

Getting Free Together Ep. 6

Sovereignty, Grief & Designing Your Life with Mara

Stas and Leander (00:00)

This is Leander, and you're listening to Getting Free Together. I'm here with my co-host Stas and our fellow co-op owner, Mara who we're so excited to chat with today. Mara is the lead of our mediation program, a DJ, and so much more. And they'll tell you about some reflections on their grief sabbatical and some exciting travels that they've been doing recently.

So let's start with how we usually start of how did we meet? So, Mara, we'll give you the chance to share. How did you meet us?

Mara (00:48)

Yes, first off, thank you for having me here. I'm so so excited. I've been listening to some of the other episodes and I love that we have both our FemTORS, mentors, people we look up to, and then also our co-op members. so I'm grateful for the opportunity to to just to chat more, to chat more about my practice and yeah, and to talk with y'all. the way that we met, so there's so much lore to this, but Stas and I went to the same high school. I went there for middle school too.

I think you did too, right?

Stas and Leander (01:15)

Yeah, I started in fourth grade.

Mara (01:16)

Okay, I started in six, so we were both there for a long time. and it was this all girls private Catholic school, which is hilarious because we're not girls, we're girlies, but not girls.

Stas and Leander (01:28)

And if you've heard

the earlier episodes, this is also the school that sha'ina and I went to. So all three of us, although you never overlapped with sha'ina.

Mara (01:37)

No, because I'm three years younger than Stas, three grades younger. so we definitely interacted though. We were in high school at the same time. Stas was the senior, and I was a freshman. And I remember first seeing you at one of the talent shows. You had an incredible outfit, you had the confidence, and it was crazy because I feel like I didn't really mesh so well. I was I was always a peacekeeper. It makes sense I'm a mediator.

in my grade and with my peers, but I didn't mesh so so well with a lot of people that were in our environment. There's so many reasons for that, you know. Yeah, there's parts of class and queerness and all these different things. and I remember meeting you and thinking, like, my gosh, this person is so epic. they they also are just doing their own fucking thing. And at the end of our freshman year, we did freshman follies, which is when they force

The entire freshman class to come together, talk about collaborative decision making, and create a play that is some sort of paying tribute to high school and especially for the seniors. And we did one that was rooted all around SNL. And I just remember us like talking to you in that process and talking to you afterwards. And yeah, it was very like Theater Kids Unite. And yeah, that was where we met. We met in in Miami and by the mangroves in the swamplands of where we went to high school.

Stas and Leander (02:53)

Is kind of toxic because Stas and I met at school too, at college. So we gotta dig into this. I know someone that we used to work with, we were catching up recently and they were like, Yeah, I got into working at Spring Up right out of school and it kind of just felt like a continuation of, you know, collaborative group projects, which for a lot of people is the hardest part of school. So it's kind of yeah, our toxic trait is that we're just always doing collaborative group projects together. Yeah. And I think ~

Mara (03:19)

Yeah.

Stas and Leander (03:20)

What feels relevant as far as our reconnection moment is I remember that I I remember you from high school, but not super well. I remember more like the group that you were in and what the group of y'all were were like and and up to. And I remember particularly feeling like y'all were so much more confident and present in your queerness than we were when we were freshmen. Cause there were a few of us that were out relatively out by senior year.

But we were really ostracized and it took a long time and we kind of knew about each other from earlier on, but not like, super DL, but it was an all-girls Catholic school. But I remember feeling like particularly your class, there was more openness around queerness than than felt possible for us when we were freshmen. And I remember feeling really like, I don't know, excited. Like, you know, when you can feel these like tangible changes, even just over a couple of years of like,

What felt possible before versus afterwards. but I think that the moment that I remember us reconnecting, I think you had like emailed me or texted me because you were working in like a domestic violence programming to support with like anger management or something like that. And you had watched one of the Barnard Center videos about shame blocking accountability and wanted to use it in some of your programming.

And I was so excited. I was like, ~ my God, someone from our school is doing this kind of aligned work and found, I don't know, it was like this full circle moment for me of feeling like I think that as like a black, queer trans person from that school who I converted from Catholicism in eighth grade because I was so upset about the history of Catholicism we were studying. Like I was such a troublemaker. and very not.

Mara (05:03)
it's only

Stas and Leander (05:05)
what that school was about, but also kind of in certain ways. But I felt so different and ostracized from that school that it felt really healing to have this full circle moment of you reaching out and being like, I remember you from school. I see the work that you've been doing. I've been inspired by this video. I want to use it. And I was so excited. And so we scheduled a call. We ended up talking for like 90 minutes, I think. We spoke for a pretty long time.

Mara (05:31)
Yeah.

Stas and Leander (05:31)
And we were

talking about emergent strategy and mediation and restorative justice and like all these things that I was like, yeah, there's so many pathways to like deepen this work. and then we've been in touch ever since then. And like it's been so beautiful to grow in our like collaboration and our friendship in the years. I mean, that was so many years ago now.

Mara (05:51)
Yeah, I I think it was twenty nineteen, right? I think it was when I was working in that shelter, right before the pandemic, I wanna say.

Stas and Leander (05:57)
Mm-hmm. I think it was twenty nineteen or early twenty twenty, one of those two.

Mara (06:00)
Okay. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, those those videos are incredible. We can link them. They're they're important to Spring Up lore too.

Stas and Leander (06:09)
Yeah,

so I guess what feels active is you know you were off for part of last year on a grief sabbatical

and we work with so many leaders that do conflict and care work and I've seen how hard that is for people to say

Especially to know that in advance. I'm gonna need a break, you know, and I'm gonna need to do some things to give back to myself and yeah, rebuild this ability to hold space for other people. And so yeah, I'd love to hear what was that process like for you? how did you know I needed to take a sabbatical? And then how did it feel, stepping back from projects that you'd been so integral to setting up, like the mediation circle?

And how did you care for yourself while you were on sabbatical and what was it like to come back?

Mara (06:59)

Yeah, absolutely. Oof, such a big question so early on. I love it. Yeah, so I 2025 was really a fucked up year for me. It was so hard. I mean, I think collectively it was so difficult. And I was already sorting through and rebraiding the strands of grief that was happening collectively. And in the second half of the year.

A bunch of people in my life started transitioning to the spirit world, like started dying. And yeah, it was really my my ex-partner's sibling was murdered, and my one of my really good friends took their life. There was car crashes, one of my best friend's mother passed, it was just a lot of death. It was a lot of death back to back. And I identify as a grief worker.

And as a death doula in many ways. I feel like I'm a doula of this new world in so many ways. and I was familiar with the practices. I've been on this journey for so long of decolonizing, and that's always brought me closer to spirit and to land, and it's brought me closer then to the life cycle.

And I felt like I was really in right relationship with that. And then all of a sudden all these deaths started happening. And I felt like I was totally losing track of myself. I literally am so good at masking and totally just switching gears of which side of myself is what's present. And as a therapist, as a mediator, I play all of these roles. that I'm sure anyone in leadership that's listening to this.

Would relate to. I play these roles where people do care about me. And it's very okay, show up like however you'd like and however you can. But when you don't actually show up in that loving, in control, these projections of perfection and what's seen as safe, you know, that's super ableist. when you don't show up that way, people are very uncomfortable with that. And in turn, that made it really hard for me. It made it feel like less and less safe to actually be grieving.

And I felt like I really didn't know what to do because I was like, damn, I'm doing all the tools. Like how, you know, what else is there to do? You know? And those were things like sitting with mushroom medicine. and I I'm a psychedelic therapist too, so I have I've built that personal

relationship for so long. I do hydropelvic steaming or yoni steaming is also what it's called, and have relationships with plantcesters in those ways. You know, I have so many tools, so many community spaces.

And ~ at that time I felt like I don't know what to do next. But the one thing that I do know is that masking is harming me and that I need to stop working. and that was a really, really difficult decision to make to your point, Lea, I had just become a member owner actually that year. So I mean, that's a bad look, obviously, to leave for a period of time in that. And I'm so about my commitments that when I say yes to something, it's almost

Literally the craziest shit has to happen in order for me to not complete it. I'm really about my word. That's my Leo Virgo cusp tendencies. And so it was really difficult. And I remember that for a couple months when all these deaths started happening,

I was like, do I need to take a break from my personal you know, romantic relationship? Do I need to step back from my organizing or ceremony spaces? It's really interesting to me in thinking about the decision making that what felt least accessible to me, but low-key would have been the easiest, is to take a break from working. But that was the capitalist mentality of I can't stop working though, like I'll die, you know, if I'm not working.

and what would I do with my time and my days? You know, there were those sorts of undertones to it that I needed to really break through and unpack. And I ended up deciding actually, Spring Up is one of the commitments that I care the most about and I'm invested in the most long term. So that's how I came to the decision. this is actually one of the primary places where I need to take a break and I want to do it in a good way. I want to have like a smooth

coming out and a smooth coming in as much as possible so that I can really show up and do this work only when I'm in a place to do it. And I mean I think that that's part of being an accountable leader. You know, we're we're all member owners together now. So we all share in different ways, but we all share to different extents like what's at stake with this business together and with this co-op. And I felt like that was really the only way I could be accountable to the work too that I do see as so

I see the work of mediation and circle keeping as so spiritual and as so sacred, and also important to this time. So I felt like out of respect to the practice and the lineage too, I needed to take that time.

Stas and Leander (11:19)

Yeah. I'm really sitting with what you're sharing because it's things that I know, but I'm also just so aware of the the depth and scale of what you were dealing with. And I think something that feels important is also noting that it wasn't just about, this these were all objectively bad things, but it was the the self-awareness and attunement to how you were doing to know when was it actually doing harm to mask the way that you were.

that's really sticking with me. It and and and also, you know, we talk about this all the time in mediation, but you know, you don't want to be perfectionistic. You can show up in different ways, but you're also consenting to hold people in a moment where they really need a particular type of attunement and to be the center of your energy and focus at least during those hours that you're working with them. And if you're not able to do that in the way that they actually need to be held.

then it's actually doing a disservice to keep pushing yourself to show up. And I think that it felt honestly really important. It's interesting hearing you talk about, you know, I was in my first year of co-ownership. it feels like it's a bad look to pull back. But I also feel like that's modeling the kind of leadership that we're looking for from each other as co-owners is the self-awareness of when you need space, the ability to name that proactively and say this is coming up.

I want to close out what I can and prepare and then give you a timeline for when I'm going to be able to return. and I think you were out for almost six months, right? It was five, five and a half months, five months. and we had the ability to set the systems up before you left. And I honestly felt so relieved and grateful that you named what you needed and took the space that you needed.

Mara (12:46)

Yeah, five.

