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**US Commission on Civil Rights**  
**Examining Health and Environmental Issues Related to Coal Ash Disposal in NC**  
7 April 2016 Public Hearing, Walnut Cove, North Carolina  
6 May 2016 Comment Submission,  
c/o Mr. Jeff Hinton, Atlanta Southern Regional Office  
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Special Thanks to Pat Clark, NC NAACP, for transcription expertise and partnership

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### SUBMISSION OF ORAL HISTORIES

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**Research Format:** The submission below of **3 full oral history testimonies** emerges from a participatory research process and a larger research program (UNC IRB 15-2371), in fields of critical ethnography and interdisciplinary health communication. The study methods include oral history/oral testimony, and participant ethnography conducted at community-led, often performance-centered press conferences, prayer vigils, planning meetings, and local, statewide, and national policy hearings. At these events, persons in Walnut Cove who face cancer and other toxicity-related illnesses provided creative leadership on behalf of their community's claims to health rights and civil rights. This engaged research focuses not only on the "what" of the phenomena of cancers and illness related to toxicity and political inequality, but also the "how" and "why." Methods of community-based, critical ethnographic research seek the "*excavation* of the political underpinnings of all modes of representation, including the scientific"—rather than espousing the reductions of a "logical empiricist dedication" to the "*eviction* of politics from science" (Conquergood, 2006:351). Critical and participant ethnography with communities facing cancers is especially vital when what can be understood as *partial science* is leveraged against the rights and health of people in environmental justice communities of concern (EJCOC, see NC Environmental Justice Network, 2016).

**Partial Science, Cancers, and Coal Ash in NC:** In the case of Walnut Cove and many similar coal ash affected communities, "partial science" may refer to scientific studies conducted according to sub-par standards or stunted representation of the facts; it may also refer to scientific studies conducted in an inappropriately partisan and incomplete fashion (see Sturgis, "N.C. produces flawed study to dismiss cancer-cluster fears near Duke Energy coal plants," May 2016; and Strong, "Is coal ash to blame for illness?" April 2016; re: NC case studies of scientific misrepresentations regarding cancer rates and coal ash). In the case of cancer and other toxicity-related illnesses, which typically require more targeted studies about causation and correlation,

statistics can be used to misrepresent the full extent of cancers in our communities, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Registry data that is not targeted to communities closest to and most affected by coal ash waste is an unreliable source of information. Indeed, the NC Toxic Substances and Disease Registry has *never* found a cancer cluster in the history of the state (Strong, 2016), despite many historic, toxic incidents in North Carolina with industrial hog farming, workplace exposures, and chemical contamination of water, such as the well documented, decades-long ordeal at Camp Lejeune. Within an ecological model of patient advocacy that places patients at the center of clinical, community, and policy spheres (Earp, French, Gilkey, 2008), numerical calculations as a primary mode of representing cancer experiences can be a disservice to the fullness of people's lived realities of the disease—and a disservice to the complexity of the environments they inhabit (Jain, 2013, Steingraber, 2010). Manipulation of cancer-related data can and has caused longterm harm for communities exposed to toxins in North Carolina.

A primary example of the strategies and outcomes of obscured cancer data in NC is the chemical water contamination and resulting saga at the Camp Lejeune Marine Corps base from 1953-1987. After knowledge about the health risks of carcinogenic chemical-laden tap water was concealed for decades (Lerner, 2010), a 2009 federal investigation ultimately led to the 2012 federal Janey Ensminger Act, to provide medical care for people affected by 35 years of contamination and 15 years of after-effects. Given the lives at stake in their beloved homeplace, the people of Walnut Cove and similar communities affected by coal ash waste urgently hope that legal redress for their health costs, damages to their land and livelihood, and remediation of the toxic waste that has infiltrated their way of life will occur at a much faster pace.

**Oral testimony:** This submission takes up Slim and Thompson's foundational recommendations (*Listening for a Change*, 1993) to engage oral testimonies that flesh out the nuances and intricacies of “unofficial histories” to better inform health and development initiatives—especially those that take it as their mission to “serve the underserved.” Three principles guide the rationale of oral history collaborations, in this case with persons facing cancer and illnesses linked to unequal toxic exposure.

- **“What and why” of oral testimony** in health and development paradigms: “Listening to individual oral testimony” can act as a “counterpoint to generalizations” and a “touchstone to review collective versions” of a given history/event/phenomenon (1993:5).
- **“Purpose and power”:** oral histories can be conducted as a form of redressing power imbalances, especially in situations of racial, ethnic, and/or gendered division, of poverty, health communication taboos, and/or problematic relations between state and non-state actors. As such, “where there is relative silence, listening should be a priority” (1993:5).
- **“Effect and equity”:** oral testimonies help “break down generalizations, mis-information, and complicate the design of relief efforts” in order to make them “more equitable and

effective” along the way—and more reflective of the priorities of affected communities versus external planners alone (1993:7). Oral history, oral artistry, and oral testimony is about “putting people at the center of development” (1993:20).

**Transcription Format:** The oral histories included below are transcribed “ethno-poetically” (Rothenberg, 1968), or as responsive to the beats, breaks, and rhythms of speech and circumstance in interviews, and participants’ original storytelling. This technique attunes readers and listeners to the oral poetry that emerges in dialogue-based, participatory research. Ethnopoetic transcription shapes for the reader both a researcher and, more importantly, the participant(s) who speak and conduct themselves “*as they are*, not as who the researcher wants them to be” (Trujillo, 2008:75). When witnesses—such as the NC State Advisory Committee and US Commission on Civil Rights—engage oral history, they are not only “readers” or “listeners” but producers of the act of *mattering*, of *re-membering* the embodied experiences told by interviewees in ways that reveal our larger cultural scripts, often in order to flip them. Listeners and tellers of oral history may find themselves “strung between” a “recollection and anticipation of historical change” as they are invited to “reckon with our place in the network of social relations a story invokes” (Pollock, 2005:7). These oral histories open up their audiences into more intimate, urgent, and shared understandings of the health and civil rights at stake in communities living, dying, and advocating for change amidst coal ash waste in North Carolina. Further oral histories (among a set of 14), or preliminary results from ongoing participant action research (40 short form interviews and analysis) can be requested by the US Commission on Civil Rights or other partners, as a supplement to the research excerpted below ([marie@itisinyou.org](mailto:marie@itisinyou.org)).

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**Participant Profiles:** Three of the four interviewees whose entire transcriptions are included below were unable to attend the US Commission on Civil Rights hearing on 7 April 2016, due to direct effects of living in close proximity to coal ash. The final participant is included as a representative of the bright promise of youth voices carrying forward their families’ and communities’ insights regarding effects of and solutions to coal ash harms. In addition to more than 40 short form intercept interviews, these 4 transcriptions are among 13 long form oral histories in the study. The most relevant quote blocks and stories for the Commission’s purposes have been excerpted from the 1 to 4 hour interviews, and placed into “key theme” categories for easier searching. Searching through these interviews allows Commissioners to see and hear “the worlds” of Walnut Cove Residents on their own terms, as positioned through their own memories, bodies, and words.

**Common themes:** All oral history interviewees in this research study continue to devote their talents and time to seeking cultural and political changes to the remarkably unjust

circumstances that situate their community as a “sacrifice zone” to coal ash production, on the fenceline and at the frontlines of industrial toxic exposure in the U.S. (Lerner, 2010). Their hard-earned insights and wisdoms give a vital lens into the primary issues that structure the human experience of dealing with coal ash waste in Walnut Cove, NC, and in similar communities across the U.S. today. Amid health rights and voting rights violations in their community—and amplification of existing inequalities based on race and socioeconomic status—each interviewee speaks out in order to *promote right action* from their governmental representatives at local, state, and federal levels, and from their corporate “neighbors,” Duke Energy. Inclusive of the 3 interviews featured below, each of the 4 interviewees speaks out of a will to honor and lift up the incredibly special community they have co-created for generations in Walnut Cove, NC, sometimes against all odds. Interviewees’ insights shed light on creative leadership among ill persons and cancer patients in North Carolina who connect the dots between coal ash, fracking impositions, healthcare access, and democratic participation. Interviewees’ insights illuminate the brave tactics of ill persons and cancer patients who activate with remarkable strength and integrity for their right to communities that are well physically, spiritually, and politically; and to their rights to engage in a pro-health economy (Brenner, 2016) and a citizen-focused democracy.

Key Words: Searchable within Document

(command + “f” or ctrl + “f” to find key theme)

**James and Priscilla Smith**

1. Illuminating Walnut Tree neighborhood, family, illnesses
2. Health and coal ash, fracking concerns
3. Annexation, Voting rights—and a sense of place
4. Water delivery issues—Walnut Tree
5. Race and Walnut Tree
6. Water, government notification, and equality
7. Advocacy and community-led changemaking
8. Priscilla and James Smith singing duets for justice (recordings in addenda)

**Danielle Bailey Lash**

1. Coal ash and family effects
2. Water Testing — Divergent results if un/affiliated with Duke Energy
3. Why move here?—The “pretty lake”

4. Why don't people want to believe it? (Cognitive dissonance)
5. Homes near coal ash waste—Any notification?
6. Intergenerational implications
7. Health Issues
8. Certainty and uncertainty—Illness as a shock
9. Accountability—For Duke Energy, for governments, for parents?
10. Voting, socioeconomic status, and decisions to place coal ash waste
11. Getting others to care—Personal purpose and facing unjust cancers
12. Civil rights—Never thought we'd have to fight this
13. Country values—Who's committing crimes?
14. Decisions about where to place toxics—Community effects and strengths
15. Huge shift in the community—Communicating for change
16. Fracking, coal ash—Right to Know
17. Promise from Our Government
18. Changing cancer knowledges—Healthcare systems, and cancer origins
19. Health rights advocacy
20. Layers of Power and poorer communities
21. Battle scars from illness to make change
22. Duke Energy goals—Community goals

### **Shuntailya Imani Graves**

1. I'll speak on my Mother first—Health and the costs of coal ash
2. Mentality of government officials to allow coal ash, and possible fracking
3. Doctors' notification—Health systems and health access
4. Advocacy from ill persons
5. Changing cancer culture
6. Who deserves fair treatment, Medical care?
7. Speaking out for a Better Life in America

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### **Interviewees—Background**

1. Mr. James Smith could not make his scheduled testimony in the USCCR comment period, due to a COPD flare-up in his lungs and throat, requiring an immediate doctor's appointment that day, in a city forty-five minutes away. **James Smith and Priscilla Smith** are founding residents of the Walnut Tree neighborhood, bordering Walnut Cove Town land, and begun in the early 1970s through federal grants to assist Black first-time home owners in the U.S. south. For the families beginning this neighborhood—that four decades later comprises 75 houses—these homes represented a welcome light on the other side of generations spent tunneling through histories of racist Jim Crow laws, that manifest in structural barriers across fields of banking, land ownership, wage labor and more. James and Priscilla sing beautiful duets together, and have done so throughout their entire marriage. Now, Mr. Smith has an oxygen tank for COPD, and Mrs. Smith is facing lung cancer with localized metastases.

2. **Danielle Bailey-Lash** felt so present in the room at the US Commission on Civil Rights hearing on 7 April 2016, as she was invoked by many panelists. She could not attend due to a set work schedule, tied to the very real need to pay her healthcare bills after facing a borderline stage 3-4 brain tumor at 35. Danielle has a way with words, and an infectious laugh, that often emerges in the middle of her thoughts. She is featured in the film “At What Cost?” (Appalachian Voices), which also features Mrs. Ann Brown, the incredible community advocate and late mother of Tracey Brown Edwards. Danielle and her 14 year-old daughter currently reside in Baileytown, as she had to relocate for safety concerns from the Pine Hall area near to Belews Creek Steam Station, given Radon exposure and other dangers while living near the Duke Energy plant, and its coal ash ponds and disposal sites.

3. **Shuntailya Imani Graves** is 18 years old, and a college student studying biology to become an oncology research scientist. Her mother is her best friend, and lived for 40 years (1973-2003) growing up and into adulthood in the Walnut Tree neighborhood—an unannexed, majority Black neighborhood less than 3 miles from the Belews Creek Steam Station's coal ash ponds and chemical air releases, and just hundreds of yards from the Town of Walnut Cove's first fracking test site (2015). Among other wisdoms, Shuntailya's insights resist and reorient what it means to “fight cancer,” as her aunt faced breast cancer, and her mom faced ovarian cancer as a child, thyroid cancer, eight cancerous brain tumors, and has had fibromyalgia and strokes since she was in her 30s. Shuntailya is a gifted student at NC Central University in Durham, NC who just completed her first year. Her mother Stacey Linster now lives in Winston Salem, NC.



### **James Smith and Priscilla Smith**

Both lifelong Walnut Cove region residents (in Walnut Tree 42 years)

**James** Smith, 77, currently faces COPD, and was a leader in the community in the 1990s battle for clean drinking water to be piped in. He has a centered, gently assured presence. His words, intentions are clear, even when his voice rasps.

**Priscilla** Smith, 74, faces lung cancer with recent progression, and she and James have loved to sing gospel duets their entire dating and married life (50-plus years). She is observant, quick to smile, and kind. She chooses the right time to say the right things.

A breathing machine (oxygen tank) whooshes and whirs at intervals.

The Smith's home in the Walnut Tree.  
A July afternoon (2015).

*J: James Smith    P: Priscilla Smith  
M: Marie Garlock (interviewer)*

## 1. Illuminating Walnut Tree Neighborhood, Family, Illnesses

P: Priscilla Smith

J: James McCoy Smith

*M: How long have you lived in Walnut Cove?*

J: All my life. I lived here in Walnut Tree for about 42 years.

P: I lived in Walnut Cove all of my life.

J: Well, in London [incorporated area to Town of Walnut Cove] was my first home. And here in Walnut Tree. 1973, I believe it was. Forty-plus years.

P: Same.

M: Okay. And, because this is a civil rights report, how do you identify racially?

J: **Well**, I really have no problem with anyone racially. Personally, **I get along with anybody**.

M: That's wonderful. And, what would you say your race is if you had to write it, on paper?

J: Black.

P: I would say I'm a Black, too.

M: What would you say the percentage of Black persons in Walnut Tree is?

J: ... Black... I'd say **98...92 %**.

M: And are there illnesses in your family?

J: Yes.

P: Oh, the illness in my family has been cancer...

M: What cancers, and for who?

