

CLAUDIA FRIESS

Yellow Bike Project and House of Commons - Austin, Texas

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Interviewer: Anne Gessler

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Claudia Friess: OK, so, my name is Claudia Friess and today is January 21st, 2012. I'm a fisheries scientist for an environmental organization, so I basically advise the policy and legal people in my organization about science issues to further our goals of sustainable fisheries.

Anne Gessler: It seems to me that the definition of sustainability has been appropriated by all sorts of different people--

CF: That's very true--

AG: How would you define it specifically for your organization?

CF: For what we do, it's sustainability both in terms of ecological and economic because you can't look at the ecosystem without the human factor. Fisheries are, in most places of the world, heavily over-capitalized. So we're trying to find the level of fishing pressure and extraction that can make the local community survive, but can also sustain the resources in the future without irrevocable damage to the ecosystem.

AG: Is the organization primality focused on national issues, international, or more local?

CF: It's national, mostly the Gulf of Mexico, actually. We do some work in the Pacific and on the East Coast as well, but most of our focus is on the Gulf.

AG: And have you involved since the [BP] oil spill?

CF: Yes I have. Although I don't do too much with oil spills; we have a separate program that deals with that. But there's some overlap. But yeah, it's a pretty big deal and continues to be, even though it's not really in the press anymore. The effects of that will be felt long in the future.

AG: And what kind of effects would those be?

CF: Chronic oil exposure, basically. We don't know really what happened to a lot of that oil; it's probably still there. It's in the sediment, it stays in the sediment for a long time. We've never had a spill in deep water like that before. We probably had some immediate losses in terms of spawning products, eggs and larvae, highly susceptible, it's toxic to them. So it's going to take a while to be able to actually quantify the exact impacts. Because we have to collect years of data and then compare that to what's going on before the spill to be able to say what's really going on.

AG: Would you say that your work informs the way you think about--

CF: Definitely. I mean, I've always been very concerned about the environment my whole life. To me, working for an environmental organization and living in a co-op is just the natural thing to do.

AG: Explain to me--for someone who has never lived in a co-op or doesn't even know what that is, what is it, and how would you describe what it feels like to live there?

CF: It is basically a place where a lot of people cohabitate. Everybody has their own rooms; some people share rooms. And you have shared labor. And everybody gets to decide how things are run, basically. So my particular co-op [House of Commons]--I'm still getting used to it because I haven't actually been there for that long yet, only like 3 months or so. But I know that there's a group of officers, and then there are several houses that belong to this particular organizational structure. And each house has a representative that goes to the overall board that decides how things are done. But each house is very sovereign; you make your own rules and stuff. And I really like that because the way that the house is run reflects the characters of the people that live there. That's pretty cool.

I really enjoy the shared labor part, too. Because that way everybody's talents get utilized. You know, you suck at cooking? That's cool. Somebody is going to cook for you, but you get to clean. Or, you know, you're really interested in composting. Well, you can do that. Or in my case, I fix bikes, so I fix bikes for the house. That's my part of the labor. Other people contribute other things. Like somebody knows how to make soy milk, and makes soy milk for the house as part of his labor. I just think that's super cool, because it would take me forever to do all these things for myself. If I lived by myself, I would have to cook, I would have to clean. I would have to make my own soy milk, fix my own bikes. It's just much more efficient, and I like the cooperative part of it. You have to address problems if there are any. If somebody doesn't do their labor or there are problems between people, you can't just ignore it. And that's something cool I've observed in a co-op. A lot of times people are timid, you don't say if something bothers you because you're afraid of hurting someone's feelings. And I notice the people at the co-op, even though they are all still relatively young, college age, they do really well at conflict resolution. And that's something that I thought was really interesting.

AG: And what co-op is that?

CF: House of Commons.

AG: House of Commons. So why did you decide to join a housing co-op?