Stas and Leander (13:00)

and that you trusted us to also be able to steward this business that you had just become a co-owner of at a really critical moment for the business. That you were like, I trust y'all to make these decisions while I'm gone that will impact me too. And that, I'll come back and honor the the decisions that you all made while I was gone. that felt like a really big moment of trust amongst us as co-owners.

of us trusting you to know what you needed and you trusting us to make decisions while you were gone and something that I want to be true for us as co-owners. So it felt really powerful to have the opportunity to lean into that immediately within the first year of you being a co-owner.

Mara (13:38)

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. I so I so appreciate you naming that part. it 'cause it is true. It actually did take a good amount of trust. You know, there was 2025 was such a hard time in movement space, the mass defunding and criminalization that every single person that we were working with and supporting and in solidarity with was experiencing. the entire ecosystem felt this these constant shocks that were reverberating for the entire year. So it felt like a really

honestly critical time to be doing the work. And of course our business felt felt the impact of that. So it was difficult to not be present for that. And, that's part of the grief work though is it's saying

yes to yourself and saying yes to your spirit and yes to your own process, which also must mean no to all these other things that you want to do, but you actually can't.

Yeah, absolutely. I was really grateful too that I worked with two curanderas throughout the time of my grief sabbatical. so I worked with Tanya Marco Vedo, who is two spirit, such a legend, lives in Long Beach, and with Jocelyn, who works out of La Vida Divine Institute, in Macas in Ecuador. and it was so powerful for them to support me in understanding the

Not just the emotional, but the spiritual side of all of these decisions that I was making. I feel like that really supported me throughout the the grief sabbatical in like having trust that this was actually what I needed to do. You know, even though I wasn't, I'm usually a really active participant when the world is falling apart. But I needed to do the opposite of that. And, you know, that trust.

It takes also like guidance and solidarity and stewardship, you know, throughout that. And I feel like we do that all the time as mediators. So it was such a blessing to work with these really powerful badass people that helped me stay in my own process and trust my own process.

Stas and Leander (15:24)

Yeah, I mean, and this is, you know, such long-term work as well. It's like obviously there are moments that feel like crisis and where quick response is needed. But I appreciate that Mariame Kaba reminds us that this is just gonna keep going in cycles. And there are cycles when people realize the need for abolition, and then there are cycles of building, and then there are cycles of people getting pulled into other things.

But in order to be able to keep holding this work, it is so important to have that self-awareness of I'm not actually able to hold this right now. Right. And this sense that there is an ecosystem and there are other people that you can, pass the baton to, or as a care worker.

being able to say no. that's such an important part of consent is to enthusiastically say yes to something. There are actually lots of things that we're saying no to, and to feel confident doing that and enough self-awareness to say yeah, I'm gonna say no. and to do that in an informed way. that's also very respectful of the people around us, to be able to

Say a no because yeah, I know a lot of people feel like if I step back, maybe I don't feel that trust that you know, and I've seen that in organizations too, right? Like someone who's been holding a lot, it's been impacting them and accumulating. They do step back and, you know, maybe they don't have enough shared leadership or

weren't able to like plan that or XYZ right. But there are so many reasons where that is a valid concern. that if you do step back, maybe people don't step up. But that does show you that the type of work that was being held was as unsustainable. And there's also more grief in that. so just noting that I've seen that and been supporting people in navigating that over the last year or

two.

Yeah, and I think that's a perfect transition into our next segment of the podcast, which is about everyday practices of liberation and movements that are inspiring you. I'm already hearing about everyday practices of living what you preach, tuning into yourself. I'm hearing about the yoni steaming and the mushroom practice and looking to mentors and being willing to be held and not always in the role of holding others. I also feel like I've learned.

so much from you and really appreciated the energy you bring to our collective around decolonization and attunement to the global south. And I hear that even in the story that you're sharing around what medicine you leaned into and turned to during your time of grief and needing that space. But I'd love to invite you to share, you know, what do you want to share right now as far as everyday practices and movements that are inspiring you?

Mara (18:25)

Yeah, absolutely. I think movement wise, the what's been inspiring me the most, and this really bloomed during my grief sabbatical, we haven't actually talked about this, is the concept of Cuerpo Territorio. Have you heard about that?

Stas and Leander (18:39)

No.

Mara (18:40)

So it's a really beautiful movement. It's like a grassroots indigenous feminist like eco-anarchist concept that was birthed from Lorena Cabnal. And it's it's kind of been popping up though all across Avia Yala, all across Mesoamerica. and it's the idea, it's body as territory, cuerpo territorio, and it's thinking about

like the body as the first territory to be defended against colonization and like extractivism and patriarchy and all of that violence. And it's all about thinking about personal sovereignty being linked to like collective defense of land and community. And I I started doing I was doing a lot of soul searching as you can imagine in my grief sabbatical, you know, and I have such a complicated

Stas and Leander (19:10)

Mm.

Mara (19:29)

I think relationship to like roots and ancestry. And I'm Venezuelan American. I'm mixed. My mom is Afro-Indigenous from the Bemon tribe and Trini as well. And my dad is white American, literally born on a farm in Wisconsin. And it's just so wild the different worlds that I have bridged in my body. And I was thinking so much about how my nervous system felt so shot.

During my grief sabbatical, I've never felt so dysregulated, all the feelings, it was very everything, everywhere all at once, like we were saying, all the feelings at once. And I was thinking about like how do I re-sacralize, make my body sacred again, and something that I actually feel at home and is a hospitable place like to my spirit again. And I came across this movement and started learning so much about it, through all of my herbalism spaces.

