



IMAGINING SOMETHING NEW

AN INTERVIEW WITH CARINA

BY ROSE AND ANDRES



Rose: Most people, if they're reading this, probably know you. Can you introduce yourself a little bit, name three key characteristics?

Carina: I'm Carina. I guess. I am a human, an artist, and a scientist.

R: What is something you wish people knew about you?

C: I guess I am an open book. But, there is something about the human piece I guess. It's like the way that I spend my time. Denali and I were talking about the different types of yourself. Free Store Carina, art Carina, this Carina, science Carina, making maps Carina.

R: What do you love doing?

C: I love to read!

R: Cool, what are you reading?

C: I am reading a Dean Spade book called "Love in a Fucked up World."

R: Name all of your pets.

C: My pets are Jerry (cat) Evelyn (cat) Jiffy (dog) Miel (gecko) Uma (turtle).

make decisions in organizing. My ultimate goal is to do things like, my survey, on page 2, but it's hard to intersect the two, and I'm not quite there. I've done a lot of really cool shit at work! But it's hard to merge it until it feels meaningful to me.

R: Is the idea to help people, though? Is that how you came into organizing?

C: I grew up in a sort of serving space and we did a lot. I've been doing food distros forever and my grandma is very very involved, even in mutual aid ways, in her friendships, bringing dinners and so on. It was a very baseline community space, in a small town. When I moved here I was trying to find spaces that fit me. I worked a lot, so that was most of my social stuff. Then I did two exchanges with science schools in Hiroshima, and then Nagasaki. We did different projects about how to interpret mass genocide, a lot of disarmament work, we did a lot of waste work with the community islands and that kind of got me more into organizing. I started trying to figure out how I fit in the world that I want to live in but I had always felt these things.

A: What is the pathway from that perspective that you have always had to opening a free store?

C: I always really liked DIY spaces, in college. There's this big DIY space where I did a couple mixed media shows. So yeah, I was involved in a lot of DIY spaces up until shutdown and then kind of pretty quickly Albany Park Mutual Aid came in and that's become my life for sure. In 2021 I was walking from the train, and there was a little flyer with a tab and a number. I took a tab and called the hotline.

A: So I wanna know how it became your life, what's the line from that to the free store?

C: I don't really know, we just had the hotline and we were monitoring that and then pretty quickly we got donations in. I have a basement so I was just putting stuff down there, and in Dan's basement and Anna's. We had various basements and we had it all logged in a sheet-thing and doing clothing swaps. We were always thinking of a free store really, kind of testing the waters and then it was a natural progression. I walked by the spot the free store is at for years, ever since I moved to Albany Park in 2016, and contacted the guy, I still had money - I inherited money from my dad - and as Albany Park Mutual Aid is becoming my life, changing and shaping me, the way that I exist, how I see the world, it felt kind of like natural progression. In a way, it felt important to get rid of some of this money and we wouldn't need to worry about rent, and then it just kinda started. Pretty much over a month, I was moving my stuff in and we had so many donations between the five of us that it just was a store. I just one day put an open sign in front and Vida walked by. She asked me what it was, and I said it was a free store in really shitty Spanish and we just went all of us running. And it went a little crazy!

A: So, we are talking about the timeline of

you getting into the community and getting involved in APMA. Now you're able to give a physicality to this idea of a network. How do you see your role within this project that grows and protects a community?

C: Yeah, I think that it is so easy, outside of the oppressive system, a free store is the easiest thing. People think this is crazy, but we were already operating as a free store. Anywhere can be a free store. There was a shift for sure, when it was in person there was a shift in time, and energy in having the in-person thing. It's just different. What we had before, we had a network and it was beautiful. We were doing it together outside of the system, and it didn't even matter that I'm an anarchist and others were not, because we were still able to organize together. And that's the spirit of mutual aid.

R: Did you have any goals?

C: One of my ultimate goals of the things that I could provide would be synthesizing specific systems that could be easily replicated. I do have a bit of a computer brain, and I would love to synthesize specific ways of being. We can actually emulate the natural systems around us. Like we can be mycelium, we can be roots. Everybody knows what is best for themselves and for their immediate community. So then why would we try to make structures that are not then repeatable on their own. Because when people see how this free store does their work and then be moved to open another underground network or a free store in their basement, or in their church, they do it on their own someplace else, in their own way.

But also, I think about what is it going to be when we literally have nothing. I guess my goal is kind of to prepare... I'm kind of like a philosophical prepper. I'm thinking of a zombie apocalypse and the inevitable demise of the energy structure. For me it's this mix of community building and this world I want to see, that is the goal but also I want to be ready, I see a world where none of this exists. In the revolution we will only have free stores and someone is going to have to run the free stores and I'll do that.

A: From your perspective, is a free store a political statement or is just practical fulfillment of material needs for the community?

C: It's hard, because everything is inherently politicized. I see it as this practical tool but then it's forced into this position of being a political statement. And I guess - sure. I don't see this as a political entity, I just see the world this way and that includes seeing that a free life is possible.

R: Does the community built in the free store invite everybody in?

C: In a way yeah. If they want to be invited in. Everybody goes to the space for their specific reason. There is something about the free store as a community space that allows people to come down. I think that is one of the most important parts of building a community space for me. At the end of the day, maybe they'll find something to

wear, something to eat, something to do, but people are coming there for safety in a way that is different from going to someone's basement. It's more an idea around how we share space and what that actually feels like and looks like and why we would keep coming back into it. That's really why I am specifically interested in mutual aid work. That's what makes me feel like something like a free store is essential to a community because it makes you look a little bit more inward, you have to ask yourself why it's bringing up certain things for you.

R: If there is all this conflicting energy and it takes a lot of work, why keep coming back to it?

C: I don't really feel like there's another option. I don't know if that sounds weird but like I just believe in it to my core. At the end of the day I believe that if we can rely on each other, we can create something different, if we really really commit to it. I have to commit to it.

R: What would you say to a baby Carina in a different place?

C: I think just slow down. Which is dumb, because I can't. But it's a goal. You know it's cheesy shit but there's something in there about confronting yourself. There's a piece of truth in your heart, and trusting in that and then letting what you can't control out. If you trust who you are in your core and can fight these systems in that way and really think about what that brings up for you. Then I think it's ok to just feel the stuff, feel the feelings and emotions. Get mad at people. It's ok, you don't have to be fighting yourself all the time, maybe it's like just keep focusing on fighting empire, you know.

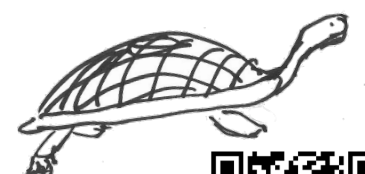


R: How do you feel like creativity plays into organizing?

C: I love that. We are not creative enough. We are not having enough fun, creativity is fun. Mariame Kaba wrote in a newsletter about how the lack of creativity in our organizing spaces is one of the last remaining carceral pierces within it. We literally cannot imagine a world without a prison, and it's like that IS carceral. We have to imagine these worlds, and unlocking that is creative. So when we are thinking about creativity, like sure there's the art and the spaces we create together and finding creative solutions but I think at that deeper piece it's about imagining something new is the essence of organizing.

R: Thank you for doing this.

C: Omg it's over? Thank god.



READ THE FULL INTERVIEW HERE:



