

# FINDING GROUND:

A STORY OF FLOODS,  
NEIGHBORS, AND NEW  
BEGINNINGS

VOLUMES 1, 2, AND 3





# FOREWORD

Every year, millions of people are displaced due to climate events. Climate hazards are reshaping our communities, and families are rethinking where they choose to live, work, play, and go to school. In response, governments are creating programs to help people move out of harm's way – from individual household “buyout” programs to community-wide relocation efforts.

Making Room for our Neighbors, an initiative led by Rebuild by Design, University of Pennsylvania Weitzman School of Design, and One Architecture & Urbanism, puts communities at the center of determining their own future, particularly when it comes to difficult conversations around relocation. Through a series of workshops and conversations with residents, faith leaders, nonprofit leaders, and agencies, our team realized we needed a new approach to introducing the topic of climate relocation.

This three-part graphic novel was born from a realization that blending storytelling and visual art, we can make these difficult conversations more approachable. Each chapter draws from real experiences and concerns voiced by residents, while also highlighting best practices that communities can advocate for within buyout programs. These stories underscore the vital role of neighbors and trusted messengers in helping communities make hard decisions, heal, and move forward.

In a time of rising waters, it's our shared stories—and our shared choices—that will shape our shared future.

## SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Jennifer Correa for sharing her family's experience with Hurricane Sandy and the NYS State post-disaster buyout program.

New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS) and the Queens Borough President's Office for co-hosting workshops with NYC interfaith & community leaders to engage on these topics.

NYS Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES) for supporting the research, outreach and engagement that informed this work.

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Johanna Lawton, & Matthijs Bouw

*PUBLISHED JULY 2025*

**REBUILD  
BY  
DESIGN**

**one architecture**  
new york city amsterdam



## ABOUT REBUILD BY DESIGN

Rebuild convenes global expertise, with regional leadership, and community stakeholders to gain a better understanding of how overlapping environmental and human-made vulnerabilities leave communities at risk. Through regional competitions, local engagements, research and policy, Rebuild by Design is reimagining the way communities find solutions for today's large-scale, complex problems by creating collaborations across communities and governments. Rebuild's core belief is that through collaboration our communities can grow stronger and better prepared to stand up to whatever challenges tomorrow brings.

## ABOUT ONE ARCHITECTURE + URBANISM

ONE Architecture & Urbanism (ONE) is an award-winning Amsterdam- and New York-based design firm that specializes in climate-adaptive urban planning and architecture. Established in 1995, the firm is known for its unique approach to addressing and resolving financial, technical, and organizational issues through design. A key area of ONE's expertise is large-scale resilience planning and infrastructure. Under the leadership of founding principal Matthijs Bouw, ONE brings a multifaceted perspective and understanding to complex, multi-actor planning processes and projects across the globe.

## ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA WEITZMAN SCHOOL OF DESIGN

The Weitzman School of Design at the University of Pennsylvania is a leading institution for architecture, landscape architecture, city planning, historic preservation, and fine arts. Known for its interdisciplinary approach and commitment to social and environmental impact, the school fosters innovation at the intersection of design and policy.