P: ...My three brothers, and my mother had cancer, and my daddy had **cancer** [all living within 5 miles of the Belews Creek Seam Station]. So it's my **whole family**.

M: What type of cancers?

P: I really don't know what kind they were. They never would tell.

M: And, are you comfortable saying what type of cancer you have faced?

P: No. I'm **all right with that**. They found it and told me I had lung cancer. And, I've been all right with it. [clearing throat]...They told me they found a lot of *nodules* inside of my throat and in my body. And on the side of the lungs. But I'm doin' real well, but I didn't **have** none of that, until **lately**, until we moved over here.

M: And how long have you had the lung cancer diagnosis?

P: I was diagnosed in 2012.

M: Did your family members – your brothers and your parents – did they live here in Walnut Cove.

P: Yes, they were all raised here.

M: And were they raised here in Walnut Tree?

P: No, no. They lived in Stokes County, in different sections.

M: What section was that?

P: All over Stokes County... they lived in London [area]...on **South Stokes Road**, on **Pine Mountain Road** [very close proximity to Belews Creek Steam Station and coal ash impoundments, some areas less than 1 mile]. So they lived in different places.

J: Russell lived over here...

P: Russell lived in Forsyth [Pine Hall area just over Forsyth county line]...

J: He lived over here [too].



P: Oh, that's right. Russell's my oldest brother, he lived over here about 4 years.

J: **He died in 2005.**

P: 2005.

M: So he was... was he here [Walnut Tree] when he passed?

P: Yes.

M: Thank you for your life, Russell. [...]

J: Well, my mother and father are both dead.

My **father** died with cancer.

My mother died from dialysis. Had 2 -3 **brothers** had all **cancer**.

And that sister lived over here... she was sickly and uh... **myself**, I live here, I have ... **COPD** and [clearing throat, deep breaths] ...**high blood pressure**, and um... stuff like that.

M: That's a lot all at once.

J: Mm huh. And, I think some of my, well **from the coal ash and stuff here...** because I've **been here** ever since, for 40 years. So I'm pretty sure it had some kinda **bearing** on my **health...**

M: And your other family members... did any of them live in this area as well?

J: In London, yes. Right, and I got a sister live up in Briarwood. Which is near Belews Creek. [Duke Energy Steam Station and coal ash waste ponds].

M: And what is she dealing with, in terms of illness?

J: She has... uh... she has some kind of **cancer** in her **breast**.

And she has a **defibrillator**, and stuff like that.

## 2. Health and coal ash, fracking concerns

M: Has living near coal ash changed your perspective on anything?

J: Why sure! I think it's a—like I said—

a **bearing on all the health over here. Mine and everybody else's.**

Because the way it spread and it's in the **breathing air**.

And it spread different ways... and there's no tellin' how far the air **carries** it, you know.

I'd say on a windy day... it's real bad.

M: Why do you think coal ash has caused illnesses?

J: I guess because the **pollution of it...**

M: Do a lot of people talk about coal ash as toxic, or as pollution around here?

J: Yeah, well, **lately**, it's been **more talk** about it [with fracking plus coal ash], yeah.

...Before, you'd hear little things about the **coal ash**,

but I didn't know anything about **fracking** until it came about the Town.

But mostly was coal ash [talk], **mostly**.

M: Has the fact that you've dealt with illness and you think that it's related to coal ash—does that make you feel a certain way about wanting or not wanting fracking?

J: OH DEFINITELY... **don't want it**. Because of what I've read about different states and cities, what it **causes** and stuff. Wouldn't **dare** want it, no, **no**... I think it's bad for *anybody*.

M: And, why do you think the fracking tests were chosen to be done right near Walnut Tree?

J: Money...

P: Uh huh.

J: That's what I think.

P: Uh huh.

M: What makes you think that?

J: Well, based on the ... what I *read* ...about the **companies** and things, you know, like the gas companies, the oil companies, all waiting for a report on what's going on here in Walnut Tree. [Within 2 months of fracking tests a few hundred yards from the Walnut Tree neighborhood border in the Town of Walnut Cove, the Stokes County shale was being advertised in international commodities meetings in the UK]

...If they ever *frack*...I just think from what they done here, they found what they need [to continue with fracking operations, despite close proximity to coal ash waste].

But anyway, I think that what's gonna happen is they're gonna try and **buy**, get this place [Walnut Tree] for **nothing**, or buy people out.

And, uh, because from what I understand, many of our homes and everything, is **goin' down** everyday, now since the fracking was *mentioned*.

So they **won't have to**, they won't pay much to get us out of here.

M: How does that make you feel?

J: Terrible...

P: Makes me feel *bad*, cause we were **blessed** to **get this home**, and now. What's *up* now?

So—we really don't know *what's* gonna *happen*.

M: What does that do for you to live with that uncertainty right now?

J: [long pause] I don't know... it's just rough...

M: Do you think that coal ash and fracking have any kind of relationship to each other?

J: Yeah, well I think that both will affect your body in the same, your **health** in the **same** way...

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### 3. Annexation, Voting rights—and a Sense of Place

M: And what is it about **voting rights** in Walnut Tree and the annexation—

J: Well, **annexation**. Well I think that—I **know** that—they *won't* **annex us** to Walnut Cove because of the **voting power** that will be from **this place alone**.

That I think, that's the main reason that they will not annex us.  
In the past, when we had the *water thing goin' on*

[undrinkable water for 20-plus years in Walnut Tree, with many years of sporadic sewage spewing up, or water cutting off completely, with pipelines contracted to a negligent provider to replace well water for the unannexed neighborhood].

We got **signatures and everything**, and turned it over [to the Town of Walnut Cove], and they were **dropped**... nothin' was ever said about it.

P: They even moved the sign back.  
J: Yeah, they **moved the city limit**...

P: It was up a little further [on the inside border of 1 of the 75 homes in Walnut Tree, Mrs. Mildred Hairston's home, Walnut Tree foundress and mother of David Hairston]. And they ...

J: Up near the first road down there. [...] They **moved it** from there back to by the second house, and the last time they moved it, put it past the *first* house. So...

M: Why do they keep moving the city limit sign?

J: So *we'll stop talking* about **annexation** and stuff like that. [...] Yeah, predominately black [neighborhood], so yes.

J: Well, they know with the **90 percent** [Black residents] here, it could *sway any vote* that could come up in Walnut Cove, and there's been about 3 Black people on the board in Walnut Cove, far as I know...

M: In the history of [the Town]...

J: Yes, uh huh. **Right**. Uh huh.



Mr. James Smith and Mrs. Priscilla Smith at their home in Walnut Tree. photo: Marie Garlock

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M: What have these decisions about coal ash, fracking, water supply, voting rights—what have they done to your sense of this place?

J: Mmmm...

M: You're smiling [to Priscilla]... you can answer, too..

J: Go ahead.

P: No you go ahead and answer. I get carried away.

J: No you go ahead [smiling].

P: I'm letting you talk...[smiling]

M: I'm sure you have great ideas....

P: I wanna do it right.

M: What has it done to the community?

J: Well, one thing, it's got everybody thinking about **what will happen**, and stuff like that.

**I'm hopin' its drawin' people closer together.**

But that's something yet to be seen.

J: [...] No, we were here when they [Duke Energy] bought ... and built the power...they **built the dam...** Well, come to think of it, [that's when] we started having **problems with the water.** That's when we **first stated hearing about the coal ash...**

M: You all have been through this experience of leadership and trying to bring people together because of what was happening with Rayco. Can you speak a bit about that, what that was like?

J: Oh, yeah, I can. **I got it right here.**

P: Oh while he finds that... [In the past] We could sorta **see the coal ash** on our blinds...

[Gets up to show the blinds and where the fly ash would blow in the home with windows open in the spring and summer].



#### 4. Water delivery issues—Walnut Tree

[Mr. James Smith brings newspaper article].

M: Hey, that's you right there! And this says,  
 “Walnut Tree resident James Smith, pictured above, and other residents of the housing development say they never know if they’ll have water when they need it.”

J: Exactly. **When that water blew...** days and days upon days...

M: [reading] “Turn on the tap, get nothing....” and “Walnut Tree residents want assurance of water.”

J: Right.

M: Because you have been in this fight before, why do people deserve water? Clean water?

J: Well, one: because **God gave us water freely** and ...  
 I don't know, but **everybody deserves clean water everywhere**.  
 That's my opinion about it. Everybody should be **getting** clean water, but...  
 it's been an **uphill battle here in Walnut Tree**, I'll tell you.

M: Why do you think it was that that was so mismanaged on the part of the company, here?

J: Well, because Rayco wasn't payin' no attention to what they were doin to us, **gathering money from each of us each month**, and we would complain to 'em and nothing would happen.

M: Who gave them that contract? How were they allowed to do that? That's just abusive of people.

J: Uh, I don't know how they got that [contract to pipe in our water when there were concerns about water safety]. I really don't ...But, right, they had to go through the county.

M: And so were you advocating directly to the company to fix it?

J: Yes, I think the Town and the ...And in Danbury [County Seat].

M: And why did you include advocacy with the town, as well?

J: Because, uh, I guess because uh, we **thought** our water was comin' from town.

But we found out that, a while back here, they, uh, the town somehow...

**managed to sell the water rights to Rayco.**

Because they said they would **run lines over here** and after they bought it from them, Rayco, and said we'd be getting the **same water** they'd be **getting in town**.

...But **come to find out**, we're still on the **same** two pumps over here, for years and *years* after this happened. And, so, we started complaining again, and so they bought pipes over here and said they were gonna lay new pipe, line, everything.

...**They never laid the pipe.** The pipe they brought over here went to Briarwood.

P: Because they had 'em stacked right here...

J: They had 'em stacked right out here...

P: On our part of the road.

J: But they never did put 'em in the ground.

M: Making it look like they were doing something?

P: Right.

J: And they put 'em in Briarwood, that's where they **planned** 'em, I guess.

... but Briarwood's having the same kind of problem with the water as we were.

And, there's a, and another reason I think it's ... **racially**, because of **this town [Walnut Tree] and Baileytown** [another predominantly Black area that is unannexed into the Town of Walnut

Cove, but directly borders it]. They *have the water*... they **built a new school up there, past Baileytown**. They **run the water on one side over to the school, and bypassed Baileytown**.

M: Bypassed it?

J: Well, they **didn't bring water to 'em**.

The school been there how long? About...

P: I been out [of teaching at Elementary School] 20 years...so its been a pretty good little while.

J: Yeah, but they hadn't done this [offer to re-pipe] 'til, uh... the [deep breaths in and out with oxygen tank] the school was built. About the water, **that's the way it was done**.

## 5. Race and Walnut Tree

M: What, if anything, do you think race had to do with those decisions?

J: Hey... **this town we're living in is racist**. Very much so. And I mean, **whew**.

P: Its *worse than that*.

M: What is it?

P: Seems like they **don't want to do things like they used to**,  
they **won't let you have *nothing***. Some of 'em won't.

M: Why is that?

P: Uh, like I said, must be all racist, I guess, **'cause ain't too many people can go borrow money to do nothing around here**. Just buy food and eat.  
It's an **old-boy town**, don't share—with ya. Real "nice"...

J: And I blame the politicians around here. They **promise you the moon**... and I tell you...

M: And what did you learn from this leadership, with you right here, on the front of the paper, and the ongoing fight for water in the 90s? What did you learn from that experience?

J: Well, I think it helps a little bit, but, uh, in the long haul, it *wasn't enough*.

M: Why do you say that?

J: For one reason, back then... people over here wouldn't stick together. I don't know why...

M: Do you see this as a pattern in any sort of way? So there's coal ash causing pollution, water not being available. I heard some stories about raw sewage coming up in the streets...

J: Yeah... **Well, seem like the same pattern**.

P: This water **smell** like *the sewage* sometimes.

J: You know, sometimes I...

P: All those **chemicals**... they have to use **a lot** of chemicals...

J: Have to **buy a 10 -12 cases of water a month**. There's \$35 in a case, and sometimes I have to use that to **shave... water be smellin' so bad**.

P: And cook... and the water bill's like \$150 - \$160 every two months [the Rayco water bill, for undrinkable water out of the taps]... but you can't **use** the water.

## 6. Water, Government Notification, and Equality

M: What's it like to not be able to drink your own water? To be afraid of what's coming out of the tap?

J: Well, I don't know, I done got used to it now... It's automatic. I don't ever think about it.

M: What's it like for you?

P: I think its **awful**. I don't like it because you have to **buy so much soap**, you know, to **try** to keep clean, to keep from **smellin' around people**.

J: The water will leave **stains**...

P: It messed up **all** your clothes.

J: Brand new **white** tee shirts and put 'em that water, come back *dingy*.

P: And then when it gets hot, it starts to smell, and you got to go change clothes. It's really sad...

M: Yes. Yes.

P: But I say: It's gonna be alright.

M: What's gonna make it alright?

P: Jesus. Pray. **Pray and Love**.

M: What changes do you want to see made?

J: **I would like to see the change made where everybody is equal, or  
—not only Walnut Tree but in Walnut Cove as well.  
Especially where the source of our water and stuff is coming from ...**

—Well, it's different. [here in Walnut Tree and Walnut Cove]

Because of the places that will **not talk about fracking, and coal ash**.

—Well, like in different locations where they **could** do the test [for fracking],  
but they will **not**.

But, uh, they **brought it to us**.



What makes it so bad—**when they first started, they didn't let us know they were doing it.** That's what was *wrong* from the **get go – right there.**

**Nobody knew a thing about it  
until they heard it on the news.**

[the fracking tests, 100-200 yards from the closest homes in Walnut Tree]

M: Can you talk about the process of how they decided to do the fracking test, and what that was like for them to not notify you?

J: Well, all I know is we didn't know anything about it... and...first time we really got into it was when we **started going to the meetings.** I'd *read* about fracking in Oklahoma and other places like that, and California, but I never thought it would be **here.**

M: What was your response when you first found out, when you first had that feeling “I never thought it would be here” [especially because of coal ash histories in this neighborhood]

J: Well, that's just it. I never thought it would be here and yet it **still is** here. **And WHY?** I don't know. I mean I *know* why, but **why?** WHY.

M: The big why [laughter together]... So there's been **no formal notice** [to residents], even still, about the fracking test [abutting your neighborhood], up until this day?

J: No, not that I know of. No.

M: And how close were the tests? To this neighborhood?

J: Let's see... probably about 2 blocks. 2 city blocks.

M: No knocking on the door, nothing in the mailbox...

J: Nothing.

M: No phone calls..