CF: You know, I never really even knew about cooperative living until I met one of the people that lives there. I started hanging out at the house. I was just so blown away by the whole concept of it, and really liked the people that lived there. There's such an interesting and diverse group--you've got a lot of college students: some social science people, some science majors, some people that work, some people that don't really work, they just kind of hang out. So that was really neat. I just really, really enjoyed it. The more time I was spending, the more I wanted to live there. You meet really interesting people all the time. We have a lot of travelers that come through; a lot of couch surfers. We had people that were on giant bike rides across the US

that crashed there for a couple of nights or something. So it never gets boring; you always learn something new.

AG: Let's back up a little bit.

CF: OK.

AG: Why don't you tell me where you're from and why you decided to move to Austin.

CF: OK. Well, originally I'm from Germany. I came to the States at 17 as a high school exchange student. And decided I wanted to stay here and go to college and study marine biology because that was my dream. And I did that at Galveston, at Texas A&M. And then I went to graduate school in South Carolina. And after that, while I was in graduate school in South Carolina, I got to know Austin, strangely. I came back to visit friends in Texas. And we went to some festivals in Austin, and I met some people that lived here. And really fell in love in the city and wanted to live here. So after I was done with graduate school I looked for a job in my field, here. I don't know why or what made me think there was fisheries work in Austin, but there was. So, hurray, here I am. And the first year I lived by myself, and then I started living with roommates again, and I discovered the actual co-op.

And I became involved with Yellow Bike, probably about a year and a half ago. And that was also sort through a roommate, one of the people I was living with. I was living in a house with four people, total. And one of them had been keenly interested in fixing bikes, and was telling me all about it. And telling about Yellow Bike. And then, I bought a bike off of Craigslist and he helped me fix it up. And that's when I like, "This is awesome. I want to be involved with this." Went to Yellow Bike to use some tools at first to fix up my bike, and then came back and volunteered. And then I liked it so much I started being an apprentice to be a coordinator--I know you've probably heard a little bit about the Yellow Bike structure already.

AG: So you first started out--

CF: I first started out with a personal project because they had tools that I needed. It was very selfish at first. "You guys have the tools; I don't want to pay the money. So, I'm just going to come here because its free." And then I got to know some of the people while working on my own project there, and started asking questions about what they do, and thought it was really cool, and wanted to be involved.

AG: And how would you describe Yellow Bike's mission?

CF: We want to, you know the saying, "give a man a fish" versus teach a man how to fish? That's what we do. We don't fix people's bikes for them; we teach them who to do it. So that people aren't necessarily high income or could't afford to go to bike shops, or just don't want to--want to be more self sufficient, can learn how fix their own bikes.

When I first bought a bike--because I commute to work here in Austin--I didn't even know how to fix a flat--I took my bike to a bike shop to get a flat fixed. And now I laugh at that [laughs]. I like being self-sufficient. I don't know squat about cars. I can't even change my own oil; I don't know anything about cars. And that really bugs me; I like knowing that I can fix my own bike if it breaks.

AG: And can you describe that first experience going into the workshop and learning how to fix--or starting to learn how to fix your own bike?

CF: Yeah I can. I had a very peculiar problem with this old Peugeot bike that I had gotten. I was trying to replace the bottom bracket because it was one of those old cotter pin-style bottom brackets and they're just no good. I tried to remove the cotter pin without the correct tool, and what happened was it just smooshed it into a piece of metal gunk that would not be moved. So by the time I had already properly ruined it, I was like, "Alright, just take it to Yellow Bike and see what's going on." So they showed me the correct tool to use and tried to help me. The first one I went to was LadyBike, I think, which is only women. And all the people that were working there were trying to help me with this bottom bracket. We worked for hours. Couldn't figure it out. So the girls finally told me to come back during the week when there were guys there [laughs]. So I did. Came back during the week, and the guys all tried the same thing that the girls had already tried. And they'd be like, "Did you try this?" We'd be like, "Yes, we already tried that." "Well, I'm going to try it again." "OK, you go ahead and do that." [laughs] So the same story--all the coordinators, everybody was trying to get this bottom bracket off, and finally we gave up and whipped out the tool that grinds off things that you can use to cut through u-locks, and it took like 10 seconds--just cut the entire thing in half. So that was my first experience with Yellow Bike. It was just cool to see that everybody was so excited to help me with my problem.