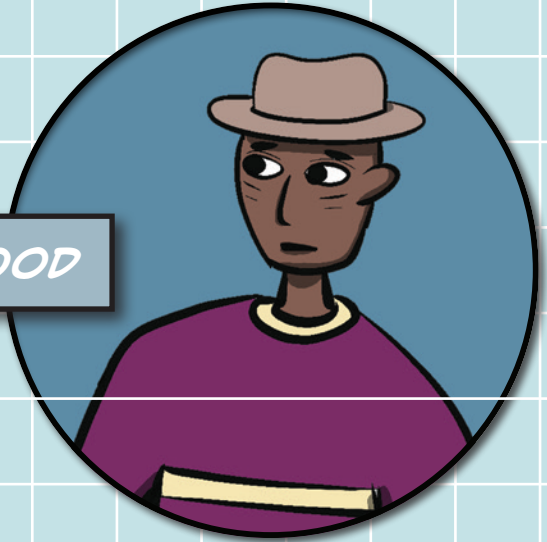


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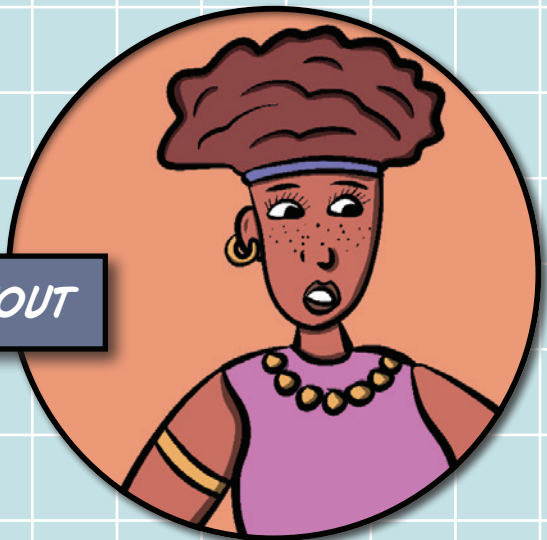
**THE COMMUNITY MEETING**

**HOSTED BY PASTOR FRANK!**

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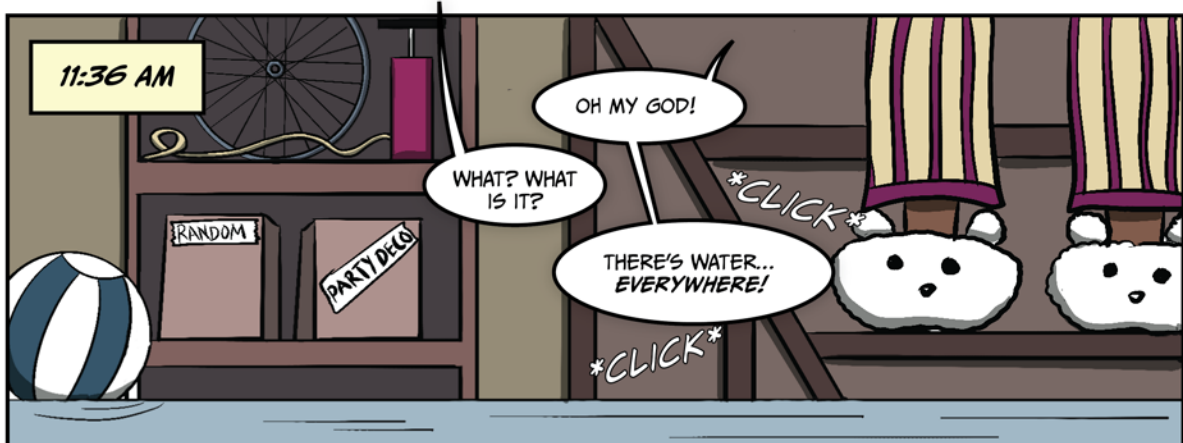


## CHAPTER 1



WHEN WE BOUGHT THE HOUSE,  
NOBODY TOLD US IT WAS GOING TO FLOOD  
THIS MUCH... TWICE IN 2 YEARS!

# ***THE FLOOD***



WE RAN FROM HOME, AND FOUND OURSELVES  
FLYING THROUGH OUR FRONT YARD...

OH NO! OUR ROOF TILES  
ARE COMING OFF!

DID YOU GRAB  
OUR BAGS?

YES! C'MON, GINA'S  
WAITING FOR US!

GUYS, WE GOTTA GO...

NOW!



THE SIGHT OF THE HIGH SCHOOL IS A WELCOME RELIEF,  
BUT WE AREN'T THE ONLY ONES SEEKING REFUGE.

P.S. 311

IS THIS WHERE WE'RE  
SUPPOSED TO GO....

ARE YOU DOING OKAY?

WE'RE HOLDING UP...

IS THERE GONNA BE  
ENOUGH ROOM?