But also then through like dance community spaces and through my I have dublab radio show, which is a local grassroots radio station here on Tongva land in LA. And I was connecting with a lot of different artists about this concept too. and yeah, I think that returning to the earth, like in such a in such a real sense, like connecting.

like my body to the earth body was the major thing that I felt I needed to do during my grief sabbatical and kind of a skill that I've been practicing for so long and I feel like will really stick with me after this time of like the veil being so thin, you know, and like communing with the spirit world. and yeah, through like right now I have in my copalera, I have some copal that's burning. And

thinking about there I'm communing with the elements of fire and with the elements of earth. And that's resourcing me. I have had so many moments of realizing that our liberation is so tied to these like ecological and ancestral cycles, you know, to also speak to what Mariame Kaba was telling us when we did a platica, you know, and how my rest cycles and my moments of pleasure are like so deeply important to building this vision of the world that I want to see.

And I think also having a sensual relationship with nature was another thing too that really helped me. Like going for long walks and smelling different flowers or making bouquets and making little flower altars, doing the spacio offerings that I learned in my work in Ecuador with Jocelyn, which is similar to a mandala in in South Asian cultures.

I feel like there's there's so much more that I can that I can share there. But I feel like healing justice and the Cuerpo Territorio movement, which is very Femme-centered. It's very anarchist-oriented, which matters to me a lot as someone who grew up in Miami that has in a Venezuelan household, which is very like a lot of trauma around thinking of capitalism and military and

communism, you know, I feel like it's really important to me to be in movements that really uplift like the earth first and the inherent anarchism to this order of like consent and just honoring each other's cycles, you know, it's very it's such a different way to like govern, you know. And so I really I appreciate all of those things about that movement and really connect to it deeply.

Stas and Leander (22:39)

I'm curious to to look more into the movement that you were talking about. Feels very connected to the like self-determination, body autonomy frameworks that I've really been tuned into in like trans rights and reproductive justice. And I think that's a really cool connection. but two of the

threads that I'm I'm really like tuning into in this moment, one of them is it feels like connection to what what you were sharing earlier of like.

When you realized that you needed to take a break, you were thinking, do I need to take what do I need to take a break from? Is it my partnership? Is it other things? And I've gone through these cycles of like when I'm burnt out or I'm overwhelmed, or whatever it is that's feeling like over stimulating in my body. The first thing that my instinct is to cut is the things that are bringing me personal joy, is the personal relationships, the playfulness, the connection to nature is well.

Mara (23:27)

Yeah.

Stas and Leander (23:30)

I could not go on this camping trip. I could be less attuned to this writing group that I'm a part of. I could have less personal commitments outside of work. And yet the like the easier answer that actually will have a big impact is to just not work for a while. And it's so hard to connect to that. and those things that you're doing for yourself and those things that you're doing to tune into the larger body of nature are

Are really not the things that should be cut in order to make this work sustainable. It's like, I don't know, I guess it's a little bit tropey, but it's like we're human beings, not human workings. Like I think that this sense of like, I especially when we're doing heart-centered work, it can feel like so much of why we're here is to do that work. and yet in order to do that work long term, we also need to tend to living our lives and like being part of the experience of being on this planet, you know?

and attuning to spirit and attuning to nature and ourselves and our intuition and our joy and our pleasure. and I think that's a really powerful, really powerful piece of what I'm what I'm hearing you sharing.

Mara (24:38)

that I was thinking too, I feel like I try to speak slowly and long-windedly and with intention too, about like the benefits and the thing the positive things that I was attuning to in my grief sabbatical. Because also there's such a pressure, I think, to sugarcoat what these moments of break are like. And

Stas and Leander (24:56)

Mm-hmm.

Mara (24:57)

Yeah, I just wanted to speak to that for a moment too, because you know, I went into insane amounts of debt during that time too. So that was another thing that I was really obviously worried about, you know, is we do actually need money to survive in this world, even with the

community care and with people dropping off meals and all of those beautiful things. I have a garden where I grow food, all of those things. And another thing that I'm thinking about is in coming back to the work.

I felt so much pressure of like I asked for this thing that is so difficult to ask for. I was actually given it in an affirming way, which is already wild. We're in this crazy space of imagination already. And then when I came back, I was like, dang, I feel the pressure to have been this in a cocoon. And now I'm out of it and I'm like a butterfly that's you know, better than ever on the other side and has these nuggets of wisdom and all of these things. And I felt that kind of

Stas and Leander (25:45)
Fifty fifty.

Mara (25:48)
pressure that was internalized like ruined my last month of my grief sabbatical because I was so anxious about that. And I felt so stuck in those feelings of like, wow, how do I share what this time has been like when I feel like I'm still in process? And the ways that urgency is even embedded in when we are able to actually ask and take up the space that we need, for that care. So I just I felt like that's so important to talk about in equal parts as all the beautiful things that I return to and that I saw.

in my grief sabbatical is to not sugarcoat it, you know, for like queer of color young movement workers, we're some of the most divested from folks, you know, like all of us do all sorts of things, you know, on the side to actually support our lives. And so to step back from the work is like there's real reasons. It's not just internalized pressures and questions, but there's so many real reasons of why it's so difficult.

And I think also why it's difficult to hold one another in those choices when people do make those decisions. You know, I felt resistance. You know, even in Spring Up, in small ways, you know, that I try I didn't take personal, but in all of my organizing communities and whatnot, of like even just like the anger of certain people feeling that it's more accessible to them to stop and to pause the work versus other people feeling like, no, this is if not me, then there's no one else. You know, there's so many, we talk about this all the time, like internalized scripts.

that are really important I think for us to look at. And that's also a huge thing that gets in the way of our community care and us naturally being drawn to care for ourselves and each other.

Stas and Leander (27:17)
Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, I appreciate you speaking to that. And a practice that we use throughout the year at SpringUp is, taking collective breaks. And I think even some of the reaction to that from people that work full time jobs, but, you know, might have more benefits and more ability to take paid time off than we do. is sort of this like, my gosh, I don't know what I would do with

that much time or must be nice. And, you that is mitigated with the financial precarity. And I think it does speak to we're trying something that is cool and liberatory in some ways to just take that time off. And because of where we were at financially as a co-op and where a lot of solidarity economy organizations are, like that wasn't paid time, you know? And so not to romanticize it, just that like

I think we do a good job of paying ourselves for the work that we provide. And then this shows a gap of like we would need to be more financially stable and thriving as a co-op to be able to pay ourselves to take a break and not work, right? And that that is actually part of the work and part of budgeting for that. So I appreciate you speaking to that. And yeah, there's the internal things that it brings up for you.

For other people, and then also just the material realities of who can actually take time off from work and what does that lead to?

Part of what we've been working on with different clients, which you already mentioned, Mara, is so many groups have had huge impacts on their budgets because of what's been going on in the world. And how do you make choices as a group and as a leader in that moment?

that's reflective of the financial reality that you're in. I mean, that's the root of a lot of the mediations that we've been doing recently. And, you know, it's tricky, but you taking that time off also was helpful to the cooperative to have one less person to pay for a while. And the rest of us also took pay cuts during that time. That was one of the things that we voted on while you were gone. but it also did meaningfully contribute to our ability to sustain. And like that's one of the things that's possible in a co-op is that people can opt out, people can

make different kinds of choices together for how you manage your budget than in a lot of like top-down hierarchical structures. And you taking that step back didn't mean that you didn't work here anymore. It meant that you had a period of time where you were stepping away. I think we were able to contribute very s a very small amount of money that was not paid directly to work that was through our mutual aid fund. But then you were able to come back and work as much as you wanted to on the other side, although still impacted by some of the pay cuts that we took during that time, which

We'll be circling back to in a couple months. I think another practice that I would that I was thinking about when you were sharing, I also lean more towards anarchist frameworks. and something that I've been thinking about is in a sociocratic structure, which is the governance structure that we use in decision making, the idea is that you can kind of do whatever you want until there's a policy that restricts it. So like you assume that you're able to do what you need to do.

And then if it ends up not being like okay or like not aligning with the budget, then you come up with a policy to adjust it together or move it towards a decision that you're making collectively.

But I think that like that feels fundamentally different from deeply consensus-based groups, where it's like everything is the group's decision unless we decide that an individual can decide. In this framework, it's like I can decide what I need to within the work that I do unless we as a group decide.

the boundaries for that kind of work. and one of the things that I've felt so inspired by collaborating with you, Mara, is that I I don't want to put this the wrong way, but you really have so much initiative and you really go off and do what you're excited about and push back even on the boundaries that we set up as a group. I remember we had this boundary of we're not gonna do direct conflict response work.

For a bunch of different reasons, a lot of them being honestly trauma and being like, I'm tired of doing this for people and it's exhausting and underpaid. And you are like, I need to push back on this. This is what we're called to do, and this is what the movement needs from us. And so many times you're like, I have a vision, I have a thing I want to do. And I'm gonna assume that we can do it unless someone tells me otherwise.

And even if someone tells me that's not what we do, I'm gonna push back on that and be like, but what if we did do it? And I think that sense of living into the vision of I really do think, Mara, you're such a visionary and moving into the the world of imagination. I think when I'm looking at life, you're one of the people, I'm getting emotional. You're one of the people that I look to that it's like.

You really live your life in a way where you're in charge. you create your own reality truly. And I think that a lot of people look to us as examples of that. And it's really powerful to feel like there are other people that we can look to of showing what's possible and how to live your life, being able to travel, being able to create beautiful art, incredible events, maintain relationships and be so playful and creative alongside doing really deep heart-centered work and

I was in a deep depression when you first started working here. I remember feeling very sad and I remember you would inspire me to smile and to feel positive while also being present with the grief and just like wanna name how much I appreciate you.

Mara (32:25)

Hmm, ~ I'm taking that in. I really, really I feel like that's something so special about Spring Up is that we have authentic friendships and relationships with each other. you've shared so much of your heart with me. And that's I think you see that's the roots of transformative justice, right? It's just people caring for each other and being like, We're gonna get through this together and there's always another way. we can we can always, you know.

inventar we can always imagine something different together. And yeah, I just I so appreciate you seeing those parts of me. And a big part of solidarity too is that when you don't feel that way, about yourself, other people remind you of that. Like in my grief sabbatical, I felt that so

deeply from everyone at Spring Up, especially y'all, because y'all I you know, I'm so close to y'all. I really, really felt that that reflection back

Of these are your gifts this world. And it's just it's hard to do that when you feel burnt out and just so all up in your grief and depression and all of those things. So yeah, thank you. Thank you for saying that. It's true. It's it has it is a blessing. I feel like my career and my life looks it's so wild the way that I've constructed my own reality. I think about that a lot of the time, working in cooperatives.