AG: Can I ask you more about LadyBike?

CF: Yes.

AG: So describe a little bit more about it; what it's like.

CF: So LadyBike is a special shop that we have. It doesn't happen every month--like all Yellow Bike shops, it's highly dependent on the volunteers' time, because the whole thing is volunteer-run. But the idea is that we wanted to create an environment where women would feel comfortable. Because when you have guys and girls in the shop, sometimes women might feel a little bit intimidated because guys are usually better with tools and stuff. So we thought we would create a shop where girls would come and it was all girls. That's the idea behind that. It doesn't happen very often, every couple months, maybe.

AG: And, you said that you are now a coordinator?

CF: I am not yet, but hopefully I will be soon. I've been apprenticing a couple--3 or 4 months now.

AG: And can you describe what the responsibilities of the coordinator would be?

CF: Coordinators are the people that can run the shops, basically. We have to have, I think, at least 3 coordinators to make a shop happen. We have to have somebody who works the front desk and greets people who they come in, make sure they know what going on, get sign in, get assigned a work station, and work the log where we record the transactions, sales, donations, etc. And then a couple people that wander around and make sure people know how to do something. If somebody looks really lost, then you walk over there and go, "Hey, what're you doing? Can I help you?" And we don't actually pick up tools and do things for the people that come in unless there's no other option. But we'll basically explain to them how to do it, and maybe do part of it and let them do the rest. The idea is not to do things for people that come but to show them how to do it. So, yeah, that's what the coordinators do. They run the shops and make sure that everything is orderly and are responsible for keeping track of the money and making sure that everything is locked up at the end of the day.

AG: And why are bikes so important?

CF: Because public transportation in the U.S. sucks [laughs]. I'm from Europe, and we have really good transportation over there--buses, trains. Everything is very, very walkable. And as hip as Austin is, the city is not walkable, except for campus and downtown. We're doing better getting more bike lanes, but you know, cars are a terrible thing, as many as we have. Traffic is really bad in Austin. So getting more cars off the road and more bikes on the road is really important. I feel like I contribute by teaching people about bikes, getting people excited about bikes, and helping people have road-worthy bicycles. So, less pollution, less traffic, exercise. Bikes are great [laughs].

AG: How would Yellow Bike define the idea of sustainability, then?

CF: More bikes, less cars, probably. Better public transportation in general. That's basically our mission: we want to get cars off the road and bikes on the road. Encourage people to commute by bike and take the bike whenever they can, and use the car less.

AG: What would you say to someone who maybe hasn't ridden a bike since elementary school? How would you tell them about the merits of cycling as a way of life?

CF: Well, right, I would tell them first of all that it's good exercise. I hate going to the gym, I hate exercising. I don't do it at all. All I do is bike, and I feel like I'm in pretty good shape. A lot of people that bike for most of their commuting are like--I haven't seen anybody at Yellow Bike who are overweight. All the bikers look pretty healthy. That's one benefit. Another one is just that I find it very stressful to sit in traffic. And biking is not very stressful, at all. Oftentimes,

actually, I've timed myself before. When I took the car into work--between leaving the house, finding parking, walking to the office, I'm faster biking, and that's 5 miles into downtown. So it's more efficient, I would say. There are other ways to get around without using a car, but then you're dependent on the bus schedules and things of that nature. So I would say that you're more independent of the car, independent of public transportation, and it's great exercise. And then there's social rides too, which are a lot of fun. Getting out and meeting people, so many of them.

AG: And when did you first feel like you were part of the community in Yellow Bike and in House of Commons?