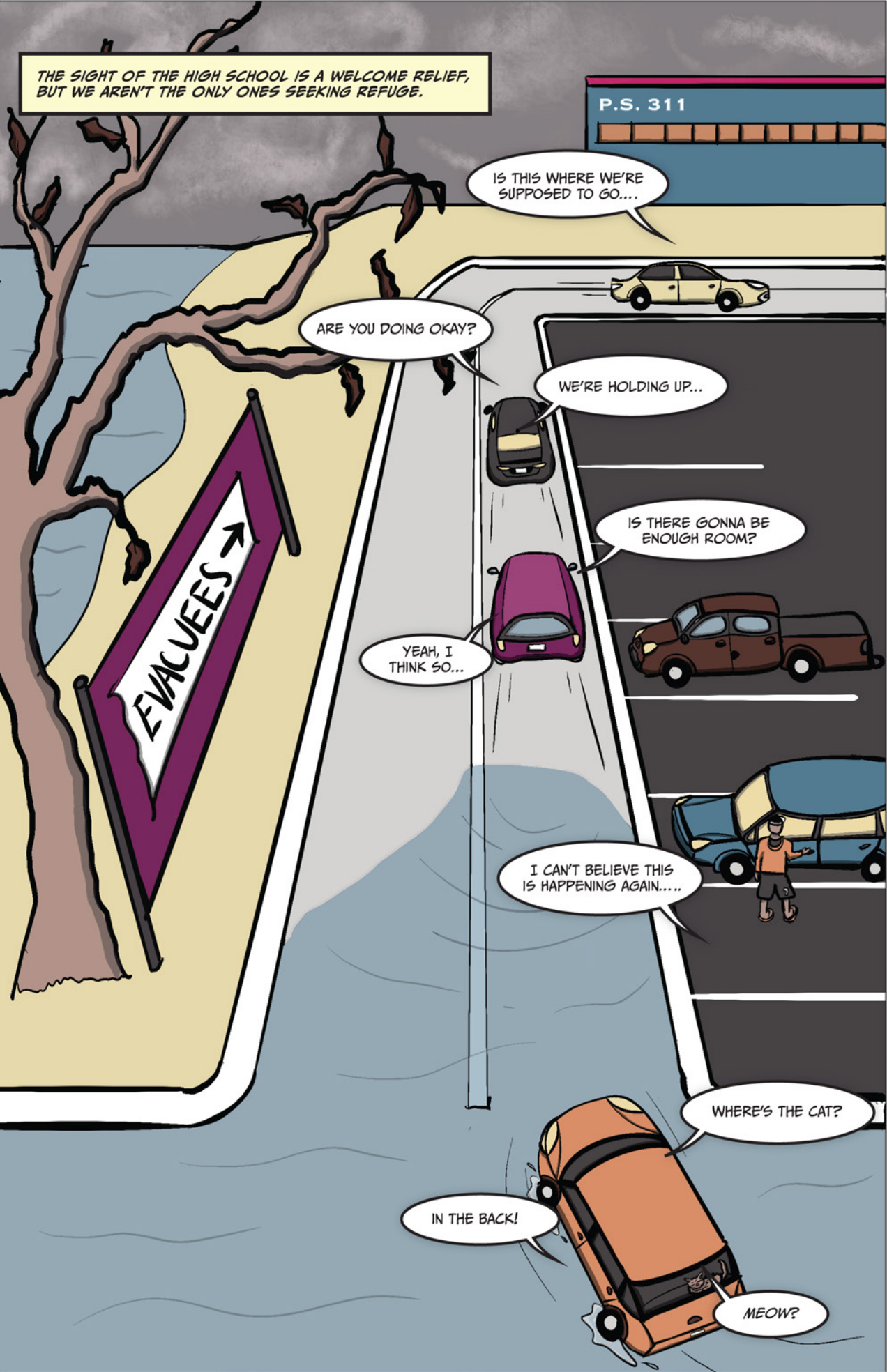
YEAH, I  
THINK SO...