feels so wild. And I love that collectively, so many people in so-called US, you know, on Turtle Island are coming back to these models. we're seriously taking our power back, you know, I worked on on different land projects, like Bueno para todos, that was kind of a failed land project. and it was literally a group of people taking the land back and being like, we're gonna heal the soil and we're gonna heal ourselves along the way. You know,

We actually have so much more power just hidden under the carpet of oppression, you know, that we can just wheel together and do in the underground and just fucking do it until someone tells you you can't, and then we figure that out on the other side of it, you know? that's how we're gonna have to rebuild the world, you know. The revolution isn't gonna be this scenic movie scene, you know, where all of a sudden everything flips. It's in all of these three steps forward, one step back of

us just like daring to create the world exactly how we dream it.

shaina (34:32)

Are you looking for an accountability and design partner in building a culture of shared leadership? Spring Up's Getting Free Together consulting services identify the root causes that make it difficult to collaborate through conflict mediation or organizational accountability audits. We provide hands-on support in getting unstuck and implementing a clear plan through group coaching. Our interactive group trainings build shared language and frameworks to get the whole team on board.

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Stas and Leander (35:29)

as far as everyday practices of liberation, we're very privileged to be able to have so many people share their liberatory projects with us. And that is what really gives me hope in the you know, horrifying environmental and political environment that we're in, is just seeing that so many people are

reconnecting to ancestral practices, decolonizing, actually practicing land back, moving into collective economics, doing generational healing. And then conflict comes up. And then, you know, people are asked to also learn and grow and transform and become the people that would be able to sustain those projects long term or find what the next project is. I think that that is a

more anarchic approach to social transformation that just is small scale and chaotic and consent based and like we're all just gonna do what we want to and some of that is hosting parties and some of that is travel. And especially in this moment of political repression in the US, it does feel so important to be

building and cultivating transnational solidarity. And that's also something that I find really inspiring about the energy that you bring to our collective is just being like, I am not gonna be tied down to one place. I'm gonna be traveling. I'm gonna be out there. I'm gonna go places. I'm gonna yeah, build those connections and be with the people. Host a party in, you know, Cape Town and

Mara (36:47)
Hehehe

Stas and Leander (36:57)

With you know, we live in if you're based in the United States, the media that we can access here is so propagandized. it can be hard to get actual information about what is going on in other parts of the world and how are people experiencing that. And I'm really excited. We're gonna be doing a training together, the three of us in France for French

decolonial environmental organizers this summer. And yeah, I'm just so excited to be in a different environment learning from people in a different organizing ecosystem. and yeah, curious if you have thoughts on why is travel so important to you

Mara (37:34)

Yes. my gosh. Absolutely. Mm, yeah. Well, a lot of my decolonizing and spiritual work has especially because I have such a complicated relationship with my blood family. So I've had to learn so much from ecosystems and environments and all the other spirits that I feel ancestrally connected to. Is I am really connected to hummingbirds.

And I mean I have them, I know this is a podcast, but I have tattoos and you know, piercings and whatnot of them. Like I always I pray to them. I plant seeds in my garden, especially for them. And I meditate a lot on like what it means to be a pollinator and what are different, what lineages are we birthed from? And I really feel that I am like from the pollinator lineage. and so it feels like destiny in some ways.

You know, I really I was I've been rereading a lot of Octavia Butler's books, so I'm thinking about like Earthseed and those sorts of things, you know, like part of it feels like destiny to me. that I was born to be in a bunch of different places. I think that it's so humbling to me that we find our people everywhere, like all over the earth. And that gives me so much hope and inspiration. And I feel like I come

Because I'm always so excited to meet new people, you know, and be on different dance floors and, you know, I don't know, go on dates with people in different parts of the world and whatnot. I'm I'm always so excited to fall in love with new people, places, things. And I bring so much of that like positive inspiring energy of, you know, the hopes and dreams and lessons and successes that we have in our movements locally, you know, and

Spring Up, I feel like being part of this much larger movement too. I love to bring that magic and energy everywhere I go. And then to also hear and be in exchange with other people on the ground, and like hear their inspiring stories or what are their big questions or roadblocks and have more of those like private conversations, you know, about how are we rebuilding the world? And how can we really connect the dots with each other and recognize each other's blind spots because of course it is really different in different corners of the world.

like how these same concepts are just materializing. so it feels very important to my work, like as an organizer, as an artist. I think my work is a queer person, like queer people, you know, queer trans, non-binary people are healing the world in so many ways. we are, yeah, portals to other ways of being and to remember the way things were more ancestrally. So anyways, that's a whole other topic. But it feels really important to

like so many different pieces of me to constantly be in movement and in motion. and to just shout out yeah, some of the projects and and trips because I'd love to, talk with folks more that are listening to the podcast about and hopefully we'll webinars with some of these folks I've been building relationships with. but yeah, working a lot in the Yucatan, with Maya folks, about all sorts of plant rituals and all different,

kind of ways even of governance, that they have practiced and all these modalities that are really intact for thousands of years. To me, that's very inspiring that amidst all of these centuries of, genocide that has happened towards Indigenous peoples, like there is still ways to continue our practices, our very life affirming practices, behind closed doors, even if you can only do it with two other people.

it's so important to keep those lineages alive. so yeah, learning a lot of that there. I think also I've done a lot of work in in South Africa, which I think is such an important anyone who cares about restorative justice and transformative justice, I think needs to learn about South Africa and like needs to go visit that place because it's really one of the most important large scale examples of a government completely turning from

Colonizer to colonized ownership and how restorative justice was really at the center of trying to figure out what do we do now with the different experiences and resentments people have with each other? how do we make sense of that and actually put money and resources towards that? And that's been a 30-year struggle, 40-year struggle, just in the present tense of people.

like bringing their practices that help them survive these times and try to figure that out on a massive scale. So those are just kind of two examples of places that I feel really connected to and have studied and some of the lessons that I think are so important that I think I wouldn't be attuned and I wouldn't be as accountable to the lineages of restorative justice and transformative justice and healing justice if I hadn't actually done that personal work on the ground, on the land, with practitioners there.

You you really can't just learn restorative justice in your college course and then be like, I'm practicing the lineage. you really need to let it hit your spirit and learn and be like a lifelong dedicated learner to it, in my opinion, if you really want to wholeheartedly do it and if you really want to change the world.

Stas and Leander (42:53)

And there's so much to talk about there too, right? there's so many things to unpack and what you were just sharing. But something that you spoke to was how you've been returning to Octavia Butler and Parable of the Sower in that kind of series. and I think that's the perfect transition into our third segment, which is called Whatcha Watchin', but it's kind of about media in general. So it could be what you're listening to, what you're reading.

whatever creative practices that other people have been making that you've been attuning to to inspire you. and I so much of what we've been talking about, f I really loved when you said portals to other ways of being. I think that that's so much what media can bring into our lives too, is like portals to other ways of being with each other, other ways of creating, other ways of attuning. and I particularly

Mara (43:33)

Yeah.

Stas and Leander (43:40)

love post-apocalyptic or like during apocalyptic narratives, and thinking about how people are depicting revolutionary lineages and movements in all these other ways of being. But yeah, I'm curious if either of you want to share what has been some media that you've been tuning into recently.

Mara (43:58)

Yeah, you wanna go first?

Stas and Leander (44:00)

Yeah, I'm down to get us started. I think that this show is

I don't even know if I would recommend that people watch it. but it's been really interesting. I think is it called For All Mankind? Yes. Okay, problematic, right? but it's on Apple TV and there's five seasons of it. And it's this kind of alternate history of what if humanity had sort of really invested a lot more early in space travel. And I think it just creates this

very similar but slightly alternative timeline that is really provocative for me in this moment where, AI videos, what's real, it's interesting that they create these alternate news reels also of stuff that happened in the nineties that like we do barely remember. But for people that are younger than us, they wouldn't know, was Clinton the president? and so the way it's playing with these kind of

they have the first woman president is a lesbian former astronaut. And she comes out while she's in office. And she beats Bill Clinton, right? For this whatever ninety two presidential election. And just things like that, where, it's sort of saying that had scientific development been much more invested in people would have had cell phones in the nineties or eighties even. And

we would have relied less on oil and gas. And so Hurricane Katrina wouldn't have been such a disaster. And Al Gore did win the presidency in this alternative timeline. And just all these small things that it is provocative and does help me feel like these are small changes and changes in the past. But sort of just showing how small changes could create such different

timelines and possibilities. And I'm not even someone that lets that passionate about space, honestly. I I do feel like looking back, yeah, I guess we did, send something to Mars in the 90s and that just didn't really resonate with me. But in this timeline, people are able to basically colonize Mars. And then it's bringing up all these different things of the ethics of creating a settlement that is, not displacing people that are already there.

But that's like basically sponsored by a corporation. And then do those people who live there have rights? Or are they just sort of this corporate project? and they live so far away that it's hard for them to feel like they shouldn't have their own self-governing society. and then their roles of who's an engineer versus who's a janitor really it's like, do you have equal citizenship then? And yeah, it's

A really interesting thought experiment that I have been kind of love-hating lately. Yeah, it's kind of terrible. but it also is interesting because there's these changes, but also things aren't actually that different. so much of the world is still the same, which I think so much of these what if scenarios, they're like, if this one thing changed, the butterfly effect, then everything would be dramatically different.

And I think the primary edit that they're making from the beginning in the first season is what if Russia landed on the moon before the US did? And because of that, then the US really doubled

down on prioritizing space travel and being in this metaphorical technology race with Russia, and then all these kind of branching off points that happen because of that one difference. But then

Mara (47:13)
that.

Stas and Leander (47:14)

A lot of the same media comes out and a lot of the same big cultural events happen anyway, which also shapes this sense of what are the drivers of human development too. And it's it might not be the things that we think. It's it's a very interesting thought experiment. And it also seems very realistic is part of what's so weird about it.

Mara (47:32)

Oof, that's okay, such a great one. the three books that I recently read, I want to shout out all three, but I'll I won't talk about all three. is The Dream Hotel by Layla Lalami. That was fucking epic. I'll talk about that one. Kindred by Octavia Butler, which is was where I was revisiting her work. And then Ten Bridges I've burnt, a memoir in verse by Brontez Pinel.

And yeah, that last one is just incredible, It's like a bunch of poems, but it's Brontez's like entire life memoir. and it's so incredible. I laughed, I cried, it was it was so, so beautiful, a short read. And also just about the relic of what Oakland and the Bay Area was like during the AIDS time and you know, eighties, nineties especially, and then today.