J: Nothing at all.

M: What's your response to that – not being notified?

J: Well, it **tells me** they don't care about us in the first place.

If they *did*, they would have **told us some kind of way.**

On their water bill, when they're doing things [with the Town or County], they **always** put it on there.

Nothing on there about it either. So, we're just **in the dark.**

P: Well, you had asked them about the water when you had gone in to pay the bill.

One of the ladies said “The water's all right.” ....**You never could talk to the leader.**

He would never come out and talk to you.

J: No. The one that takes the money, you could [deep breaths in and out with oxygen tank]

M: [Pause] Can you say that last part again?

J: I said the one that's taking the money, you never get **no further** with her about the water.

M: Why is that?

J: **Same old, same old.**

M: People doin' the damage not comin' out.

J: **Right!**

M: ...to face it.

P: They **know**. Cause I just wanted to talk to him.

M: What would you have said?

P: I don't know, I probably would have just asked him **why?** Why you **never** come out and talk to us when we wanted to *ask you some questions* [about water safety]. That's about all I'd say.

M: And what would you say to him when you talked to him?

J: Well, I tried talking to him one day and I got a little loud, so I ... just left.

M: What's the political situation that's made this possible? From your perspective?

J: Well, politically, it is still **wrong** and I think that those are **in charge**...

They **know** these things, yet they still will not try to **better** them for anyone.

They just **go along** with the program.

And I think that's because it's more money for them, going into their **pockets**.

I don't know why. All I can say is even though **we live here** and **we oppose it**  
[toxins from coal ash and from fracking],  
they still try to **throw it** down your throat. They try to put it on you *anyway*.  
And, I think that's a lot, a lot of **political maneuvers** also.

P: They just won't listen to you. Bring it up, and they **go on to something else**.

**"Oh, we'll talk about that later."** They just won't **listen** to **this community** ...

J: Look it, **all** people're not bad, but these political ones, those leaders... I think once they get into office, they get this **perspective in mind** about what they're trying to carry out and **nothing** else. **Regardless** of who it hurts or doesn't hurt.

## 7. Advocacy and community-led changemaking

J: Well, I think the role of **advocacy** is a good thing. Because it helps get the **word out** about the fracking and the **coal ash** and **everything** else going on.

And I think we should have more of it.

Simply because of all the things we're talking about today, and everything that's going on: **If I don't speak out about it, then who will know?**

M: Are there a lot of neighbors who are also facing a lot of illnesses?

J: Well, yeah, I have a few cousins over there that died from—worked in the school system, **Joann Welch** and her husband. There was **Buck**, we called him Buck Welch. My **brother-in-law** he died from **cancer**. He's been dead probably about 2 -3 years now.

And he lived here for a **long time** before so. And, **Alonzo**, he was pretty sick.

P: And then my momma... she was on dialysis, but she wasn't bothered with none of that **until** she moved over here with me.

J: **And still a lot of sick people wherever you go.**

P: Just about everybody over here....

J: About *everybody* over here [that] has **died**... has been *cause* of ***cancer or other illnesses linked to pollution.***

M: What's your response to that? Being around so many people who are sick, and who have died as a result of the pollution?

J: **Well, I always think about how can we help 'em?** Because we are needed real bad.

M: Who needs to be involved to stop the pollution?

J: I think for most of all, **the leaders should take... be in charge, if they're gonna do the right thing.**

M: And should it be brought to a state or national level?

J: **State and national.**

Well, I think it would make it—it would cause the politicians to **really think** about what they're doing. Some, the way I understand it now, are on this board now regretting that they passed this thing now...

P: Yes...I understand one has already left, or getting ready to leave.

J: Yup.

P: Was on that [Town] Board. I don't think they really **know** what they were doing.

J: And this woman, she tried to quit at a meetin' ...

M: What was that like?

J: They wouldn't let her quit. But I think that's where the whole thing is... right there [how politicians conduct themselves].

J: Well, I think it **throws out a great message from the whole crew** [to advocate at Town and County Meetings]. **We Shall Not Be Moved. And I will continue to stand on that.**

J: Right, well, it shouldn't throw a **barrier** on everyone. To be in the same situation, sick or well, to call for the same thing.

[People pay more attention when ill people are speaking], I guess because of the ... okay.

—Say I'm **sick**, and I **know** I'm **sick**, and I *know* what it's **coming from**.

— Then I'm trying to **get it across to everybody** else and *those in charge*.

— **To send me help.** That's the way I look at it.

[...]

J: Well, ideally, if they take away the fracking, and **give us clean water** [remediate coal ash and other contamination], and everything else, **then I think we can live a better life.**

**... And our lives would be more in tune to things that's goin' on.**

...We won't have to worry about the fracking or other bad water [from coal ash].

...I think it would a **great, great thing if this could happen.**

P: The best possible future for my saying it, is that we get on Walnut Cove [the Town Commissioners], and **work together and straighten these things out.**

J: We gotta show more love...

M: What does love do?

J: Well, like the Bible says,

"Love will keep you together and love will move mountains, with faith."

P: That's right.

J: That's for sure.

M: What's the future for children who currently live in Walnut Tree?

J: **Oh, boy.** If things don't get any better, the *children* are going to be doomed.

...That's the way I look at it, because, there's a few now [who are sick].

...I think the youth *should* be involved in all we do, because they're the future.

P: Some have said "What can we do?"

...Just tell them that we're trying to do what we can to help.

J: That's where the education comes in. [spreading the word to the public]

P: Mmm huh...

M: When you're a part of something and you're trying to shift what's going on, what does creative advocacy do? Like at the Walnut Cove Town Commission, with the youth dancing for a clean environment for kids of all races, free from coal ash and fracking, what does dance do?

J: Well, the dance, to me, it **illustrates what we're talking about**, and how they bring it out in their dancing and their singing **what we want to do.** I think that goes a long way.

And especially with the *young people* doing it.

—They deserve purity.

P: I guess **a lot of talented children** over **here**. They just need a *chance*.

M: Beautifully said. What do you want people to take from this interview?

J: Well, one thing is that it should **all go away** [coal ash and fracking], as I was saying before, and **everybody** come to an understanding. Keep carrying this thing **on** as it comes into place... Just to keep it going... **don't give up**.

Well. If you give up, you **forget** about everything. Whatever you started, if you give up, it's ended. So you got to **keep pushing**. I like what Valvano said... "Never give up." Regardless.

P: Well, **come together...in love**... Don't get upset cause a little something go wrong, but **hold on, and work together**. Because things *will* work out.... Hold on.

[We are] so glad... that somebody cared.

[Gestures with another thought] No time for a bad attitude. It's a **good time to get closer together, and work together in love. And you can see things fall in place.** ...Might not come when we want, but its gonna be on time.

**...And I just hope I'm gonna be around to see it.**

[Reflecting on family in Walnut Tree as we stand up]. All them was good parents back then. They would tell you what was right. They wouldn't tell you no wrong. **Most things** they done *said* back then, it's coming, **it's coming**.

M: It seems if you're a kid growing up here, you have a lot of parents.

P: Yes, Yes. **A lot of love** in Walnut Cove. They look out for one another. I just love people. My home, our home would be just **full** of people. I'd get up on Sunday morning before I'd go to church and just **cook!**

I **love** helping people.... We try to keep love in this home, no hate. Just love.

Can we sing you some songs? To go with this interview?

J: [smiling to his wife] Ok, I'll try.

**Priscilla: OH LORD WON'T YOU HELP ME**

[Recordings attached in addendum]

Oh Lord, won't you help me?  
 Singing, Oh Lord,  
 won't you help me?  
 Help me on my journey...  
 Help me all day long.  
 Singing  
 Oh,  
 Lord,  
 won't you help me?

While I'm waiting,  
 I want you to  
 help me.  
 While I'm waiting,  
 I want you to  
 me.  
 Help me on my journey...  
 Help me on my way.  
 Singing Oh, Lord, I want you to help me...

---

**James and Priscilla duet: JESUS IN MY ROOM**

Come on in my room  
 Come on in my room  
 Jesus is my Doctor  
 and he writes—all of my prescriptions  
 and he brings—me all of my medicines  
 In my ro-om

Well there's  
Love  
in my ro-om  
Love  
in my ro-om

Jesus is my Doctor  
and he writes—all of my  
prescriptions  
and he brings me—all of my  
medicines  
In my ro-om

Well there's  
Hope  
in my ro-om  
Hope in my ro-om

Jesus is my Doctor  
and he writes—all of my  
prescriptions  
and he brings me—all of my  
medicines  
In my room

Come on  
in my ro-om  
Come on in my ro-om  
Jesus is my doctor  
and he writes—all of my  
prescriptions  
and he brings me—all of my  
medicines in my ro-om



### Priscilla and James duet: ON THE OCEAN

On the ocean  
and it's movin'  
this a-way  
If your soul's not anchored

in Jesus  
You will surely  
Pass away

*James: Whew I can't get there, sorry.*

*Priscilla: We don't wanna get him outta breath.*

[Priscilla, finishing the duet]:

If your soul's not  
anchored in Jesus

[soft laughter]

you will surely  
drift away...

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## Danielle Bailey Lash

Former Pine Hall resident (close to Belews Creek Steam Station),  
current Baileytown resident (near Town of Walnut Cove).



**Danielle**, 40 years old, got a stage 3 brain tumor at 35, in 2010. When she was 13, she moved back to family land in the Walnut Cove area, and despite job offers elsewhere, stayed for the appeal of “country living” for her own family. Danielle has a vibrant yet peaceful presence. She speaks quickly, and is a great storyteller; she changes vocal tones for people she quotes, or for herself spoken about in memory. She often laughs in the middle of words, and finds humor and humanity even in the absurd circumstances she describes.

Danielle moved with her 14 year old daughter into her parents’ home for safety concerns due to leaking coal ash waste ponds and air emissions from Belews Creek Steam Station. Danielle’s husband stayed behind in Pine Hall home, at his decision.

Interview in her mother’s home, on a September evening (2015).

*D: Danielle Bailey-Lash*

*M: Marie Garlock (interviewer)*

### 1. Coal ash and family effects:

D: I feel like—he [her husband] wasn’t concerned.

And **a lot of the community** wasn’t *concerned*, because we were like:

**we live in America** and who would, you know, **who would purposefully contaminate our water, and our air?**

And we *purposefully* lived in the country—we kinda-bragged about it.

We-were-like: *We live in the country!*

*We don’t have to worry about **criiime**.*

...And now we have to worry about our **water**?

That’s kind-a...

And my husband’s like:

“You send money to Joyce Meyers to [laughter] *dig wells in Africa* and stuff.  
And then you don’t even have water here...” [laughter]

So, it’s just, at first we didn’t **believe** it.

So, at-this-point: he [my husband] still *wants* to believe that *this can’t be happening*.  
Where-I’m-like:

I have a **child**

**I can’t—take a chance**

that this is what’s really *going on*. And if this is what caused *me* to have **cancer**  
what’s gonna happen to my **daughter**?

Luckily, my son’s away at college, but...

I just didn’t want to take any chances—so now I’m staying *here*.

[Danielle’s mother’s house, where she and her daughter now live].

**Plus**, we couldn’t **afford** to keep **buying all that water**!

Like, I *literally* was not cooking with it, we weren’t *drinking* with it,  
and then when they came and **tested** my water, they were like:

“Well, don’t take a shower

*longer than ten minuuutes*,

don’t cook with it, don’t drink with it.”

This was when I first had mine tested,

—no one else had had theirs tested.

2014, March.

M: And that was a lot of money, to have to buy water.

D: It really is! So that’s why I was like, **we can’t afford to keep doing this**.

My husband kept saying “*Well I grew up on well water*,”

and I was like—“*Well this is not the same well water*,

**ev-i-dently**,

that you [laughter] grew up on.”

## 2. Water Testing — Divergent results if un/affiliated with Duke Energy

*So what was weird* about that—I had my water tested just by happen—well, it was a  **blessing**.

What happened is I called the—so technically I live near Forsyth County,

I’m on the line. So I called Forsyth County Health Department.

And at that time, I was on **disability**

because I was doing **chemo and radiation**.

So I had plen-ty of time [laughter] on my hands [laughter].

M: And that is tough stuff.

D: Yeah, it is.

So I called them and I was like, **“I need my water tested.”**

So they send me **all these papers** to fill out.

And I didn’t know what kind of tests I needed! [laughter]

I wasn’t “good in science in school.” [laughter] So I just checked all the boxes.

And the guy at the health department—he-was-so-nice—he called me back and he’s like,

“Are you **sure** you want all these tests?

‘Cause it’s gonna cost a *LOT*. Of. Money. To get your water tested.”

So I was like “Oh, **no-ooo**. I was thinkin’ like, twenty-five dollars [laughter].”

He was *so nice*, his name was *Brock*. And he said “Um, so what’s going on anyway?”

So I told him where I *live*,

and that my friend had told me *she felt like* because I lived so close to a power plant *that* might have caused me to have cancer.

And so he *arranged it*—for D E N R to come test my water [and air]. *For free*. For Radon.

**And they tested it. And they found that there was *Radon and contamination in my water*.**

And what was funny was that they had to do it through, like, regular paperwork.

But THEN somehow—took care of the *costs* for me—somehow.

The *other person* from DENR—she called me and was like “*I’m coming to test your water...*”

And I was like, “Oh, someone’s already come to test!”

And she was like “Well, I’m already *out* here. So I’m gonna go ahead and test it.”

And I was like “Oh okay,” because I was like,

“Well maybe if these people hooked me up, am I just supposed to play along?”

And she tested my water—

**and *she* found nothing wrong with my water.**

But she was *also* the same person who said,

“I have to **report these findings to Duke Energy**”

and “Was I okay with it?”

...And I was like... “Sure, I don’t care.”

But, I always *thought* that was weird,

but I never *said* anything—

because the other people kinda hooked me up by testing my water,

and let me know, and they came to my house.

And they were like “You need a *filtration*, an **air filtration system** put in—

**don’t drink the water—**

**don’t cook with the water—**

and **don’t take a shower longer than ten minutes—**

and **always have a fan going and the window cracked.**”

So, I was like, “Well how *much* is the filtration system?”

She was like, “Well...I have one...” and the lady that came and tested my water lives in Greensboro, has one—she said you could get it for “*under* a thousand dollars.” ...But that still **scared** me, because I was like, [laughter] in my head, “Does that mean *eight hundred* dollars?” [laughter]  
 so I mean, **I needed her to be specific—!**  
 And she was like, “Well, they *vary*. Just, do your homework on it.”