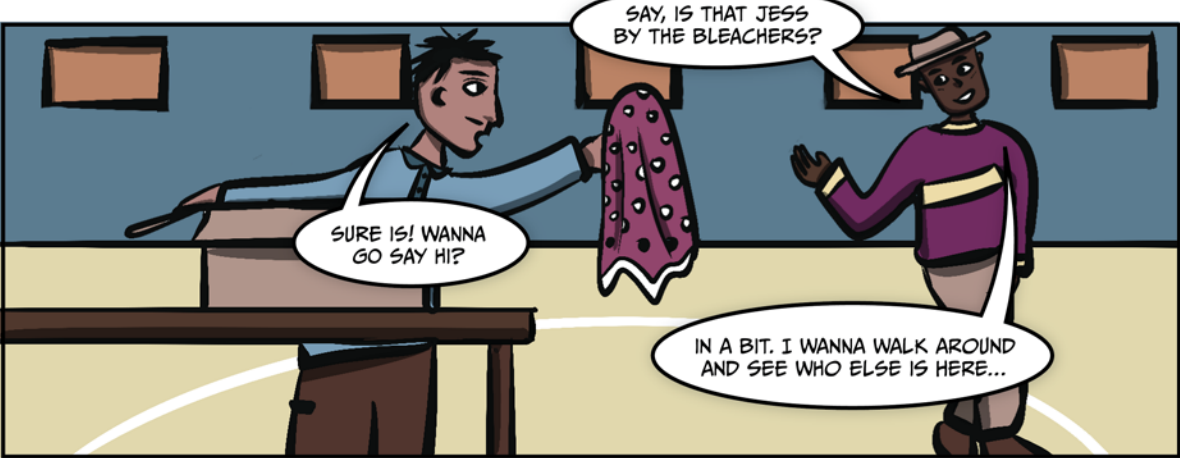
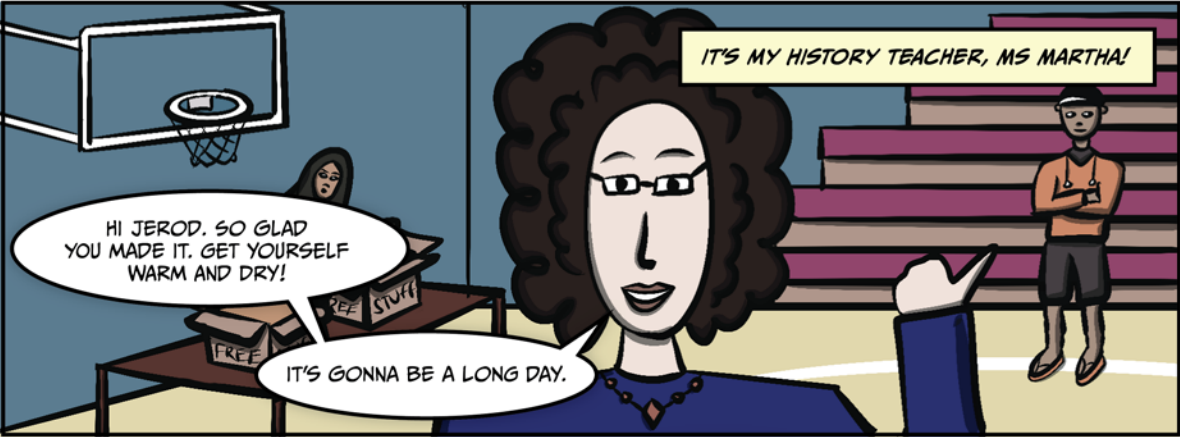
I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS  
IS HAPPENING AGAIN....

WHERE'S THE CAT?

IN THE BACK!

MEOW?





AS I WALK AROUND THE AUDITORIUM, I OVERHEAR ALL KINDS OF STORIES ABOUT FLOODING IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD.

HOW MUCH DID IT COST YOU LAST TIME?

REPAIR MATERIALS ALONE COST \$16,000! AND THAT DOESN'T EVEN INCLUDE LABOR, THE CLEANUP, ELECTRICAL... YOU NAME IT!



THEY SAY JUST 1 INCH OF WATER COSTS \$25,000 IN DAMAGES TO YOUR HOME!

OH, IT CAN BE *MUCH* HIGHER DEPENDING ON WHERE YOU LIVE... DON'T GET ME STARTED.

BY THE WAY, DON'T GET YOUR HOPES UP ABOUT FLOOD INSURANCE... THEY HARDLY COVERED A FIFTH OF THE COSTS FROM LAST YEAR'S FLOOD FOR ME