CF: Yellow Bike Project, probably when I became an apprentice and started going to meetings. I'm a little, like, I guess, shy at first when I get into a new group, as most people are. I'm quiet and observant at first. But once people started knowing my name and stuff, and talking to me, and I started having opinions about what was going on, that's kind of when I felt like I was becoming part of the community at Yellow Bike.

And House of Commons, it was really easy become everybody's so outgoing and friendly that I felt at home immediately. That was pretty cool. Even shortly after I'd lived there, I travel a lot for work and every time I got back home, I'd step in the door and somebody would yell at me, "Welcome home!" So it was really cool. They make you feel at home and like you're welcome and wanted there.

AG: Do either of the organizations have social events for their members to encourage sociability?

CF: Yeah, at Yellow Bike we have work days, basically. That's usually a weekend afternoon. There's always something that needs to be done. Those are coordinator and apprentice events. So it's for the coordinators and apprentices to get to know each other. Because in order to become a full coordinator at Yellow Bike you need to be nominated, basically. And all the other coordinators have to agree that it's time for you to step up. And so, there might be some people you never get to see because they only work day shops, and you can only do evening shops. So those work days are a good way to get to know people and it's always good to work together. I feel like you get to know people much faster and more intimately when you actually work with them than if you go to a party or something and just talk to them. So that's cool. And we do have some parties. Like, we have the birthday party that we celebrate, like Yellow Bike's anniversary. And then there's garden-work parties, which are work and parties, because that's the best of both worlds. So those are the types of things we have at Yellow Bike.

At House of Commons there's always a party going on. But the two most important ones are, I would say, are the "Around the World Parties," which they have at the beginning of every semester. There's usually a theme, and it's pretty rowdy. Basically the entire house moves from room to room, and each room does something, comes up with some sort of skit or a play or

activity or something that's for the house to get to know you, and you to get to know the other people that live the house. That's sort of an internal party. And then we have a lot of parties that are open to the public and we have bands and stuff and things of that nature. And we also have a work party too every semester, and that's a lot of fun as well. Where the entire house mobilizes and we get things done that have been pushed off.

AG: What I'm thinking about--You were saying that your housing co-op has a lot of college students who are members. Does Yellow Bike have the same kind of relatively rapid turnover?

CF: Well I've only been a part of Yellow Bike for a year and a half, but I would say that there probably is a group of core people. And I don't think they're college students, they're in their 30's, most likely. And those are the people that have been doing it for a really long time and probably will continue to. They're rooted in Austin and the community. And then there some people who come and go. But I would say that the core community is probably pretty strong in Yellow Bike. You can tell which people have been in charge--"in charge" air quotes--no one is really in charge. But those are the ones who are most vocal and have the most history and can therefore contribute the most whenever we have certain proposals during our meetings, public proposals. Then you can tell easily--somebody would be like, "well we tried this 10 years ago and we had these and these and these problems with it, so this is what we could do better this time, blah blah blah."

But House of Commons, I would say, there's the longest that anybody's been there, that's living at the house now is 4 years, something like that. Somebody only stay for like a year or a semester, some longer. I guess, after a while the college co-op probably--I would say, I don't know that you necessarily grow out of it, but it's always loud, there's always people there. I would imagine as you grow older, at some point that might not be what you want anymore. Then, I imagine, there are co-ops too for people that are a little older, different stages of life. But I'm really enjoying it because when I was in college, I wasn't doing any of this. I was working and studying all the time and not very outgoing at all, so this is unique to me. So.

AG: That's so interesting; I have so many questions to follow up on now [CF laughs]. So, you were saying that Yellow Bike's mission is to get bikes into the hands of people and help them learn how to fix bikes themselves and see bikes as an alternative. How would you describe the difference between Yellow Bike and another advocacy program or organization that isn't a collective?