So, just now, I’d rather be safe than sorry, so we just,  
 me and my daughter [14 years old], stay back there in my [laughter] *old* bedroom.  
 [points to her own childhood bedroom growing up in Baileytown]

### 3. Why move here?—The “pretty lake”

M: Mmm hm, and is your husband still living out there [Pine Hall area near Forsyth line, downstream from coal ash ponds]?

D: He still is... ‘Cause we can’t all *fit over here*.

M: And you were saying that you moved to the country because—

D: Yeah, my Dad moved—I was born in Philadelphia, then we moved to California—and my Dad was like,

“**I have *property*, [laughter] in North Carolina,  
 in the country where I grew up:  
 it’s *clean*, there’s no crime,  
 everything’s *slow and easy*—you’ll love it.”**

**And we *did* love it.**

I’ve lived here since I was thirteen.

And at *first* I was going to move with American Express to Florida, so I was like, *ehh*.

And then I was like, “I’m getting *older*,”

I wanna raise my kids in the country—where it’s *safe*.

So I *thought that* um:

No Crime. Clean Air. Clean Water.

My daughter **loves** the lake.

My husband loves the lake, he likes to **fish**.

And *now* it’s like: **don’t *get in*** the lake water.

I told my husband, “Don’t bring that fish *home to us!*” [laughter]

“We’re not eating [laughter] *that fish*. So **don’t even bother** fishing...”

M: Are there any signs that say “No fishing”?

D: No [sigh].

M: No signs?

D: *Mm mm*. You know, so everybody thinks I’m Hispanic [Danielle identifies her race as Black].

So at the Appalachian Voices meetings they would always ask me,  
 “Do you think you could let the Hispanic community *know*  
 [laughter] um, to maybe not, um...”  
 ‘Cause a lot of Hispanics come down—and they—**they need that fish.**  
*To. Eat. Like, they catch it, they cook it, and they eat it.*

So I was like, well, I don’t speak *Spanish*, but there *should* be signs! But there *weren’t* any.  
 And I still don’t know of—  
 when I was at the lake for that last time we took pictures,  
 a few months ago, I didn’t see *anything*  
 about *stay out of the water*, or *don’t eat that fish*.  
 So there are still probably people coming who are gonna come and eat that fish.

M: Yeah, I saw, I went down there [over the last 3 months], saw a lot of people swimming, with their boats, little kids.

#### 4. Why don’t people want to believe it? (Cognitive dissonance)

D: *Yeah* it’s *so* pretty over there. But it’s like *if they only knew*.  
 I was trying to figure it out, because I was thinkin’  
 It’s somethinga—*about the community*—we just don’t **wanna believe it** I guess.

M: why do you think that is?

D: *I was trying to figure it out*  
 I was thinkin’, it’s one thing to be in *denial*  
 you know how like a woman’s **in denial** that her husband’s cheating-on-her  
 “*Oooh*, I’m sure it’s not that.”

**But I guess it also is that:  
 if we have to believe this,**

**then *where are we gonna go?***

*like, my house is not paid for*

so I’m still **paying for a mortgage** over there

and I don’t **live** over-there

and I can’t **sell** my house to someone and then, you-know

and **rest easy** at night and be like

... “Oh. by. the. way. there’s-**radon**-in-there.”

[Matter of fact eyes looking up—fake smile]

So —eee. Huh.

*I don’t know.*

**We have nowhere to go.**

You just don’t **want** to believe—I think they’re in **denial** and they’re **afraiiiid**.

[long pause]

M: Well we just jumped right in! [Breath and laughter together].  
Let's start with the beginning details again:

D: My name is **Danielle Bailey Lash, and I'm 40 years old.**  
**Lived here 27 years.**

First here in Baileytown, where we're at now.  
And then I moved to the area they called Dicktown,  
and then now, where my house is, Pine Hall Rd, in 2005.

### 5. Homes near coal ash waste—Any notification?

M: And when you moved in there, did you know anything about [your home] being near the station—did anybody say anything?

D: Well, I knew *exactly* where it was,  
because the people we bought the house from—they were *friends!*  
And they were going through a divorce,  
and they were just like: “Just pay off what we owe.”  
And we were like... **this is a great deal, yes!**  
And we moved in—and later, now that we've lived there—I **made the connection.**  
I was like, *this is kind of strange,*  
that the man who owned the house before them,  
*he had cancer.*  
Then, the couple that *bought* the house  
she had some **GBS**—some type-a *weird* syndrome where it kinda like crippled  
her, just *out of the blue,*  
she was a perfectly healthy, normal woman,  
all-the-sudden got it.  
Then her *husband* started having issues with his **prostate.**  
Then *I* move in—[laughter, short] that was in 2005, then in 2010,  
I find out I have **brain cancer.**

So.

At first we kinda **joked** like: **is the house cursed?**  
But *now* we're like, “It's not that it's *cursed*...it's *um,* **by a steam station.**”

Because, It never occurred to me to do any research, like  
“*Oh if you live next to a power plant...*” [nice voice]  
...and there's so much *information.*

Caroline had given me information, and she was like, “Um, do you know if you live within nine miles of a power plant, you're at a *higher risk* of getting all these various illnesses?”

And I was like: “No. I don't know that.

**Why don't I know that??**

Why don't people just *know that?*”

And she was like, “Well, you have to do your *research!*” [loving voice]  
 And I was like —**ooouuh.**  
 I guess, we just don’t *do* any **research?**  
 I don’t know what is *wrong with us* in this community [laughter].

M: Well, people just think that, like you said, “We’re living in America...”

D: *Yeah!* Why would, why would you think—  
 OKAY maybe NOW you would.

**But back-in-the-day *why* would think that something would be wrong with your water?**  
 And even like, we would **joke** with people in Winston like,  
 Oh we don’t drink that ***city water*** [soft laugh]  
 You know because it would have a little-bit different taste from our *good well water*  
*[lots of laughter]*

M: Yeah, well water, it does taste good! I grew up on well water .... [laughter together]  
 ...if it’s not poison, then it’s good!

D: Right, yeah! Good—Minus the Radon and stuff. [silence]

M: I think often people just assume that their rights will be protected.

D: Yeah, it *never occurred* [softer voice] ...to me.

M: Like you wouldn’t have to do *research*, houses just wouldn’t be allowed to be somewhere where the water would be poisoned?

D: Right—I mean you *would assume that.*  
**I always thought** there’d be **some type of law—**  
 and that **there’d be agencies** that, **kinda protect you from**  
**people putting up, you know, anything that would *hurt* you.**

## 6. Intergenerational implications

M: Then how has your view changed on that?

Uh, *now*, I sorta feel

like: **You. Have To. Protect Yourself.**

You sorta have to do your **own** research, unfortunately, and **since I’m a mother**  
**it’s now my obligation and my responsibility to protect my children.** [matter of fact].

Because I have little pieces of property all over Walnut Cove. Now.

Like, things that I bought when I *first* moved here,

I have property in Baileytown, that house over there, and I have a piece of property *in*  
 Dicktown near The *Only* Black Park [laughter]

—is that, is all this property *worthless*?

Because now it's in our air, **air is polluted**,  
and our **water is polluted**—

So I feel **robbed**. [matter of fact speech, then sadness only in the pause that follows].

And the intention of *buying all that property* was

“I want to **have something for my children, like every one else does.**”

[silence, pause]

And that, I'm gonna stay focused and try to do the research now,  
and try to go to **every single meeting there is**—  
and when there's something about it, I *read it*, now. [silence]



Image is a still from this Appalachian Voices video about illnesses near the Belews Creek plant—

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=rraUoadqr8o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rraUoadqr8o). See *Facing South's*

“N.C. produces flawed study to dismiss cancer-cluster fears near Duke Energy coal plants.”

[<http://www.southernstudies.org/2016/05/nc-produces-flawed-study-to-dismiss-cancer-cluster.html>]

*Sue Sturgis*: “Danielle Bailey-Lash does not smoke or drink but was diagnosed with a Stage 3 brain tumor at age 35. She worries that the pollution from Duke Energy's Belews Creeks coal-fired power plant near her home in Stokes County, North Carolina, was behind her illness and the unusual number of cancers in her neighbors — a connection that the state has tried to dismiss with a flawed cancer-cluster study. Also see The Ecologist's “Coal Ash: America's multi-billion ton toxic legacy” (UK)

featuring Danielle

## 7. Health Issues

M: Because this is for the purposes ultimately of a Civil Rights investigation, to look at the patterns over time, how do you identify racially?

D: I'm Black.

M: Are there health issues with you personally, or with your neighbors?



D: **Well, for me. Brain Cancer.** Stage 3 Astrocytoma.

When I found out, that was in 2010.

And they **originally** gave me a

***strange expiration date***

of: I could live *three to six months*,

OR if there was a miracle, I would live thirty years.

So: I'm going for the miracle of course! [laughter]

M: Yes!

D: Because, that was back in 2010, and I feel great now.

M: You're a miracle woman.

D: I am!

And, I'm officially in *remission* now—the only issue is,  
**my skull is not in yet.**

Because they had left it out. [matter of fact]

Because they told me that when you have,

a **stage 3 Astrocytoma**, that those same cells will build up and cause another tumor  
....and you'll have to keep going in and removing the tumor.

So I have like a—[showing the open skull scar on the side of her head]—

I'm gonna show it to you again—

I know you saw it in the video—but it looks a lot *better* now!

Than how it looked before.

[laughter] It was *so gross in that video*.

My daughter's always like [“Mooom” eye roll]: “I can't believe you *showed* that!!”

And I'm like “**I'm proud of this! I'm alive!**” [laughter]

But, um, I had like another *scare*. Right after that.

So it happened in May of 2010, but then in September of 2010

—I have an **MRI** every single month,

which is ***un-believ-ably expensive*** [laughter]—

They um, said I had another tumor,

but there wasn't one in there, I had a brain infection from my first surgery.

M: So many complications with this stuff. [...] Within this conversation around illness, did you notice other illnesses among your neighbors when you were living over on Pine Hall, or any other areas?

D: Well, yeah, there's um—let's see [...] down the street, **right across** the street.

We have a neighbor, a woman, her name's Jan, and her *dad* has **cancer**.

Then her *children* were born with all these **deformities**.

And if you go *on down* the street, *around* the corner,

...there's like **a little boy who had a brain tumor**.

It was just ***real... strange*** that so many people have **cancer right there**.

But nobody wants to *talk about* that they have cancer.

And then if you go on down the street, there's an older woman, she has **cancer**.  
 Then some of my friends, who actually live *in* the Walnut Tree—  
 We're all around the same age, they—um—have like **neurological** problems, **tumors**,  
**lots of breast cancer**.

It's a **lot of sickness** for it to be such a small community [overall].  
 Because my oncologist has treated like *five* people from this area [small street].  
 That seems like a **lot** for such a small town.  
 We're all like—"Oh do you go to Dr. \_\_\_\_\_? Yep! That's my doctor." [laughter]

But nobody really *likes* to talk about it.

But what will *happen* is, when you go to all these little **cookouts** around here—  
 because we go to **everybody's funeral**  
 we go to **everybody's wedding**  
 we go to **everybody's little cookout**  
 'cause it's **country** [laughter]

That's when you hear about, "Oh, **so and so has cancer**"  
 it's just cancer, cancer, *cancer*, **so many people with cancer**.

I have even started to *pass out these little flyers* and stuff, that um, Appalachian Voices had given me—

Well we were **so behind** on knowing, I guess, what **can happen**  
 when you live behind a power station [laughter] they made these really awesome  
 diagrams: "Well, **this** is caused by this metal. This is caused by this, this is cause  
**by that.**"

So I was like—"Don't you guys see, that you **probably** didn't just  
 start having problems with your *liver* because of just living here,  
 in beautiful, little country Walnut Cove?"

It had to be *something*.  
 People would be like, "Well, *yeah...*"

Then the older people would be like,  
 "...**Well** I do remember, when we would see **black ash**  
**all over our rooves, and ... cars,**" And I was thinking,  
 "All this was going on back then?" Finally, *now*,  
 some of the older people, are finally telling this,  
 how it was, even back in the 70s til now [with coal ash storage and fly ash]—  
 it's been a *health* problem for a **long time**.

[laughter] And it probably would explain some of these **weird things** that people say they  
 died from—

like people will say, "Oh...so and so died from ...*a bad cough*."  
 ....and I'm like "People *don't die* from **bad coughs!** [laughter]  
 What are you guys **talkin'** about?" [laughter]

People are like, "**Oh well around here, it's always been that way.**"

What would *really* help is if we could get some of the older people to talk more, like how **Mrs. Brown**, had that little notebook....

Yeah, it was just a *notebook* that she used to bring to the meetings.

She was like, “I’ve been keepin’ a *list* for *years* now”

[in Mrs. Brown’s sweet voice, laughter]

“Of *everyone* that died, and what they died *from*. ”

And I was like “That’s...*awesome*. ”

## 8. Certainty and uncertainty—Illness as a shock

M: So what has your relationship, your experience with illness and brain cancer as a young woman done to your perspective about coal ash?

**I totally, am 100% sure now.**

Because I —it’s kind of um—I **didn’t drink or smoke.**

**Never had to party.**

So I was a little—you know, **not** that I’m *better* than anybody—but **why** would I, why would I get **anything like brain cancer?**

So um, it’s so *rare*.

I’m livin’ here *in* the country—in my so-called “clean air and clean water.”

So, now I’m *positive* that it had to have been from the power plant.

Because there’s **nothing else around me** that could have been *anything* that was polluting my body. Or toxic.

So now there *is* actually research.

Which...has always been around **evidently**...but like I said, I *admit*,

I wasn’t *readin’* it...yet, but that *confirms* it.

**So now I’m just wondering like,**

**“Well why don’t they *care* that they’re hurting us?”**

And everyone’s like, “Well *Danielle*, it’s about *mo-ney*...just *making money*...”

But it’s like Mrs. Brown used to say—“**At what *cost* are they making money?**

At what *cost* is all of this?”

**And it’s our *own lives*.**

And surely, a *small* little town like this, [dog barks in background] there’s nothing, they’re aren’t any other power plants or anything like that that could make us sick.

So now...when you see those little smokestacks. It’s like we **joke** about it,

“Oh I’m glad we don’t live in the city with all that *pollution!*”

...**Well you *do* live in pollution.**

They're shootin' it **right up** above our house.  
Now we're *playing in the water*, and in our soil, like "big dummies"...

