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Socastee Interview, Participant #12, April 15, 2021

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"Flooded Afterlives Project" Interview

Participant ID: 12
Community: Rosewood/Socastee
State: SC

Interviewer: Bailie Willis
Interview date: 04/15/2021
Interview location: Zoom

For questions about this interview or research study, please contact the Primary Investigator, Dr. Jennifer Mokos, by phone (843) 349-2919 or email at jmokos@coastal.edu.

Interviewer: Let me pull my questions up. You live in the Socastee area, is that correct?

Participant: That's right.

Interviewer: And how many times have you experienced repetitive flooding in your home?

Participant: Um, we've had flooding reach our house twice. And we've had flooding cover our road so that our house isn't reachable probably six to eight times.

Interviewer: Oh, wow. When was the first time it happened and when do you think the last time it happened was?

Participant: The first time it happened was...when were the two hurricanes that happened? Florence was in 2015 and Matthew was in 2018, is that right?

Interviewer: Yes.

Participant: We might've had flooding on the road before 2015, but I can't remember for sure. So, let's say 2015. And the last time we had flooding on the road was February.

Interviewer: What do y'all do when you can't reach your house? Do you have to find a different way?

Participant: We just move out on to the road till the water is low enough that the road is passible. So, we were out of our house probably two weeks.

Interviewer: Wow.

Participant: Probably the last week of January and the first week of February this year.

Interviewer: Would you like to describe your experience more? How it impacts your family and you as an individual?

Participant: Uhm, sure. We have three kids, two of them are in school. So, that's one main reason we moved out. We can get them to and from school without having to pass through the water multiple times a day. There's some neighbors who stay and just run through it, either with their trucks...but, you know, it gets to a point where you're not really sure if it's possible. And we have a teenage driver. So we are just not willing to do that. We moved out for two weeks into a home that my parents own, not where they live, but that they own. We stayed there in the meantime. There's some expense associated with the flooding on the road, but it's also just really disruptive to everybody's schedule. It also just adds a layer of stress everything. You have to gather up everything you might need for baseball, or for the musical, or for school, or church, or clothes to wear to this thing or that thing. You take it all with you and come back if you forgot something. My youngest son has Down's Syndrome, and he receives therapy in home from four different therapists each week. And he has a sitter, so all of that has to be reconfigured and we have to say "Well, we're staying over here now". Some of their schedules have to change because they, the therapists, come here and then their next appointment is there. But if we're over here, then they have to come earlier so they can get back to their next appointment. They'll have more time to drive from our appointments to their next person. Maybe it takes twenty minutes now and it only takes ten from our normal house. All of that has to be sorted and then resorted. You know, "We're back. We're back at our house now, you can come back here." We have kind of a large property here, so all the gardens are usually ruined once it floods. The vegetable gardens, the flowers, the plants, and the grass. And then we also have about a dozen chickens. And they have to be managed and prepped for the water, and then the boats need to be tied down and everything. It's just a matter of the road some of that is more minimal. If it's a matter of water that's gonna reach our house, our house is raised. But then everything on the ground floor and garage has to be raised, adjusted or prepped for that. We had just about a foot of water after the first hurricane, Matthew. After the second one- which actually that one was really a surprise we didn't expect that it would reach the house. We really didn't prepare. You know, [we] had to cut drywall and repair all of that. And my husband went around and used cement...what are they called? Cinder blocks. And sealed it all around the house up to about two or three feet. Maybe two feet. He did a lot of work after that one. And then after Florence, is it? Everyone had so much water, the water was covering our mailbox. The boat had floated up and over our back fence and into the yard, because the water was so high.

Interviewer: Right!

Participant: We pushed it back out over the fence so when the water went down it was in the water and not in the backyard. That time we made a lot of changes to our house. All the electrical panels, light switches, and everything on the ground floor he moved to six feet high. We rebuilt with different material that's more water resistant. We moved our air conditioning unit that was on that ground floor up into the first level of our house and, we reconfigured all of that. We bought an aqua damn that was too little too late for that flood, but we did just put it up for this last round for February. Which we wouldn't have had much water in the house but almost any water is...