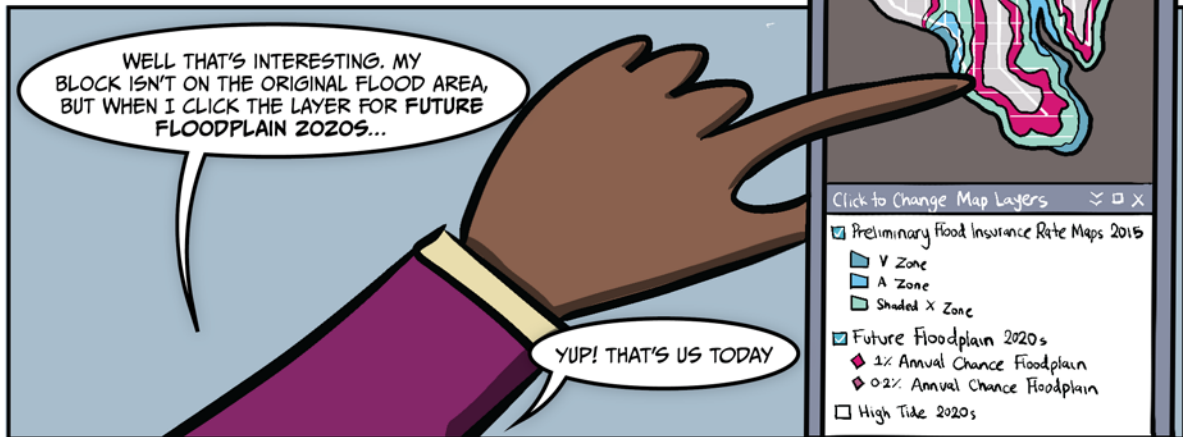
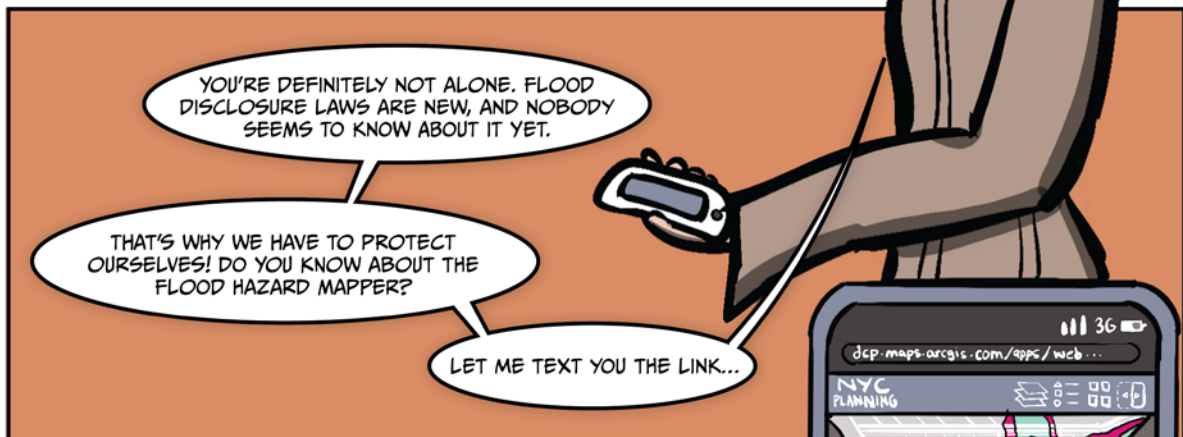
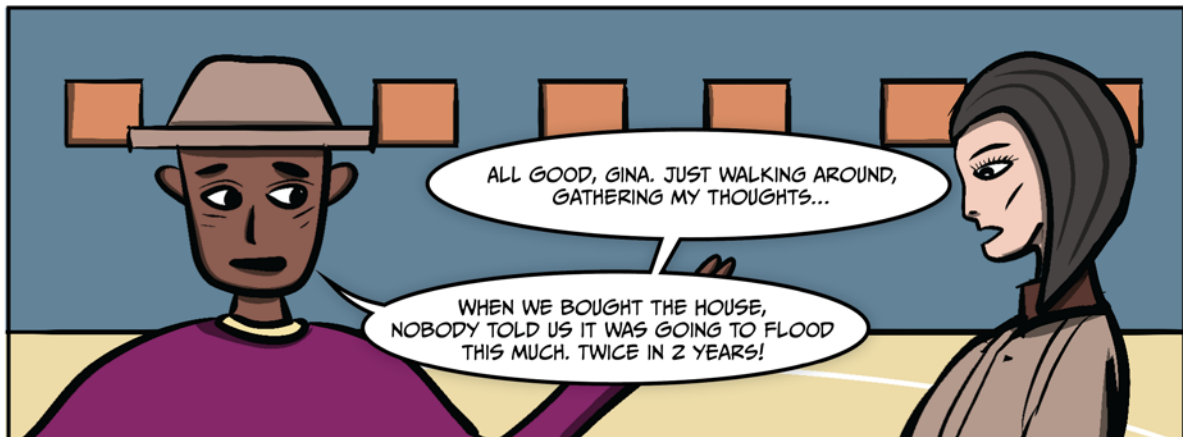
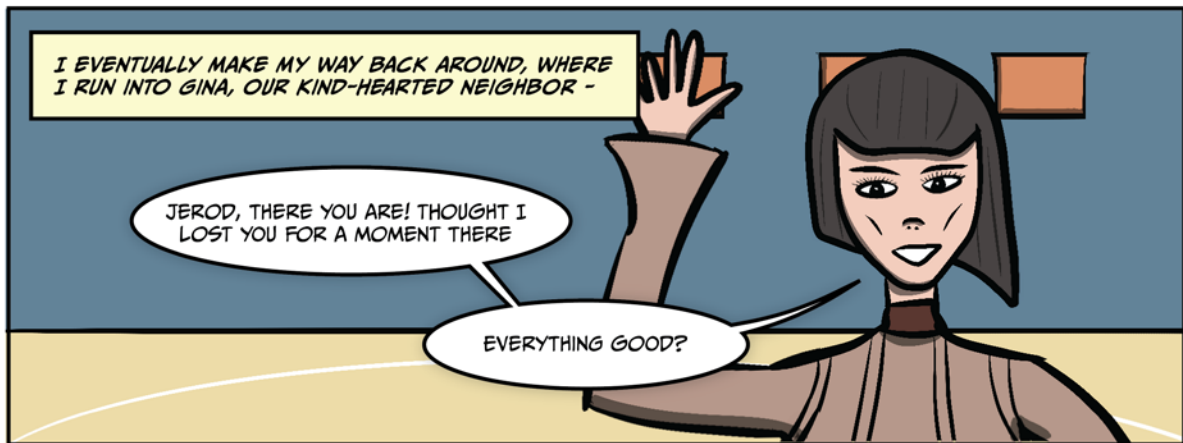
I'LL PROBABLY HAVE TO FORK OUT THE SAME AMOUNT OF CASH THIS TIME TOO... HOW'RE WE SUPPOSED TO LIVE LIKE THIS?