..McKinley Warren, he told me that the train used to go *behind* our house. Like, there's no train tracks anymore, but a train used to go behind there, *carrying* something.  
And I think back then, people weren't real *inquisitive* or curious.  
So they never asked, "Well what is *on* that [laughter] **train**?"

M: Right. Or, perhaps...trusting? Trusting, of, "Oh! That's just a business..."

D: Yeah, I think so. And like McKinley said, Duke Energy gave *so many* people *jobs* around here. And paid well. Or what *we* consider well, for the country.  
That you really just *love* Duke Energy, **at the time**.

And now it's just... still, it's back to what Mrs. Brown says. **At what cost?**  
And I'm really just 100% sure.

And if I'm at the point where if I *knew* how to, what the *next step* would be to just say,  
**"Hey, you guys are the reason  
that I can't live in that house,  
I can't use my water,  
....so, relocate me.**  
Find me some place to live, where I won't be close to you guys..."

Since they're *adamant* of course, that they're **not** causing any type of pollution.

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### 9. Accountability—For Duke Energy, For Governments, For Parents?

M: Why do you think that is, that they're so adamant that they're not causing pollution?

D: Becasue **they** have their **own scientists**,  
and staff working for them, that probably can *word things*.  
And also, around here, where all of us aren't **as educated**  
as whoever's on payroll at Duke Energy—  
once they start throwing around some of those scientific words,  
some of us are just like, "OH. Okay... **Well.**"  
So luckily we have people from Appalachian Voices that come around here,  
and like, some of those people are scientists that can *explain* things to us.

M: How does that change your perspective to have such a pattern of illnesses [as you've described]?

**Well, it makes me feel like a horrible parent.  
That I had my children living there. All this time.**

**And that it makes me afraid.**

Actually. I constantly am like, whenever there's any sneeze or ache that my children have, I'm like, "Well, well let's go get it *checked* out. [laughter]"  
So now, I just wouldn't put anything  
*past* Duke Energy, at this point.

**And I'm not gonna risk my children's lives.**

So, I can't help that I was "dumb" before.  
...But **now that I know**, what type of parent would I be?  
To, to **allow** my children to **be** around that.  
...And I understand that **not everyone** can move **away** from there,  
**because they have nowhere to go.**

But since I *did* have somewhere, I'm like "I can move back into my Mom's old house...  
Stay in my *old bedroom*...me and my daughter share my old bedroom..."

But she [Danielle's daughter] **understands now**,  
whereas before she was kinda like, "We're gonna share a *bedroom*?"  
She just turned 14 so...

M: Right, right! But you're pretty awesome right? [laughter together]

D: But my son, he's away at college now. [vegetables being washed in background]  
But just like, where he's in college, and he's **exposed to people who are aware  
of more than just Walnut Cove...**

And that, there are some of his classes that *expose*  
some of the things that unfortunately the *government* has done...  
He's more, he **believes** that it **is** possible for **government**, and **big companies**  
**to keep stuff away from us**, like they have done.

Whereas before, I was kinda *naïve*, like "***They're not gonna do that.***  
That's in the *old days* that they did stuff *like that*!"

Well, I always see so many other activists, and journalists, it feels like people are constantly  
*snoopin'* and *lookin'* for things...

So I thought that people would be **snoopin' and lookin' for this**  
if  
there was **something wrong...**

...And come to find out **they were.**

...Where just, we weren't *receiving* their information here.

M: I'm really struck by you taking it on yourself. Which is a really human thing to do. But.  
Actually it's *nothing* about your parenting. I just wanna reflect that back to you [laughter  
together D: Yeah].

What would you *shift*—where should the responsibility lie? Rather than each individual who's  
just living in their home [D: Right] and just trying to live in a clean place? [D: Right]

D: Well. I think it would have *started*—and I don't know if politics really work this way—

It seems like the **people that we elected** to *manage* our town,  
 and make the *decisions*,  
 it seems like **they should've been** like, well  
 “**We don't want that here, destroying our community.**”  
 And I don't know why they *would*...unless they just don't care because,  
 none of those elected officials actually live within nine miles of the power plant.

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#### 10. Voting, socioeconomic status, and Decisions to place coal ash waste

M: You spoke about voting, what is the relationship—and I know you're not in Walnut Tree—but also Baileytown, both of those have not been annexed into Walnut Cove proper. [D: Mm hm]. And those are both predominantly Black communities. [D: They are.] What's going on with these two sides of the town *not* incorporated into the political body that's making the decisions?

D: Now. It seems intentional.  
 Like well—those-people don't have a *voice anyway*  
 and they're **not the most “valuable people”** in the community...  
 and they prob-ly felt like, they won't *know*, they won't *care*,  
 and **we can do whatever-we-want**.

Like, I was trying-to explain to my daughter,  
**The Entire Community**  
 would be like: “Youuu are **not** puttin up a *strip club* in Walnut Cove!”  
 We are SO CORNY here.  
 “*You are not puttin' up a strip-club here in Ourrr Town.*”

It's because we **know how that would affect the community**, and **what it looks like**.  
 We would ***immediately protest***  
 but because we were um — ignorant — unfortunately, ***about Duke Energy***,  
 and *what they were doin'* we didn't even *know* to protest...

and I guess that's **where they know how to pick**  
 like for here—they wouldn't go to *Stratford Road*  
 where all-the Doctors and Dentists happen to live

And say “We're Gonna Put a Duke Energy Plant Right Here.”  
 Because *those* people would be like “*Well First of All.*” [more nasally voice]

“My cousin is the **so-n-so of such-n-such**,”  
 and they might be share-holders in *Duke Energy*  
 ...*and* they also have the education that they've probably read up on somethin'  
 that says, “Oh, no, I already know that power plants cause health issues.”

But we're sittin' here like

OH  
they said *jobs are comin'*—and we just run with-that: “*Jobs!*”

But now it's—**it's intentional.**

It's like, *all* the other places that have power plants that are going through this—  
sometimes just poor *white* communities [in addition to communities that are people of color],  
but *poor* and like, *less educated*.

Just country people—just *plain old country people!* [loving voice]  
You know, our expectations are so low I guess, compared to other people's.

Where they [more affluent people] would be like, “Well, we're not gonna have all that *traffic*  
going through [from industry], we're **not** gonna have **this and that**” [more nasally voice]

Where ***we're*** just like—“Well, they brought jobs. And we like the *pretty lake*.”  
You know—just so simple. [laughter]

### 11. Getting others to care—Personal purpose and facing unjust cancers

D: I think, ***once it's personal***, then you *really* care about it.  
Whereas if things don't directly affect you, you don't really care.  
You just are like “Well, I hate that *for them*....”  
Well now, **I'm one of them.**

And you want the other people to see—because I really thought,  
like originally when I got cancer I was like,  
“Oh, um, God took his hands off me for a **minute**,  
so that I could **see** that I need him.  
And then he's gonna **use me for something good!**”

So ***all*** this time I was thinking I was gonna get people *saved*...

And when I started going to these **meetings** [on coal ash], I was like,  
“*Oh*. This is so I can go around to **let people see the face. Of a normal person.**”

Like if **Duke Energy** was like, “**Well, you smoked!**” [deeper voice]  
“**Nope**, I never smoked ***anything*** in my entire life!  
I don't drink, I don't party.  
Never worked in a *coal mine* or anything like”—[laughter]—I don't know,  
I don't know what they would try-to-say.

...**This shouldn't really happen to me.** I'm not your typical person who would get

*stage 3 brain cancer.* So I would be able to say,  
**“No, if this could happen to *me*, this could happen to *you*.**  
 I’m just a *regular average person*. And we need to **stand up**  
**and get Duke Energy out of our neighborhood.”**

But. A lot of people felt like since it hadn’t happened to them personally,  
 then it just didn’t  
 affect them.

So *now* when I talk to people, I’m more like,  
 “Well your *children* are gonna have to live here.  
 After you *die*...don’t you want *them* to have clean air and water?”  
 And a lot of the older people—at least they care about their grandkids.  
 And if their grandkids have clean air and water. [glasses clinking in background from her mom]  
 But I *never* thought that **this would be a fight that we would have to fight.**

## 12. Civil rights—Never thought we’d have to fight this

D: Like I thought that *after*—you hear people **talk about Civil Rights**,  
 and I was like, “Well we have nothin’ really left to *fight about* ... ***Well everything’s done!***”  
 But *now* it’s just like:  
 it seems like it’s just gotten *out* of control.

Well, I think because *this* particular Black community,  
 Politically [...] We never take the time to *really*  
**make our representatives represent us.**

We just go along with “Ohp, they have our best interests at heart!” We’re **too** trusting.  
 We’re not *aware* of what’s going on **outside** of Walnut Cove.

**And I think that Duke Energy knows that.**  
**I feel like they personally have a map.**

And the map probably is like, “**Well, this is a low income predominantly Black neighborhood. ... We could put it here. They won’t even know.**”

Now, I’m **sure** that they don’t say it just **plain** *that* way,  
**but** I’m sure they probably have like little *acronyms* for like,  
**“PBCPH: Poor Black Community, Put Here.”** [laughter]

M: Do you think that the voting rights of people in these two areas that have not been annexed  
 by the town has anything to do with the fact that they aren’t attending meetings?

D: For instance [...] the same way the news showed up in Walnut Cove. Just—for the *first time*.  
 Ever. **The news is here.** [from fracking issues in a town already affected by coal ash]  
 It’s like once you start making some noise—  
 [...] Get your voice **out there**, then *somebody will listen*.



I always think about the Walnut Tree.

There's always been this weird thing about their water.

They can't *wash their clothes with their water...*

*And* they've never been drinking their water.

But I just always thought, "Oh it's...it's something to do with city water..."

You know, *we* didn't know. And I guess **because it's *always* been that way**, you kinda *work around it*.

But now I think they're kinda getting to the point where they're like

**"Enough's enough."**

And even though that community is not "desirable" to non-Blacks

and people who have a little bit more money—

**that's their *homes*.**

They're **proud** of their homes, and they **take good care** of their little tiny homes! And **it's theirs**...and there's been like *grandmas* that have passed those houses on to their children, and those children are getting ready to pass them on to their children...

So. We **care** about our little small community.

They're not big **fancy** homes, but they're **our** homes.

### 13. Country values—Who's committing crimes?

D: Yeah, but our little **small town values** are **good**.

M: This community is what most people, if they get some sense, strive for. So to have this bad surprise...is a shock and an injustice.

D: It is. Last night I was telling my children, it's like a *tradeoff*.

We don't have um, the movie theaters here and malls. But before we'd be like, oh well there's no *crime*, we've got the *lake*. *There's no pollution*.

...and so now it's sorta like:

**Welllll, OOOOkay.**

You're taking away some of the *benefits*—well, what we **thought** were benefits of living in the country—*clean air, clean water*, no crime. And everybody just gets *along*...

I feel like it *is* [a crime]...!

Because I truly feel like I was almost *scammed* ...**why** would I buy a property around here, if my *children* aren't gonna be able to live around here, if it keeps *going* this way...

I would tell them [people in other communities]

that they don't want to **wait** until they are sick until their children are sick, or someone is sick that they **care** about.

If you can prevent this from spilling over to your community  
or your neighborhood—or from *hurting* anyone that you care about.  
Then get involved now!

This is ***our air, our water***, it's not ***the government's air***,  
***...it's not Duke Energy's air and water...***

They're basically...***stealing OUR water, and our air***.  
Why can't I *use the water in my house*?

Even...the **worst** neighborhoods have **water**!

And all these little *commercials* about going other places  
to help other countries—and now I'm sitting here like *maybe we need to make a commercial!*

[laughter] ***Someone come help us! Save our water!*** [laughter]

We can have our kids running around barefoot too.... “We need water here!” [laughter]  
“I can't keep buying water at the grocery store!” [laughter]

And it's so common now:

....at Food Lion, and Ingles they don't even **look at me crazy anymore**.

Where before they'd be like, ***“How thirsty IS this woman?”***

But now, it's just—they would be just, ***“Ok, she's gotta get her weekly water...”***

[...] Well, I buy everything on sale [laughter]

I'm a *sales geek* [laughter]. So it was probably like \$45 dollars a week. Anyway—but it  
*adds up*—I know you're probably like, “Well that's not bad!” But for me, it's like a **bill**.  
After you add it up for the month...

Like I still pick up the water for my **husband**...

M: That's a lot, for your water!

D: Yeah, cause I took it seriously when they said “Do not drink or cook with it”

So I was like, “Well can't make any Kool-Aid or **sweet tea** with it...”

[laughter] ***And we're in the country so we have to have sweet tea!*** [laughter]

M: Mm hm, I know it!

D: Or even just like boiling little instant noodles for my daughter and stuff,  
and I'll make her and *use* the water— then our pets too.

You know, if ***we're*** not supposed to, then now our dogs have to drink bottled water too.

And some of our neighbors were like “Are you giving your dogs bottled...??”

And I was like “Well **how am I gonna explain it to my daughter if...**

***the dog just falls over*** [laughter]!”

Then the vet down here, she came down here and she noticed there was like a *huge*  
increase in **bladder cancer** in the animals...

So um, that's when I was really like ***“Eeeuuuw. Maybe I should definitely give...”***

That's when I was like oh my gosh  
 my daughter would *die* if her dog...  
 and we're not in a position where like, if our dog had cancer, that we would be like,  
 "Well let's get it...treated..." ... You know, I hate saying that.

M: As a patient facing cancer, do you ever want others to consider, "Well *why are people getting cancers?*"

D: Mm HM. That's **all I want to know...!**

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#### 14. Decisions about where to place toxics: Community effects and strengths

M: What is the effect on the Walnut Cove area as a place, from decisions to put toxics here?

Well **surprisingly** it's now made the community **stronger**.

As far as the Black community—it seems there's a lot of *non-Blacks*  
 that are like, "**Well this is wrong!**"

And they're not *concerned* with Black or white,  
 they're just like "This is wrong, **no one** should be taken advantage of."

And *right now*—we feel like we're being taken advantage of.

And a lot of people *hate to admit that*  
 because when you have to admit that you were taken advantage of—it's kind of like  
 "You were too 'dumb' to protect yourself..." [deeper voice]  
 But *sometimes* the people [making these decisions] are just a little bit too *savvy*  
 and...they were **sneaky**  
 ...I feel like... and took advantage of us.  
 Where I was sittin' there like,  
 "How did I not know this was happening,  
 and I was going to these MEETINGS!" [laughter]

I think that for this community it is—you don't **always** want to look like the *underdogs*.