Interviewer: Right, right

Participant: Whether you have two inches or two feet you still have to almost do as much work to clean it up. So we made a lot of changes after that flood and we were out of our house for a couple months. Multiple months, I don't remember how many. And then we lived here while a lot of the work, repair work, was going on. In January this past [year], a

couple months ago when we were out of our house, this time around my husband said, "I don't think I can keep doing this." So, we put our house up for sale. The first of April. And we'll see if we can sell it

Interviewer: Oh, okay. So y'all are trying to move elsewhere? Somewhere else in this area or just completely?

Participant: No, in Myrtle Beach still. But away from the water. It's just become too...um, too much work to manage and emotionally, mentally just too fatiguing. It's kind of shifted the balance. Ninety-eight percent of the time it's wonderful to live right here, but that two percent of the time that it's not...it's just kind of becoming not worth it. Making it not worth it.

Interviewer: Right, how long have you lived in that house?

Participant: Ten years...eleven years? Almost eleven years.

Interviewer: Do you think it is going to sell easy with all the flooding in that area?

Participant: Um, I don't know. There's a lot of things that put it to an advantage. There's a lot of great things about it and I hope when people come they see all the fantastic things. I think it's probably gonna have to sell to someone who doesn't know about the flooding or who hasn't experienced the flooding.

Interviewer: Right.

Participant: "It's so great here! Yeah, we can handle it!" They kind of know about the flooding in abstract rather than having lived through it. So, we'll see. I don't know. Our realtor is enthusiastic; we'll just have to see.

Interviewer: Well, good luck with it! Are any of your neighbors in your community thinking about leaving? Because I'm sure they've been impacted pretty similarly.

Participant: I haven't seen anybody along the area where we live. I haven't heard from them whether they're planning to leave. But I haven't really spoken to them about it in this last little while.

Interviewer: Right. My next question, kind of a guiding question, what do you wish other people understood about you and your family's experience with flooding?

Participant: Hmm...I think a lot of people that know us understand how disruptive it is. It's expensive. I don't necessarily wish people knew that. Um...I don't know if I have a good answer for that. I think what I wish people knew is that it's avoidable. It never flooded here before like this. It's only been in the last five or six years. I feel like there's some- I think there's something that changed in the way North Carolina manages their water that is causing it to become more prevalent. And I think it's fixable. I don't think...I don't know how to fix it and it doesn't look to me like anyone else, anyone else who might know, is making any effort. So...

Interviewer: Well, that kind of goes into another question I have. What do you think can be done to better support people who are experiencing the type of flooding y'all are?

Participant: Well to support them...I think the most useful support is to manage the water in a way that this doesn't happen. Which I think goes back to either upstate South Carolina or to North Carolina and their water management. Whether it's the reservoir and damn systems or...I don't know what it is. I don't know how to manage it, but I think there must be people who do know, and it doesn't seem to be the case that it's bothering anybody. So I'm kinda at a loss for how to encourage that. We've seen a couple local things; there's that local group, the Horry County Rising, is it?

Interviewer: Yes.

Participant: We've kind of tried to watch what they're doing and learn from what they're doing, but I think the main thing...somebody knows!

Interviewer: Right!

Participant: There's water management people, infrastructure people, somebody knows how to manage this and it's not the quantity of water it's the un-regulation of the water flow that's causing it to happen. I think we have systems to manager water flow, we're just not implementing them.

Interviewer: Right, so would you kind of say that maybe local government or local water management aren't really stepping in as much as they should be...as far as helping?

Participant: Well, I don't hear any of the local people saying, "Here's this thing we can do." I see some of the efforts to help people who have flooded. I know there was a recent report about how some people can sell their property. I don't know...some government money to buy houses. You probably know more about that than me

Interviewer: We talked about it in class a good bit.