CF: Hmm. Well, I guess I could use my organization to some extent. Because we're an environmental advocacy group, and we're not a collective. So the structure is different, obviously--it's a bit more corporate. You've got your CEO and your team of executives and all that. And then you've got the programs beneath and the program directors, and all of that good stuff. So there's a hierarchy I would say that's not there in the Yellow Bike collective. Because in order to be part of the the collective all you have to do is volunteer for 24 hours in a 3 month period. So anybody who meets that requirement is part of the collective and gets to make

decisions. And, so I would say it's a little bit more almost--things are more equal and then in the non-collective, non-cooperative advocacy group, you kind of have company policies that you have to follow. And, you know, internal alignment and all that good stuff. Like, you have to make sure that the work you do on your individual program reflects what the overall goal of the organization is. And you're a representative of the organization. And your personal opinion might not always matter if it doesn't jive with what the higher-ups say.

AG: How would you describe the composition of Yellow Bike and House of Commons members, besides age?

CF: Besides age? Umm, what are you looking for?

AG: Who volunteers?

CF: We have all sorts of people that volunteer. Besides age--boys, girls. I'm a little lost other than like, age characteristics.

AG: What kinds of people, I guess?

CF: Oh, OK. Generally, not people from the upper class, I'd say. Generally a lot of people from the neighborhood, college kids, lower income classes, I would say. We have some people that volunteer and are part of the collective that are homeless people. So definitely lower income classes, maybe some middle classes. Not very diverse. Mostly Caucasian people. We have some African Americans, some Latinos, but it's probably predominantly Caucasian. Yeah, I think that's accurate. What else? What other characteristics are there?

AG: However you want to describe them. Well, let's go to House of Commons. So it's mostly college students?

CF: Yeah, mostly. Yeah, in fact, I think I'm probably the oldest person in the house; I'm 29. So the youngest is probably 18. Most of them are right around 21, 22, I would say. Couple of people are in their mid-20s. Also mostly Caucasian. We have like maybe 1 or two 2 of Asian descent and 1 African American. And as far as income classes, probably about the same thing. Although, I think there are some people that have wealthier families that live there. So I think that it's probably a wider range economically speaking that Yellow Bike.

AG: And how does Yellow Bike try to increase interest within the surrounding neighborhoods for its own activities and missions?

CF: I would say mostly through the birthday party. Where we basically invite the neighborhood and give kids' bikes away. So that's something that people know about and the kids are excited about. And I think that that's probably mostly how we involve the neighborhood. I don't think

there's really much else we do. Everybody knows about the shop and a lot of people that live in the neighborhood come and fix their bikes and stuff, especially kids.

AG: And why is it important to help kids learn how to fix their bikes?

CF: Because kids are the future. Education is the most important thing we can do. Especially the kids that live in that particular neighborhood. It's not really one of the better neighborhoods, it's kind of more lower class people, lower income people. And especially for them to have something that they can get into, they can get excited about, an outlet, a hobby--So, it's pretty cool to see these kids come in. They might not necessarily care much about school or whatever but they enjoy working at Yellow Bike and it keeps them away from trouble [laughs].

AG: And, what does House of Common do then to--

CF: Oh God, we live in frat--fraternity and sorority hell. So I think they yell at the neighbors and throw tomatoes at them [laughs].

AG: Yeah, I guess that would make the neighbors be aware of them [laughs].

CF: And the neighbors throw beer bottles at us, so that's kind of how that works [laughs].

AG: And you've been at Yellow Bike for a year and a half. Have you've seen the community change in any way since you've been there? I'm talking about more bike lanes or new housing developments. Has there been any change in the way the neighborhood looks?

CF: Not that I've seen, no.

AG: Part of Yellow Bike's purpose is also to increase bicycle access, correct? So what kind of programs does it do or policy measures does it try to advocate for?