Sometimes we wanna feel like, "***We've got our acts together..!***"

We're, you know, ***we're upstanding citizens, taxpaying citizens,***  
***we're homeowners...***"

And here we are it feels like, ***Duke Energy*** was like,

"Aaaaeeh, those 'dummies' won't even know..."

They probably felt like "Oh, they won't even care!"

And you know **Duke Energy**, even though they're *here*,

they're *so disconnected from our community*.  
 ...That they have no idea that we could *pull it together*.  
 And that we could *find a voice* and say, "You know, we're not going to *take this!*"

And so I'm *hoping* that **from now on** when they make decisions, that they're gonna be like,  
 "Well, you know what, *those people* are gonna put up **such a fight**,  
 let's not put it here..."

But the thing like, I guess 'cause we're just so country and laid back  
 that we're like, "Well **we** don't want it to happen **anywhere!**"

So now [laughter], so we say—

"Well, if we get it out of *here*...how do we make it *not happen somewhere else?*  
 Instead of "We don't want them to dump it here...they can dump it at such and such."  
 And we're *still not satisfied*. We're like,  
 "Well, we don't want them to dump coal ash *anywhere*.  
*Can't they not dump it?* Can't they **not dump it** anywhere?"

M: Figure out another solution?

D: [...] We don't wanna *hurt* anybody else *either*.

Yeah, 'cause that just—what would we do, if we lived somewhere else?  
 You know they could say, "Well we got it out of the Black community.

Now **let's put it in some other community** where there's a whole bunch of immigrants  
 that don't speak any English, and can't read...we're gonna dump it there."

...You're **still taking advantage**. It's like you're *trying* to find **the weakest link**.

### 15. Huge shift in the community—Communicating for change

There's been a **huge shift**. It's like, "*Well, times have changed!*"  
 I'm imagining that the Mothers of Our Church are like "*Frackin!*" You know [laughter]  
 "What are y'all *talkin* about?" [laughter] Thinking that's a *dirty word* or something [laughter]  
*But* now they [elders] will say, "*Well, people be gettin' sick from those chemicals...*"  
 ...So they're getting the concepts.

And we don't necessarily use the same *terminology*.  
 Like probably if you had to get up and give a speech...

Now—what *happens* from those chemicals that she [the scientist] was talkin' about! ***That would be me.*** "And here's what *happens!*"

M: All of it's important. ...And you're *connecting it*, and I think that's the most important—  
 you're *communicating it* from a result of your experiences.

D: And I thank God that I'm *alive* to **communicate it**.

And I think even of Mrs. Brown, Tracey's mom when she died [last year at 62].

It took a lot—like I told you, the entire town goes to someone's funeral—

so there were a lot of conversations that got started then.

At the funeral, during the viewing.

Because everybody was like, "Well who are those *white* folks?" [short laughter]

You know, thinking that they were politicians or...

I was like, "No, those are the people that came, originally, to tell me.

—That it's a **good chance that Duke Energy's polluting the air and the water.**"

...And that's how **I** got cancer. And that's how all my **neighbors** have cancer.

And how people in the **Walnut Tree** have cancer...

And now here's Mrs. Brown—she's suffered with all these crazy ailments—

her doctors were like, "We don't know *what it is*..." That's the scariest thing-in-the-world.

I'd rather I got *cancer* than for someone to say "I don't know *what's* wrong with you!"

So, she, **she didn't die in vain**.

Because there was a whole lot of conversation started *just* at her funeral.

M: I get goosebumps.

D: Well, I want Tracey to know that too.

*That her mother's death was not in vain.*

Because it started some conversations. And people **trust** her.

Now *they* are connecting the dots. "Oh, I see what you were talking about!"

## 16. Fracking, coal ash—Right to Know

M: What are your thoughts on a relationship between coal ash and fracking?

D: Um, I definitely think that they have a relationship **now**.

Whenever I hear someone talk to me about coal ash,

I was so focused on **just** the coal ash pond,

and how they were explaining how the ash came downstream,

and how it's **definitely in my water**,

and then of course I get my water tested, and there's Radon in my water.

But now with the fracking, I *know* that it's connected.

And it all makes *sense* now.

Sometimes I feel like **we just didn't hear about it** [fracking].

Or maybe we're *watching the wrong news channels?*—*I don't know*.

[...] Maybe that would maybe explain why **my oncologist** has "**no opinion**."

“Can you just tell me *your opinion?*

*Like, do you think I got cancer, because I have Duke Energy **right** down the street?”*

And he was like, “Hm, well I can’t really **talk** about that...”

And I was like, “Can you just tell me when we’re not in the hospital. Like can you just tell me when we’re *out...like would you **live by where I live?***”

And he was like, “Well you know, I’ve heard.” [crisp voice]

And he’s normally good, like, “Do you wanna do this type of chemotherapy, do wanna do this?” Like I always put it on him, “Well what would you tell your wife, or your sister or your mom?”

And I’m like, “Well then that’s what I want. Whatever you would do for the person you love the most, that’s what I want you to do for *me!*”

And always it works.

But when I ask him that question, how does he feel about **how** I got cancer?

And he’s just always kinda—he **shies away** from it.

But my nutritionist out there, she believes that cancer is directly related to um, toxic chemicals.

And so, I always play around with her too, and say “What do *you* think about the power plant?”

And she’s like, “Well, *I don’t know...* I do know that it’s related to *toxic chemicals...*”

But they would never just give me **their personal opinion**.

So maybe that’s [the case] for them too.

Like she would tell me “Don’t”—and I told *everyone* around here, and they looked at me like, “**What?**”—she told me “Don’t eat any vegetables that come out of an aluminum can.”

So I said, “Well why don’t you tell the **whole world that?**”

I’m can-free now. I’m like “Nothing?” She’s like “No cans.”

So I’m like “Well **why aren’t you tellin’ people that?**”

And she’s like “Well we tell **cancer patients...**”

And I’m like “Well if you had told me that maybe *thirty years ago*, is there a [laughter] **chance** I wouldn’t be here?”

....And she’s like, “Wellllll, we didn’t *know that* thirty years ago...” [nice voice].

Similarly, with the coal ash—that’s so **disturbing** to think, that someone would intentionally **let us get sick** and go through *any* type of **unnecessary illness**.

That makes me... angry.

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## 17. Promise from Our Government

M: What does that anger make you want instead?

I just want there to be **some type of regulation or law**, or some type of way that

*a company can't buy off the government.*

And I'm not that good with *politics*,  
but I feel like there has to be *some* government official,  
or...**department** in the government that's like  
"Oh, we **can't be bought**. We're **totally for the people**."

Because that's what I always *thought*.

**America was like:**

**"We're for the people."**

And

***I'm people.***

***My children are people.***

***...We're people here.***

So shouldn't the **government care**  
about us???

Like

**"Hey you guys, Duke Energy:  
you're not gonna do that  
to those people!"**

Like, for me it's, we're so consumed  
about other countries.

And we're killing our own people  
right here.

It's a **slow death**. It's an **ugly death**.  
Cancer's ***not fun***.

My grandma she used to say that a lot.  
She's like "We're so worried..."

I wasn't really *receptive* to her when she  
was saying it. [laughter]

"We're so worried about feeding other kids in other countries," [elder voice]  
and doing stuff for other countries [laughter], we've got enough problems here"

And I'd always be like—"Gramma that's not nice!"—at that time, I was like,  
"...We've got a *great world* [here in the U.S.]."

At that time, when I was in high school,  
people weren't just *killing people randomly*...  
back then they had just started interracial dating...  
and I was thinking like, the world is being *so cool* and open...  
and we had our first gay cheerleader on our team...



Danielle at the Press Conference / Prayer  
Vigil in Stokes County prior to the 2016 NC  
DEQ hearing on coal ash risk classification.  
*photo: David Dalton*

so I was like, the world is *really* ...moving along.  
 So, I just thought the world was great. When I was in high school in the 90s.

So we just kind of ***take it for granted*** that life is just great.  
 We really thought we had a ***great*** life here.  
 Not ***knowing*** that we were being polluted...

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### 18. Changing cancer knowledges—Healthcare systems, and origins

M: What would different conversations about cancer, culturally, what should they look like instead?

D: Well, I think we would need to focus more on **preventing cancer**.  
 And not *just* with diet.

We just need to have **better** conversations.  
 ...I don't remember my parents talking about cancer until someone was getting diagnosed with it. And then died like a couple months later. And then they're like, "Oh, they died of cancer."

So if we could have more conversations on **how to prevent it...**  
 Conversations on how to support research...

I think we need to know *who* to give our money to.  
 As far as cancer research.

And there's a lot of organizations that try to **scam people**  
 and say they're doing research, as far as all these **walks and charities...** I would **love** if  
 the government that had some type of watch-dog that was like *these* are the people that  
 are really doing cancer research, and *these* are the people that have good results.

It seems like as advanced as the world is...  
 When I try to talk to my daughter and find an explanation...  
*Why can't we find a cure for cancer?*  
 We've got Droids and smartphones and signature homes that do everything...  
 Why can't we cure cancer?

[...] Now that we're polluting the earth—wouldn't that make sense to *some scientists*  
 that it **has to be environmentally linked somehow?** [thus deserving research and policy action]

At this point it seems like it would be **obvious**.  
 Like I'm saying, "All of us from Walnut Cove are coming to **you** Dr. \_\_\_\_\_.  
 Don't you think that's **strange** that you have so many patients from  
 the **same** little small town?

But maybe to keep his job, he can't.  
 I guess it would take someone who's just *wealthy*. Who happens to be a doctor.



To actually try to **make** that connection.

M: What types of things should or could Doctors communicate about this, government agencies communicate about this?

D: It seems like there would just be a **simple database**.

—I know Doctors-Are-Very-Busssyy

But like the same way when you go to the doctor's office  
or mine, all my doctors are connected through *Novant*, right,  
so I go to the **oncologist** and he's typin' stuff in  
my primary-healthcare-physician sees that same thing  
As Well as-the-hospital that I go to  
for my M-R-I's  
so everything's *connected*  
and it seems like it would be **connected that same way**  
*and it would be just a little box that says*  
*THEY LIVE* nine miles from a Duke Energy Plant  
— maybe not just Duke Energy, there's other power plants too,  
—and then, it should just *connect*.

So it seems like there should be a database, and I dunno,  
CDC or someone will be like, "**Wow this is a lot of people**"  
um, that have **cancer**. That all happen to live 9 miles within a power plant.  
"We need to shut that power plant down. It's causing cancer."

...**It seems that simple. To me.**

But everyrthing is always made *so comp-li-cated*  
and there's these "experts" that come on TV and say  
"Wehl *ack-tually*, the cancer could be caused by the *UM*, the cancer could be caused by,  
*you know*  
*their parents had cancer or...*" [nasally voice]

It kinda just makes you feel like well: they're always gonna-find-an-excuse,  
like a *paid expert witness* in court.

...there's always some **expert**.

...and I don't know how you **get to be the expert**, but *uhmmm*,

[pause]

That's actually something I would just like to do for Walnut Cove  
if I could get them to tell me,  
if they've *had an illness*,  
and I could let them know,  
we're not gonna tell your **job** or anything, but we need to **know**...

Because I think that would be— [sigh]

You know the thing that I think would be the most *effective* for the community.

That would...be **so powerful** if I could get the information.  
But people don't wanna tell that they were *sick*.

## 19. Health rights advocacy

M: Would you say that as a result of facing brain cancer, you've become more of a health advocate?

I think I am.

Because like the stuff that I read now—before I was just *not* concerned.

My life was just **so easy-peasy**.

Like I would do the same thing. Get up, go to work. Traffic, get there.

*Jammin' riding past Belews Lake. Go to work, do my hours, come home.*

*Put on dinner. Sit outside, we might walk across the street to the lake....*

Then *now* it's where I don't—**my skull's not on my head**.

This is a **constant reminder to me that I'm alive for a reason**.

***So I'm not taking that blessing for granted.***

I'm alive for a reason—I **don't want anyone else to have to do this**.

And I'm not a scientist, but I have *common* sense.

I just want to see **change**.

**Here, our desires for happiness are different.**

And there's nothing wrong with that.

That people want huge homes and fabulous cars, and boats and...

**We want just *clean water, clean air*, we want to be able to sit outside.**

**We like to sit outside a lot—**

**Watch the cars ride by—**

**Wave at our neighbors.**

**You know, have a cookout.**

It's just a **simple life here—and I would like to have my life back**.

...And if that doesn't happen to me, I would for my **children** to have their lives back.

My daughter **deserves** to be at home, in her room, in her bed, playing outside with her *dogs*.

Riding her four-wheelers around our property and stuff.

You know, just having a **normal life**.

And you know for *me*—isn't that a part of our **basic rights**, to have clean air and water?

[silence]

And we just need *all* the information that we can have.

And like they say *knowledge is power*, and we *didn't have the knowledge*—but now we know to **look** for the knowledge—

I'd be visiting Philly [to see family] a lot,  
and I'd just be coming back to good old Walnut Cove...and I would just feel like  
“The **government has our best interests...**!” [laughter]  
And I was like “Gosh, it took me til I turned **40** to see that the government's not really *for* us?”

[silence, long pause]

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## 20. Layers of Power and Poorer Communities

M: What are the layers of politics and power that made these decisions around coal ash and fracking happen the way they did?

D: Well I think [laughter]  
That probably they needed a community that would be less likely to fight back [sigh].  
And that would be a ... **poorer** community.  
...Cause we're... just worried about paying our **mortgages**,  
so if we're not worried about anything else...our concerns are so...different.

And that they also knew it was a community that really wouldn't have any say so.  
**They can't vote.**

Then of course there's *dollars and cents*.  
There had to have been **some** type of financial gain for *somebody*. I don't know if they were like,  
“Well, we'll pay somebody in the Town of Walnut Cove such-and-such amount of dollars to let us to do this...” And well, Duke Energy always brings up the benefits of them being here, which is *just jobs*...as far as I can see.  
But I'm sure they pay some type of tax or something.  
This is benefitting *someone* financially.

With all of our protests [recently]—Yes, We Shall Not Be Moved—It really was...  
I was **proud of us**.

M: What's going on there with majority of people saying we don't want things like fracking in the town—especially as it endangers the coal ash dam structure. But the Town still votes on it?