Participant: That's useful but it's not local. The water isn't coming from local. It's coming from upstate and North Carolina, then flowing through South Carolina and log jamming at Wing Out Bay. It has to be managed beyond local. It has to be managed at the state levels, I assume. So that water comes and it's so much. It races through, it just needs to be- it needs to be regulated. The water dispersal needs to be regulated. The speed of the water dispersal needs to be regulated. How much water is fine? It can even come at some level of highness. Even at some level of minimal flooding. But it just needs to be, the spigot needs to be turned so that it can flow through without causing flooding.

Interviewer: Did you ever experience flooding before moving here or have you grown up in this area?

Participant: I grew up here but no, I had never experienced flooding until 2015.

Interviewer: Alright. Is there anything else you'd like for other people to know about your circumstances or just to share?

Participant: Mmm, I think...I think one thing that is kind of not understood until you experience it is just the level of distress and destruction. I used to think "Oh, flooding like the water flows through. You know, like water from the bathtub or something". But it's not. The quality of flood water is something that I did not understand before. The dirtiness, what it contains and everything. So that was new to me. And I think to other people too. If you haven't experienced a tornado or a hurricane or something you just think "Oh, it's, you know." You don't have a sense of how bad it really is.

Interviewer: Right!

Participant: And then I think just the...like the...you know physically you're not necessarily injured by the flooding, but it's like the mental and emotional stress that comes with it. There's quite a toll that comes with damage to your home, to anybody's home, in any kind of these disasters. When your home and your things and your space is ripped apart in some way is felt more deeply than maybe someone who hasn't experienced that can quite realize.

Interviewer: Right, and especially with you having kids and everything. You want everyone to be safe, I'm sure.

Participant: You want them to be safe. I think it's really disruptive to kids to have that happen to their home. And you know, we have had damage to the lower part of our home. We haven't had our couches floating away or our mattresses soaked with floodwater like a lot of people have had. We've had a more minimal experience with it, but even the level that we've experienced is stressful and stressing, which I wouldn't have perceived it quite that way. I wouldn't have perceived it had I not gone through it.

Interviewer: Right. One of my last questions, I know you've kind of already talked about this as far as putting your house on the market and looking to move to a different area, but what is your vision for the future?

Participant: Well, I'd like to see the water regulated in a way that it stops happening. I think that's possible. If we had even any sense that was beginning to happen or people were starting to look at that, we would not necessarily look at moving. But we see this as the new normal and nobody who can make a difference is making a difference or making the effort. And so we're hoping that we can just move and not have to deal with it anymore.

Interviewer: Gotcha. That's all my kind of regular guided questions, if you wanted to share anything else or if that's kind of all you wanted to say either way. This interview has shown me a lot. We talk about this a lot in class, and we've learned about different places throughout the U.S. that's been impacted by flooding but being able to talk to somebody is really eye-opening. I've seen the flooding while I was driving and I was like "wow" and then we did this project, this community project in class, and I was pretty excited to be able to interview somebody and actually talk about it.

Participant: Well, I appreciate that. Yeah, you can imagine. I can see your room right there. Imagine coming back and like everything that's on the ground is totally ruined and destroyed and the walls are all...and our family has had less destruction than other families have had, especially in the Rosewood area and probably other areas in Conway. But when it happens on a massive scale, like house after house after house, it's just really weighty. And I do think it can be managed but I don't see those efforts being made. So, that's all that's what I have to say.

Interviewer: Alright well thank you for doing this interview and I wish you good luck with everything.

Participant: Thank you so much. You take care.

Interviewer: Oh real quick. I'm going to text you but we're sending gift cards to people who we've interviewed and so I'll just text you and ask you for your email so the research leader should send you.

Participant: Okay, perfect. Thank you so much, take care.

Interviewer: Thank you!