CF: During our general collective meetings, which happen once a month, there is a period where people from the public can come in and make proposals to the collective. And that's really the main way in which we get bikes out there. People that work with other NGOs or other groups of people come in and they tell us what they do--like Boys and Girls Club is one of the groups that comes and talks to us frequently about meets that have. And organizations that work with refugees. And they'll come and say, "Hey, you know, we have these people. And we need 5 adult bikes for refugees to use as their primary transportation. Can you guys provide those?" And then we'll tell them what we can and cannot do. Sometimes teachers will come in and ask if we can do special shops with a select group of kids to show them how to do basic bike maintenance stuff. So all sorts of community projects, whatever anybody can think of, the collective will talk about. And if it's within our capacity, we'll do it. So we give away a lot of bikes. Most of them kids bikes, but also adult bikes, for special purposes.

AG: And is the Yellow Bike Project a presence at community meetings or city meetings to shape bike policy?

CF: I think there are like individual Yellow Bike members that are involved in other things like League of Bicycle Voters and things like that. We have some people that volunteer for Yellow Bike that actually work for the City of Austin and do transportation stuff for the City of Austin--bike lane planning and that type of thing. So, if you're interested in cycling in general and getting bikes onto the road and cars off the road, there's a good chance that you're going to be involved in Yellow Bike and some other cycling programs around Austin.

AG: What do you think that Yellow Bike or you--if you had unlimited resources and unlimited resources, how would you change the way our city looks?

CF: Oh wow, that's an interesting question. Definitely more trains. We have that one right now. Probably extend the rails for that a little bit and have the trains run more frequently. More bike lanes, of course. Something I find extremely annoying is that cars and buses always park in the bike lanes. The bus system in Austin is alright. It could be better. Something that would make it much better in my opinion would be if they had actual bus stops rather than having the buses stop in the bike lane. Because then, you know, you're stuck behind the bus on your bike, and there are cars passing everywhere and stuff, and you've got to wait. Sometimes the buses sit through 2 or 3 lights if they are ahead of schedule. And you're stuck behind it getting really mad because the bus is in your bike lane. So that's something I think that would improve traffic flow a lot--is if you had a little nook or something that the buses pull into at the bus stop rather than parking halfway in the bike lane and halfway in the road.

To improve walkability overall would be a bigger issue because that has to do with the way cities are planned. We've got housing neighborhoods that are away from stores and shops and stuff and necessitating the use of cars, essentially. Central Austin's not quite as bad; there's houses and shops where you can walk to the store. But if you live outside of Central Austin that's pretty much impossible to do. Yeah, I don't really know how I would address that, but I guess better neighborhood planning, better city planning in general.

AG: Can you describe the public transportation access that people have in the surrounding neighborhood of Yellow Bike?

CF: Bus. It's pretty much it. And I don't really know how frequently the buses go. I don't think it's too bad. But there were a couple of people who came into Yellow Bike not too long ago. One of them was a homeless guy and he had a woman and a kid. They must have been friends of his or something. And they said they were coming from like, 620 and Anderson or something like that. And it took them 2 hours by bus to get there, to get to Yellow Bike. So they just started the Earn-A-Bike thing, where you have to volunteer a certain number of hours and build up a for-sale bike and then you get to build your own bike. And the homeless guy wanted to build

himself a bike for his primary transportation. So he's going to have to ride the bus for 2 hours each way for the next 2 months for however long it's going to take him.

AG: So it's not just that--so we have buses, that's not the problem, though. It's how inefficient that the bus runs--

CF: Probably, yeah. It's better than in a lot of cities, but it's still not as good as it could be. And also, in San Francisco the buses are electric and that's really cool. So, we need to have something like that in Austin, too.

AG: Well, I think I'm almost finished with my questions. Do you want to talk more about things that we haven't addressed?

CF: Yes. One thing I've forgot to mention that I find phenomenal about House of Commons. So each co-op has something that is sort of their thing and ours is food. And that's something I think is really cool. I've always been vegetarian. I've recently become vegan because it's really easy there. So, cooking is a really big deal, and no animal cruelty and all that. And we also host the Food Not Bombs people on Saturdays. They come and use our kitchen and they make food for homeless people and then give it to them. That's cool. I don't know if anybody at House of Commons, actually--I think there's one person who helps them, but I think they just basically just come in and use our kitchen.