D: I'm not sure how that happens—because like, normally, on TV, you know, even now, where I sign all these **petitions** and stuff, you know, you get this to *change*.

I was **under the impression** that,  
once the community *sees* that we're all standing for this,  
and we're all *together* on this,

I thought they were **kinda obligated**, like,  
 “Oh, well we **can’t** do this. This is not what **the people** of our town **want!**”

But I *guess* that whatever **politics** is—**that that’s not the way it works.**

Because I really **did** think that—once you push back, that they **had** to be like

“**Well.** We better **rethink** this, and we **won’t do this**, because this is **obviously not what the community wants.**

Because how many more people would need to *be there*

for them to get the picture that **we don’t want this to be there?**

...But I guess, it’s they feel like it’s more beneficial to bring it, bring fracking all these poisonous, cancer causing chemicals, right next to the Black neighborhoods, and they’re not worried about our health... *at all*: they don’t actually live in this area.

*None* of the county commissioners live, actually **live** over here

[in the Pine Hall and Walnut Tree neighborhoods most affected by coal ash].

So of course they are like, “Ehhh, what’s tha big **dealll?**”

So I just did, I was talking to Caroline and saying:

“maybe we need to start **sending them pictures of our doctors’ billllls**  
 ...and like **my skullllll** [motion of opening up skull, lifting up hair to show scars]  
 ...and you know people’s like people’s **ga-ross wounnds and stuuuff**  
 and you know, like  
**here’s all my receipts**  
 just wanna **let you know** that this is **affecting real people.**

*You know, we are real people.*

It’s not just reading about people in New York or something, “Oh, I hate that that’s happening there!” ...*This is happening in your own neighborhood...*

Show them our **Scars...**

Maybe some of our **obituaries** and stuff, cause people were asking me, cause my mother-in-law just passed from pancreatic cancer, right?

M: So sorry to hear that.



Danielle with her friend from Walnut Cove since childhood, Caroline Rutledge Armijo  
*photo: Appalachian Voices*

D: Me, too. And that's when I thought my husband would *finally* make the connection. This is a *whole lot of cancer*...

now that **your mom has passed from cancer,**  
**your wife had cancer.**

And, he's like, I just *can't believe that they wouldn't know...*  
and he's...like, "Seems like there **ought to be a law...**

*isn't there a law that they can't pollute?"*

I'm like, "Well, there's *supposed to be a law*  
that you **can't just go around polluting stuff,**  
but **evidently they found a way around it.**"

... [nodding, "So yes"] I think that would be a great idea ...to get the full picture together.

...Obituaries, scars, wounds, maybe even real pictures of people, cause there's a lot of people in the Walnut Tree that are on dialysis and stuff like that, people walking around with the little oxygen things... that would be **really telling.**

And, especially the **children.** Cause people—even the hardest people—it tugs at their heartstrings, you know, when it's **a child** that's sick.

Cause **no child** is supposed to be sick... you know, with *cancer.* Jeess...

M: Right. There've been several cases with children...

D: There's been one around the corner from me, and he had brain cancer and its just a lot of...

M: It's not common for children to have brain cancer.

## 21. Basic Rights and Civil Rights

D: [...] Right, and doctors *normally* have that under control for you, and now **all the kids** [in areas near coal ash waste] are suffering from **serious asthma attacks** and having to get *all* these different treatments.

And so it's like the health situation is so **out of control** for this to be such an environmentally- friendly area. Like we don't *throw trash*, I don't know if you noticed, we don't litter, and we'll actually get on our kids—"You can't throw that straw wrapper out the window! What are you doing?" So that's why it's just so crazy, that we would even have *any type* of air pollution or water pollution.

Like our lakes, you **don't have to enforce it** down here...

We **respect** the environment and appreciate it, that's why it's just so *unfair.*

M: What is the role of advocacy, what does advocacy do?

D: Well, it's saying that you are **committed to making your world livable**.

It doesn't have to be—it's like now, people want **more, more, more**.  
 ....**We just want it to be livable and comfortable**.

Instead of for *your* rights alone— **we all have the right**  
 – black, white, blue, green, gay, straight, whatever –  
 we **all** have a **right to have clean air and water**.  
 That's such a basic right to me.

We're sending people to fight terrorists... so why are we hurting our *own selves*?  
 —Allowing big corporations to **take** our community... they don't *live* here,  
 so they're not being **affected** by it, but they're getting **rich** from it.

...Can't just give up without a fight.  
 Anything **worth** having is worth fighting for so... I'm going to fight for my rights,  
 my *children's rights*.

And I guess this **IS our fight**. Our parents had to **fight for civil rights**...  
 and this is one of **our** civil rights... this *is* a **civil rights issue**.  
 I have the right to have clean air and water. My babies do, grandchildren...

... We need to learn from this. This should **never** happen again. Now we should **know** that,  
**we're not gonna to be robbed of any of our rights**.

I think **probably**  
 our **great grandmothers and great grandpas** are lookin' down, like  
 “*What are you people doin'?*” *Why are you sittin' back lettin' this happen?*”

You know, they risked their lives for freedoms [...].

...**I'd like to feel that I didn't go through cancer in vain**,  
 ...and **Mrs. Brown didn't die in vain**...  
 that she **started** a conversation, she **initiated** the change with her death,  
 that people finally made a connection that **this is wrong and we've had enough**.

I'd like to be able to say that one day my children feel like “Oh, my mom was part of *that* revolution [for our rights.]” She **did** this... where I'm not a real aggressive person, I want people to be like, “She **handled that**. She made some change happen!”

M: Yes—well, we're already seeing *that*!

D: Because we're just used to being **so polite**, like “Oh, well, bless your heart. Uh huh.”  
 And **not** having an opinion. ...Yes, it's **time** for us to have an opinion.

If this could happen to us, it could happen—to anyone.  
 It's *not* going to stop here... once we stop it here, it could be coming to their neighborhood. And, everyone – **everyone** - deserves to have clean air and clean water.

## 21. Battle scars from illness to make change

D: I truly believe the reason you're *going through it* – you're not *stuck* in it – you're gonna get *through* it, is because **these are your battle scars**, so when I wear this:

with my *ugly little skull missing*, [laughter]  
 people stop and they'll **listen**, just because of that.

When I would walk around with all my hair gone, they bandaged and stapled my head, they would *listen* to anything I had to say. So, that's your *opportunity*. I think that was God's way of saying "**The mic is on, Danielle**. Spread the gospel, spread the word..."

And that's what I *feel* like... every opportunity I had people would come up to me and be like "*What happened to you?*" and I would stop:

"Let me **tell** you. I was minding my own business,  
 then all of sudden I thought I had cancer. It was brain cancer.  
 ...They gave me an expiration date, **three to six months**, and here it is,  
 ...five years later I'm still alive. Ain't God good?"

And, then they'd be like, "Are you *serious*? You had brain cancer? **How'd you get it?**"  
 And I'd **tell them**, and that would start a conversation where people would even ask—  
 And I would tell them what my beliefs are, just I *happened* to live [as many others do]  
 within 9 miles of a power plant and I felt like my air and water is polluted,  
 and I got brain cancer that way."

And that would start another conversation, where people were like "**Oh no**. When I **ride through Walnut Cove I see those smoke stacks**— I always *wondered* if that was causing any **health issues!**" So, it's *starting a conversation*. And if you *have cancer* and it's *more than likely* related to *some type of pollution*, use that as your **platform**.

And I feel like it's your *responsibility* to **help someone not have to go through that**.  
 It may be 10 years from now, but you don't want to die in **vain**,  
 you want to feel like you're living with a purpose.  
 You don't just want to be alive: **LIVE!**

## 22. Duke Energy goals—Community goals

D: [...] It is, and it's kinda awkward when Rev. John Oliver Hairston is praying.

Cause he *knew* what they were doing—  
and he would *pray* that **someone** at the **top of Duke Energy**,  
whether it's from the top **or** the bottom  
would decide that they want to *live a right life*  
because they *too* have to have a conscience—*someone* there has to have a conscience  
eventually. ...Like “I can't do this anymore.”

They're all kind of like, “This is a big secret over there”—but at some point—even people in  
prison, at some point, they feel *remorse*,  
and they'll just get saved and say I don't *want* to live this kind of life anymore.  
“The power of prayer...”

[...] Well, I feel like, um, you can't buy your way into Heaven. [pause]

There's no **price** for *admission* into [laughter] **heaven**.  
You're not gonna take all that money with you.  
And there's *nothing* more satisfying than going to bed  
knowing that you didn't harm anyone and that you're at peace...

Go to bed with no regrets so that if you were to say, “If I were to die tonight...”

And that you're, that your **family** and your **loved ones that they're proud of you**.  
So that they're not like, “Ooooooh. What are we gonna *say* at her funeral? ...She was a horrible  
person! What are we...[laughter]...”

Nothing more satisfying than *peace*...I can't even put a *price*...

[So yes...] their [Duke Energy's] *intention* should be to **provide clean energy**  
and they can *still* make money—somehow!  
Now, I'm not a financial genius, but there's GOT to-be-a-way  
to **create energy *without* harming the people that are using the energy!**

—Because if we're all *dead*, then we don't need Duke Energy [laughter]  
It seems like at some point they have to make that *connection*—

I think their **intention** should be to produce energy that's not going to harm people or animals.  
And **won't destroy** our environment.  
**We're not gonna get a second, third chance at our world. This is it.**  
Either take care of it, or we won't have earth at all.  
Just, I can't **imagine** how it would be years from now.  
Like, *this* is bad enough...  
Cause I know my **great-grandma** and stuff like that —she would have *never* thought that it was  
like this now.



You know, like how she grew up—  
 even like my husband's gramma, she's 92, she's watchin' the news that she should drink  
 aloe vera juice. She was like, "Well can you drive me to Wal-Mart, so I can get aloe vera  
 juice?" And I was like, "Well, can't we just order it?" And she was like "Well **how** you  
 gon' do that?" So I pulled up my tablet and she was like, "How you gonna **get it** from  
**there???**" She was so cute...

And so this is probably *so disappointing* to her, if she knew that

**clean water**

and **clean air**

is our ***biggest concern now***,

like when you think about how ***far*** we've come...

She was crying when Obama became President,

she was like, "I never woulda thought, in my lifetime that there would be a Black man that was  
 President!... Well that means ***anything*** could happen, huh, honey?"

And I was like—"Well, yeah...it does. It just takes a long time."

M: And it takes people who are using their God-given gifts, like you.

D: That's right! That's right.



### Shuntailya Imani Graves

**Shuntailya**, 18 years old, is an NCCU psychology and biomed student with a dream to be a cancer researcher. Granddaughter of Ada and Willie Linster (residents of Walnut Tree 1973—on), Daughter of Stacey Linster (resident of Walnut Tree 1973-1993, with many lifespan health issues, including 8 brain tumors, ovarian cancer, thyroid cancer, fibromyalgia).

Shuntailya has an electric, articulate energy. Her eyes are bright as she speaks with

fearlessness and warmth. Her love of family is palpable, and she has inherited their wry sense of humor, honesty, and poetic sensibilities. Interview at Stokes Stomp annual Arts Festival, where her grandma Ada ran a booth on a September afternoon (2015).

*S: Shuntailya Imani Graves*

*M: Marie Garlock (interviewer)*

#### 1. I'll speak on my Mother first—Health and the costs of coal ash

S: My name is **Shuntailya Graves**.

Thank you. I'm 18 years old.

My mother stayed here up until she was old enough to move [in 1993]. She lived in Virginia, and she lived in Winston-Salem. I would say until she was about 18 or 20.

M: How long have your grandparents lived here?

S: Since before I was born. Over... since my mother was born, so 42 years.

M: And is that within 5 miles of the coal ash pond? And the mounds, and the plant?

S: *Yes*. [Walnut Tree ranges between 2-3 miles from the plant].

M: What are the health issues that your family has dealt with, that you know about?

S: I'll speak on my **mother** first.

Uh, my mother was diagnosed with **ovarian cancer** at the age of 9, and was **told** that she would not live to see her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. ...But, gladly she did.

She turned 24, and she was going to have her *hysterectomy* done, but went to do her pre-op for her hysterectomy, they told her she was **pregnant with me**...! So after I was born, she had a full hysterectomy.

Then she had **thyroid cancer**, and she had **8 cancerous brain tumors**. [matter of fact, nodding head while speaking these diagnoses].

She also has **fibromyalgia**, she has a lot of **strokes and seizures** as well.

...But she is cancer-free now.

Stacy Linster.

Yes, we are **very close**! It's fantastic.

She is very **outgoing**. If you were to look at her, you would *never know* that she was that sick or that she had been that sick before. She doesn't **open up** to a lot of people about her story, because she doesn't like people to *judge* her, and to *treat her differently*, because she is **just as capable as another person** to do **anything**. But, ...if asked about her situation ...and what she's *gone through*, and what she's *overcome*: she will talk about it.

M: What do you know about healthcare access, given your family's situation?

It is *very* important.

And, I've been around it since I was born, pretty much, so, sometimes we can go to CVS and she can have Medicaid or something, but *then* they'll say **Medicaid denied her medicines**.

So, then she has to come **out-of-pocket**.

But—**all this money** to get her medicine that we don't *have*.

M: Those medicines are expensive.

S: Yeah. She has been out of work since 2006. She hasn't been able to get disability or *anything*, no help, no food stamps... *none* of that. Because they tell her she makes *too much money*. ...But she doesn't have a job, so how does she make too much money...? I'm not sure. But they were using the income from my child support, but I no longer get that *either*, but it's still no help.

...It's like when she had her *brain cancer*, before her brain cancer was gone, she used to have to get **shots in her head**!

Those shots cost **thou-sands of dollars**...

but, the **insurance doesn't cover it**...

the insurance doesn't *cover the medicine* she has to take.

My mother was taking *22 medicines 3 times a day*.

M: That's your whole day right there.

S: And, her insurance barely covered *any* of it.

So, the **struggle** growing up --- it was terr-i-ble. And it was very *hard* to go through, **but** she *always* made sure that we **had**.

## 2. Mentality of government officials to allow coal ash, and possible fracking

S: What it makes me think about [with coal ash], because that is hazardous, because it can cause cancer, I'm not gonna say it causes cancer, but it can cause cancer – with most of my family being victims of cancer. It's like, *okay*, a lot of people in this community have **health issues, breathing issues, cancer issues**, things like that

—and then they're trying to do **coal ash and fracking** and all this other stuff,

—not thinking of the **health effects** that its going to cause to the people that *stay* there.

