who was gifted this prophecy, and it's from Tibetan culture, from around the eleventh century. The prophecy goes something like: there will come a time when everyone on Earth is in danger, and there will be people called the Shambhala warriors. You won't know them. They live everywhere on Earth. You can't see them, but they're there. And they know they need to walk into the citadels of power. And they know that all the weapons of destruction in the world are manomaya - made of mind. Because they're made by the human mind, they can be unmade. And the weapons they need to unmake them are two things: insight and compassion. Mind and heart. You need one to cool down the other, and one to warm up the other.

I love that it's a prophecy. I love that it feels like it's of this time. And another part of it is that the citadels are in our own hearts. It's the undoing of those weapons of destruction in our hearts - the idea that things aren't possible. They are, because we just constructed them. So we can gently, with insight, unconstruct them. And having the space here to do that in my own heart is the key to all of it, for every person who's here.

This Was Tomorrow – Is This the Future We Were Dreaming Of?
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