AG: That actually reminds me of one question that I wanted to ask. What are the other similarly-minded organizations that affiliate or just like to hang around House of Commons or Yellow Bike?

CF: Probably more Yellow Bike. House of Commons, Food Not Bombs might be one of the few ones. I know we've also had socialist meetings there. I think one of the people in the house is a member so she asked the house if it was OK to have the meetings or parties there. So really, like, I think it's less House of Commons than Yellow Bike for sure. Yellow Bike, we had, like I mentioned, Boys and Girls Club, which is an after-school thing, I believe, and Bikes Across Borders, and refugee people--I don't remember what the names of the organizations are. Gosh, there's many more, I know, but I can't think of any right now. Some of the other bike organizations, maybe, rarely, not very often actually. I think that there's more, but I can't think of it right now.

AG: Do you ever participate in, or does Yellow Bike try to network with other cooperatives or collectives in other cities?

CF: I don't think so, not that I know of, at least. Yeah. I can't remember.

AG: What about House of Commons? Are they affiliated with the ICC [Inter-Cooperative Council]?

CF: Yeah they are. And NASCO as well. And I forget what that stands for: National something something [North American Students of Cooperation]. Yeah, I don't know. Something about co-ops--some big council or something like that; I'm not sure. And we had some people that went to the NASCO conference this year, or last year, I guess it was.

AG: And what would that be like? What would it be about?

CF: Yeah, I have no idea [laughs].

AG: But it's a national conference.

CF: Yeah I don't know. They might have themes or something, I would be making anything up. I just know that some people went for the Year of the Cooperatives project [United Nations International Year of Cooperatives 2012].

AG: Right.

CF: And did some filming there. I'm not exactly sure what they do at those conferences. I think they surely talk about things that have to do with cooperative living, but I'm not sure what.

AG: Well, I just wanted to ask a final question. You were saying that you recently became vegan.

CF: Yes.

AG: Can you describe what that lifestyle change has been like? Or philosophical change?

CF: Well it's--the reason why I'm a vegetarian is because I disagree with the way that the meat packing industry works. Animal husbandry in general, treating animals as commodities: it's not OK with me. I've been sort of ignoring the fact that milk and eggs are both part of that, just because it's hard, especially if you travel, which I travel a lot. And it's extremely difficult to avoid. So I kind of just ignored that. And now that I live at House of Commons I don't want to ignore it anymore. Because it's so easy at home that I've been trying to avoid eggs and milk products when I travel, too. Which is a lot more difficult because people just don't get it. It's like, "What? You don't want cheese on that sandwich? What's wrong with you?" [laughs]

AG: Yeah, it seems like you're kind of confronting the same kind of culture that limits or is kind up against bike advocacy, too.

CF: Right. It's the larger question of sustainability. You know, cars v.s. bikes. Vegetarianism v.s. animal products. I mean, it's definitely a lot more sustainable to eat vegetarian than it is to eat animals. And you can't argue with that. You can ignore it, but you can't argue with it. I want to have as little impact as I can. I know it sounds cliché and silly, but leave the world a

better place than you found it. So that's why I work for an environmental organization, and I volunteer for Yellow Bike and I don't eat animals.

AG: Well, thank you so much. Is there any last words that you want to say?

CF: Just that, I'm really glad that I discovered cooperatives. I've only experienced 2 of them personally. I know there are many, many more ways in which people live cooperatively. And I hope that I will learn more about that as I go along, because we used to live in villages and stuff, and it takes a village to make things happen. It's been very educational and a lot of fun. It's improved my social skills [laughs].

AG: Well thank you so much. This was awesome.

CF: Cool. Glad I could help.