They're just thinking about *themselves*,

but they don't *stay there*, so of course, they're not going to be impacted on.

What I believe is—I think they're looking at it like, “Is this is going to help the community?”

That's what I think they *think*—its gonna help [economically for some],

but they don't **realize while trying the help** the community,

they are **hurting** the community.

For one, with all the side effects that fracking and [existing coal ash] stuff causes, a lot of people in the Walnut Tree are elderly [with more vulnerable body systems].

I know for example, my aunt and uncle that stay beside my grandparents... my uncle has COPD, and they have had cancer as well. He has to walk around with a **breathing machine**.

Because **the air is not good**. The **water is not good**. ...I went to my grandmother's house before and turned on the water and its smells like *old eggs, or sulfur, or iron or something*... **clogging the water. It's not healthy**. They **don't even drink** the water, they have to go out and **buy** water, because they can't drink the water that's at the house.

...Yeah, and it's like you go to the restroom and you want to wash your hands, but the **water stinks**. They don't even feed the *dogs* the water that comes out of the faucet.

They won't drink it. *They won't drink it*. So what they do is get *water bottles* and fill the **dogs' bowls** up with water, because they won't drink it. The only way they will drink that water is if they don't have *anything* else... they won't drink it.

That's the only thing that I could think of: that it could be is the **economic**.

I'm not sure **why**. I have no *clue*. But that's the only thing that it could be because it ... that's the only thing that it could be... it *couldn't* be anything else.

M: Is that worth it?

S: NO! It's **not**. In my opinion it's *not*, because you're putting **families at risk** of having things that can *kill* them, and different **chemicals** in the air, in the water, basically polluting the air. Which we're not supposed to *do*. They're breathing this stuff *in* and it's **harming their bodies—but they don't have the money or the insurance or the financial ability to take care of themselves by going to the doctor**. So, that doing this is going to *decrease the population*. It's how I feel.

### 3. Doctors' notification—Health systems and health access

M: Do you think that people that are dealing with illnesses from Walnut Tree, do they tell their doctors about it? Do doctors know there are a lot of people in that area that are dealing with it?

S: I'm not sure if they know or not. I know my grandparents, cause those are the only people I talk about the doctors [with]... with their **cancer situation**, they went to the doctor. They go to the doctor to get checkups, but with a common cold or something like that they're **not going to go to the doctor**. They are not going to say "Well, our air is terrible outside. ***We can't breathe.***" They're not going to *say* that. Only if they've been **diagnosed** with something, they'll go for a yearly checkup—but other than that, they're not going to the doctor.

M: What relationship do you see, if any, between needing health access and needing all these toxic exposures to stop?

S: It's a **direct** relationship. And the reason I say that is because: —needing **health access, everybody** needs that. It's required to have health insurance now. For everyone to have it, whether it be a little bit or a lot, but you're required to have it. It's a law. So, being exposed with all these different *pollutants* and things like that is gonna **raise people's medical bills**, because they're not gonna have any other *choice* but to **go get healthcare** after being exposed to chemicals that can harm them.

One—figure out where it came from. ***Find the root of the problem.***

It's just like a tree, when you ***find the root, you can pull it up.***

Cancer is caused by many different things, whether it be things that are in nature, things that they eat, things that they breathe, or it could be hereditary. Or all mixed together. But, if we eliminate, if we *know* that certain things cause it, we can eliminate or just try to find something like a **reverse action** that **doesn't** include all the chemicals... It might

be better. Like, with the coal and all that, say they found something that could replace that, those certain chemicals that can cause cancer.

Regardless of what it is, if it can better **help their health**, than *hurt* their health, **do that**. Instead of just doing the **first thing that comes** [to mind]...

*Exactly.* And that's a big issue,  
**because that's [coal ash is] not the only way to make power. It's not.**  
 And, that way of making power being coal, is causing a lot of issues.  
 So: choose another outlet.

#### 4. Advocacy from Ill Persons

**They have to speak out.** [people who have had illness]  
 If they don't speak out, nothing will be done.  
 That's like I've always told —**a closed mouth doesn't get fed.**  
 So if you don't *say* anything, how's somebody supposed to know that you feel some type of way about it? **Speak how you feel.** But nobody, they're not paying them any mind [right now].  
 [...] So if you get enough people to **petition** and say  
 "We're against this," *something needs to be done.*  
 And if nothing is being done on a lower level, **take it to a higher level.**  
 Speak to someone else. But if you don't *say* anything, nothing will be *done*.

**Especially** if they've already been diagnosed with it [cancer], it [healthcare access and Medicaid expansion] should be a **high demand** because they're already **at risk of being re-diagnosed.**

They had went through chemo and radiation,  
 but it's not a definite that it will not come back.  
 So, I feel like, they should have [healthcare].

Right. People with disabilities get help, why isn't **cancer** considered a disability more often? It disables them from doing everyday activities. It disables their social life. Sometimes, it even hurts people's self-esteem, cognitive ability and all. So...

And I can say for my mother, she was on medicine that had her "high" like a "drowsy, here, but not here," kind of feeling. **She hated that feeling.** But that's the only thing that would help her, so...

Medical Insurance. Doctors, period. [We're] all at a high demand for that [insurance].  
**Something has to happen.** And somebody has to find a cure. And that's why I'm going to school to do what I do. I'm double-majoring in psychology and biomed. I want to be a research scientist to figure out which *genes*, and certain things *cause* certain disorders and diseases.

#### 5. Changing Cancer Culture

And if I go at the rate I'm going *now*, I have a **4.0**, if I continue to go to summer school, and make the grades that I'm making, I'll have my Ph.D. in Psychology and my M.D. by the time I'm 28 years old.

**That's my plan.**

M: You are going to do it with flying colors! [...] What do you think about research regarding whether it's the toxins in the environment or the stresses that people are under, that will ignite cancer causing genetic processes? [gene deletion or mutation increasing risk for cancer].

*Exactly.*

M: And what do you think of the people who are ill who are the ones doing the speaking, or performing their stories [for the sake of advocacy]?

S: I think it's just like a *long* time ago **when the world was segregated**... It think it's the **same thing, segregated by people with health issues and ones without**... it's the same thing.

You have to have *leaders*. You have to have **different leaders fighting** for what you believe. And if no one person stands up and *speaks* on how they feel about the situation, then nothing will be done.

M: And what do you think of the cancer campaigns, as we were speaking about them—the story they tell about “fighting cancer”?

It's not always like that. I think with people that put the **pink ribbon** on certain things that can *cause cancer*, I think they're...

I'm not **gonna say** they're *trying to trick* the people out here into **believing** that it's helping the community and the economy, but it's like **manipulating**.

It's *very* manipulative because – it's just like if I see a Mountain Dew bottle, but there's Pepsi in it.

And I'm seeing a **pink ribbon**, but the *stuff* that's created from whatever the pink ribbon is **on**, is **causing** me to **have cancer**.



Duke Energy national HQ in Charlotte, NC, lit up annually for “Breast Cancer Awareness Month.”

Breast Cancer Action identifies *pinkwashing* as: pink ribbon marketing by a company that professes to care about breast cancer while manufacturing, making, or processing a product that may significantly increase risk for breast and other cancers.

It's **contradictory** – it shouldn't be done.  
 It just shouldn't be done.  
 [e.g., Duke Energy HQ sponsoring pink anti-cancer campaigns].  
 And you can quote me on that.  
 It should ***not be done***.

It's not just... "I have it, I went to the doctor, I got chemo, and now I'm better and it's gone."  
*'It's not that.* Because the stuff, even ***after the chemo***, after the cancer is done, that you have to do, you still have to ***prevent it from coming back***.

[...] M: What is the role of people giving speeches, performances, dance, against the town passing fracking tests, in a community already dealing with longterm effects of coal ash waste?

S: That's their ***cry out***. That's their cry.  
 They're begging for help.  
 It's only so much that you can ***do***  
 in a small town like this.  
 Only so much you can do, and they're crying out.  
 That's their ***protest***.  
 But nothing is being done... nothing is being done  
 [by the Town].  
 Everybody in the neighborhood signed a petition a long time ago, even recently [against Fracking, and for town annexation to address water issues]. But ***nothing*** has been done.

M: What does this have to do with Walnut Tree being annexed, and Town voting rights?

I ***do*** believe, because it's just like somebody ***walking all over them***.  
 They're not going to get their way. It's just like voting for president – if you don't vote, your choice is probably not going to get picked. So if they ***don't vote*** on what they want for their town, their community, for them living there, then nothing is going to be done!

I'm not sure why they haven't been annexed. I'm not sure if it's because it's an elderly community... some aren't as educated, so they may not know about what can be done.  
 Exactly. And if they're not educated to know ***what they can do to change*** things, to ***vote***, to do ***anything***, it won't be done. It's called... being kept ignorant.  
 The lack of knowledge... ignorance.

But, it's just like I said earlier – this is the ***same thing as segregation***. With **health concerns, economic concerns, voting concerns, it's everything**. It's all the same.

I do [think it's all connected]. And something needs to be changed, but of course, no one is going to speak out. ...It's like they're waiting on somebody else to speak up ***first***.

M: What do you think it does when people do things like your grandma has done? To speak up at the meetings? What does that do for people to see that?



S: Some people – it *scares them* because they don't know what's going to *happen* because of her **actions**.

Some people – it *encourages them* to follow her and to speak up, too.

“*She’s right, I guess,*” somebody said. But my grandmother is not one who’s going to hold her tongue for *anybody*—and she’s going to say how she feels! Regardless of how *you* feel about it.

Exactly. She feels like the *constitution says you have freedom of speech*, so she’s gonna **speak**.

If you agree—you can agree or disagree—it doesn’t matter. She’s gonna *say* how she feels. And for *other people to see her speaking out*, it’s like, “**Okay, we can do that, too.**”

M: They’re not speaking out just so their voices can be heard, right? They’re speaking out for something bigger...

S: Right. It’s *way bigger*. It’s not selfish at all, because if they were just speaking for themselves, they would have *let it go* a long time ago when *nothing was done*...

But now it’s like, “Okay, **this is enough**

—we’re *tired* of this, we’re tired of being taken advantage of

—we’re tired of being walked over

—we’re tired of everybody doing what they want to do

—it’s **time for us to speak up.**”

There has to be a **change done, or we’re all gonna be dead.**

**Or we’re all gonna be sick.**

Or we’re all gonna be *layin’ up in the hospital not being able to pay our bills.*

Or we’re gonna have *water that we can’t drink.* Or we’re gonna *run out of resources.*

## 6. Who deserves fair treatment, Medical care?

M: Does anybody deserve that kind of treatment?

S: *No. No.* Not animals, not humans, not leaves, not *grass*... nothing.

*Nobody* deserves that. Everybody should be treated equally—

I feel like, **whoever’s in control of all of this, they should step into their shoes.**

Because if they were doing this in **their neighborhood**, causing their **water to stink**, causing **chemicals that can possibly harm them**, or **their** mother, or **their** grandmother, or **their** father, brothers or sisters, or **their** children... they wouldn’t want it there, **either**.

...What if it was **your child** or **your mother** that was staying here in this non—**not so financially great** area?

...What if your child or your mother was *staying* here – they had **no choice**, they had no **medical insurance**, they had no **health**, but they’re **breathing this stuff in**.

Or they’re growing their **food** on the **land** that the **coal** was **put upon**,

or they're drinking the **water** from the pond that the coal was in?  
 And your child got **sick**, or your mother got **sick** from this:  
 wouldn't **you** try to **stop** it?

M: What would you say to the people who are in charge of blocking the expansion of health access? Like blocking the Medicaid expansion for 500,000 people in NC?

S: Are we going to **continue to let people die**?  
*Or* are we going to help them **through it**?  
 Are we just going to **watch** them suffer? Or are we going to help them **survive**?

M: What do you know about that role of seeing people suffer and seeing people survive?

S: It's **hard**. It's really hard. Growing up as a child still not all the way an adult yet, suffering my entire life because we didn't **have**, or my mother didn't have the **insurance** that she needed or the **medical help** that **she needed**. She *could've*... if we had had the help like it should have been given, we wouldn't have suffered all the time. ...We wouldn't be living strictly off of child support. We wouldn't have to **go to ask** for *anything*. And it's hard for people that have **never been in that situation**...  
 ...If you've had **everything handed to you all your life**, you **wouldn't know**.

But, for people who **don't** just have stuff given to them, just because they don't **have** it, or you have to **work for what you have**—

Well, all my life all I've been told,  
 "You just get the **grades**, and I'll take care of everything."

...But it's **hard** seeing your mother, your grandparents, or your aunts and uncles **struggling**, going through **health issues** and ***you can't do anything about it***, because of your **age**.  
 ...It's **hard** seeing your mother struggle trying to pay bills and stuff  
 ...but can't get any help from the government, any type of financial help *at all*.  
 And you can't **do** anything about it.

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Shuntailya Imani Graves gives testimony at the US Commission on Civil Rights Hearing in Walnut Cove, NC, hosted by the North Carolina State Advisory Committee. *photo: Marie Garlock*

## 7. Speaking Out for a Better Life in America

M: And those costs are enough to bankrupt anybody.

S: Exactly. It's hard to even **try** to speak out on that...

**When you don't know who to talk to.** But then it's like, when you finally find who you need to be speaking with in regards to these type of [health insurance, healthcare] situations, you've gone through the **proper protocol** and **proper steps**, everybody gives you the **runaround**. *It shouldn't be like that.* Where I live in – **America** – the **United States**... this is supposed to be the *land of the free and the home of the brave*.

People come here to live because its supposed to be a ***better life***...

the **American dream**...

but **we're letting our people suffer**.

We're letting our people die.

It's not right.

At least, work on *helping*—and I’m not even going to say *try* to help, because a friend always told me, “Trying is another word for failure.”

So, **work on making things better.**

Don’t **say** you’re going to do something and don’t **do** it.

Or don’t say **one** thing and do **another**.

That’s like the same thing with the pink ribbon on certain things.

You’re expressing that you’re *aware* of breast cancer: be **aware** of breast cancer, but you’re **throwing the chemicals out that cause it**. So, no. **Don’t contradict yourself.** Don’t say one thing and do another. Try to **help** people, it’s the right thing to do.

M: Are there any last things you want to share?

S: The only thing I would say is – just think about it if *you were in this position*, if you were the one that was going through that.

**Just stand in our shoes for 5 seconds.**

**That’s all its gonna take to change your mind.**

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