But yeah, so I recently read Kindred for the first time, and I'm a huge fan of the Parable series. I've read it many times. It's one of my favorite books of all time. And ~ Kindred, it's so wild. Essentially, a black woman from 1976 in LA starts getting called back into 1819, and then kind of different times, because her ancestors, and it's actually a white ancestor of hers,

Is calling her back to that time because he needs help. And it's such an interesting thought experiment. one of the things that stuck out to me the most is she keeps going back and forth between the two different timelines, 1976 and early 1800s. and she always is remarking on how time felt more real for some reason, and life felt more real.

in the eighteen hundreds, even though she's going through this, you know, absolutely absurdly horrible scenario of being an enslaved person when she's in those times, about the presence that she's able to access and actually being in her senses in a completely different way because we didn't have those same veils of technology and of separation and of neighborhoods and all of those sorts of things. that's something that really, really stuck out to me that I've been thinking about a lot. I feel like it's so perfectly

captured and descriptive of that the way that that difference is is felt. and also just about too how much is possible to change in a hundred years, you know, is it's so important for us as

organizers to constantly have that top of mind, you know, of what what Turtle Island looked like, what the Americas looked like in the yeah, the peak years of like chattel slavery. And

what it looks what the US looks like today, you know? It's like, it's just so important to think about all these shifts. and then the other one that I read is Dream Hotel. And I mean that book is so incredible. I don't usually read dystopian novels. I really try to protect my mental health because we work in such dystopian, worlds, you know. but it's essentially about a an archivist who works at the Getty in LA and she's detained at LAX

by something called the Risk Assessment Administration. And basically, AI is tracking 200 different sources of data and deemed her to be a risk. And so she's basically under watch for 21 days. And it's interesting like who's in there in those places where you're under watch. And of course, it's a major prison industrial complex corporation where AI companies and all these other companies rely on this prison labor. and

It's essentially about a normal person, you know, in the world, normal in quotes, like not a activist, these people are like fitness instructors and all different types of random jobs. and they are starting to understand so many things about our reality and what we've given up by letting AI and data be more trustworthy than people and

dehumanizing the data that we are tracking, about the risks and the dangers of that. And then also how important like our our labor is and how we need to be in command and control of the fruits of our labor and when we're forced to labor and those sorts of conditions. So it's a really interesting community organizing book that made me feel actually really hopeful, even though it's such a dystopian novel where I'm like, even in these worst case scenarios, just like Parable of the Sower.

you know, we're gonna be okay 'cause we know how to organize and love each other.

Stas and Leander (51:36)

I love that. That's actually on my on my to read list. So that's a good reminder that that's something that I'd be interested in digging into. I won't spend a lot of time on my two books that I've been reading recently, but I will call them into the space because they seem connected to what you've been talking about. The series that has captivated me, and I've gotten almost everyone in my life to start reading. My dad just bought a copy of the first book, is the Dungeon Crawler Carl series.

The eighth book in the series just came out in May, and I just finished the eighth one. there's gonna be two more. and it is so good. It's a very like kind of internet white guy kind of humor, but I also love it. Like it's fantastic. And one of the main characters is a cat who's able to speak Princess Donut. And it's this idea of the world is is taken over by aliens and everything collapses and

People have the option to go into this underground game show competition that's based on the dungeon crawl in Dungeons and Dragons type of framework. but they're almost in this like role play game style battle royale structure, underground, which so much of this feels off, but it's so well done. It really plays into this question of AI sentience.

And these galactic corporations that are going through this for profits and the nature of the power broking between a large-scale corporate galactic ecosystem with all these different types of beings and then what it means for humanity to be trying to take back its own power to maintain itself and because people go into the dungeon from all over the world.

There are all of these alliances across people from different backgrounds, getting to know each other and each other's cultures and each other's resistance frameworks, which I think is super, super cool. So something that I wasn't super compelled by when I first heard about it, but then I really dove in and I strongly recommend. Absolutely love it, super readable, very funny. And then the book that I've been reading since then that was recommended to me by my friends Crys and Brooke is this book, Someone You Can Build a Nest in.

and it's really interesting. It's a body horror that's about a shapeshifter, but it makes me think of what you were sharing earlier of what does it mean to see your body as a hospitable place, as a place that actually feels sacred. And it's through the lens of a shapeshifter who's trying to identify who they could lay their eggs in. And so, literally who has a body and a caring nature.

That is hospitable to growing their shapeshifter babies who will then eat them from the inside out. so it's a really disturbing horror, but it's also a queer romance. and the main character falls in love with this woman who she thinks seems hospitable and cozy. and it's just a very queer, very weird, very cozy body horror that I've been really enjoying. So

Those are those are some recommendations. I read almost exclusively in the dystopian sci-fi fantasy realm. So always finding recommendations in that sort of world. I think it makes me feel like the dystopian world that we're in is just one of many. And there's so many methods to cope and to strategize and to resist and to find relationship and pleasure and play and power across all these different inspirations.

Alright, so let's close out with who is on your pride playlist. I'll say on my pride playlist right now I've really been enjoying Rosalia. Yeah, I'll say Cain Culto.

Mara (55:04)

Cris Emejota always and 63OG I've been getting into his music lately.

Stas and Leander (55:08)

Awesome. Well, you can check out Mara's radio show at Dublab We'll link that in the notes. And you can check out a lot of the other things they do at Spring Up. and then we'll also share your, other links for how to follow along on your adventures. and yeah, just really appreciate

this time with you and our ongoing collaborative relationship.

Mara (55:30)

Thank you so much for having me. This was so fun.