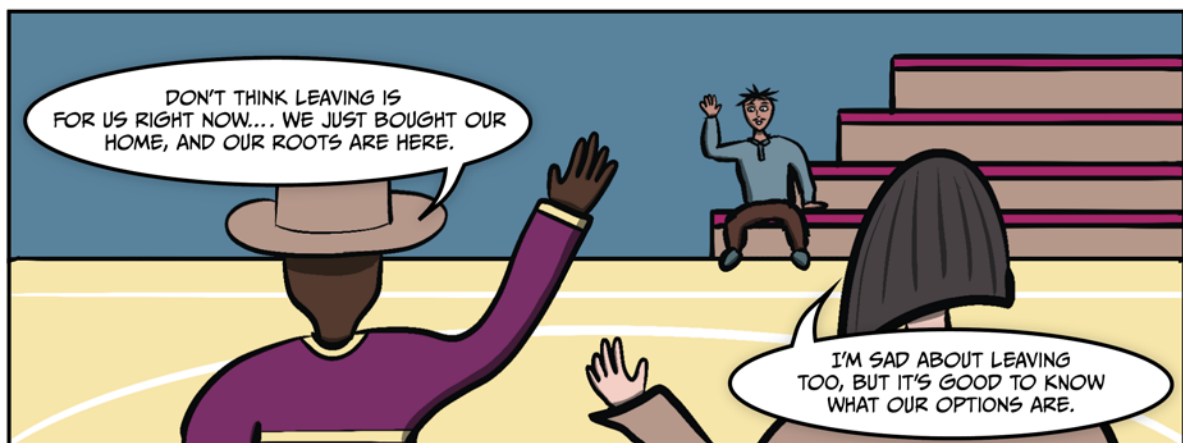
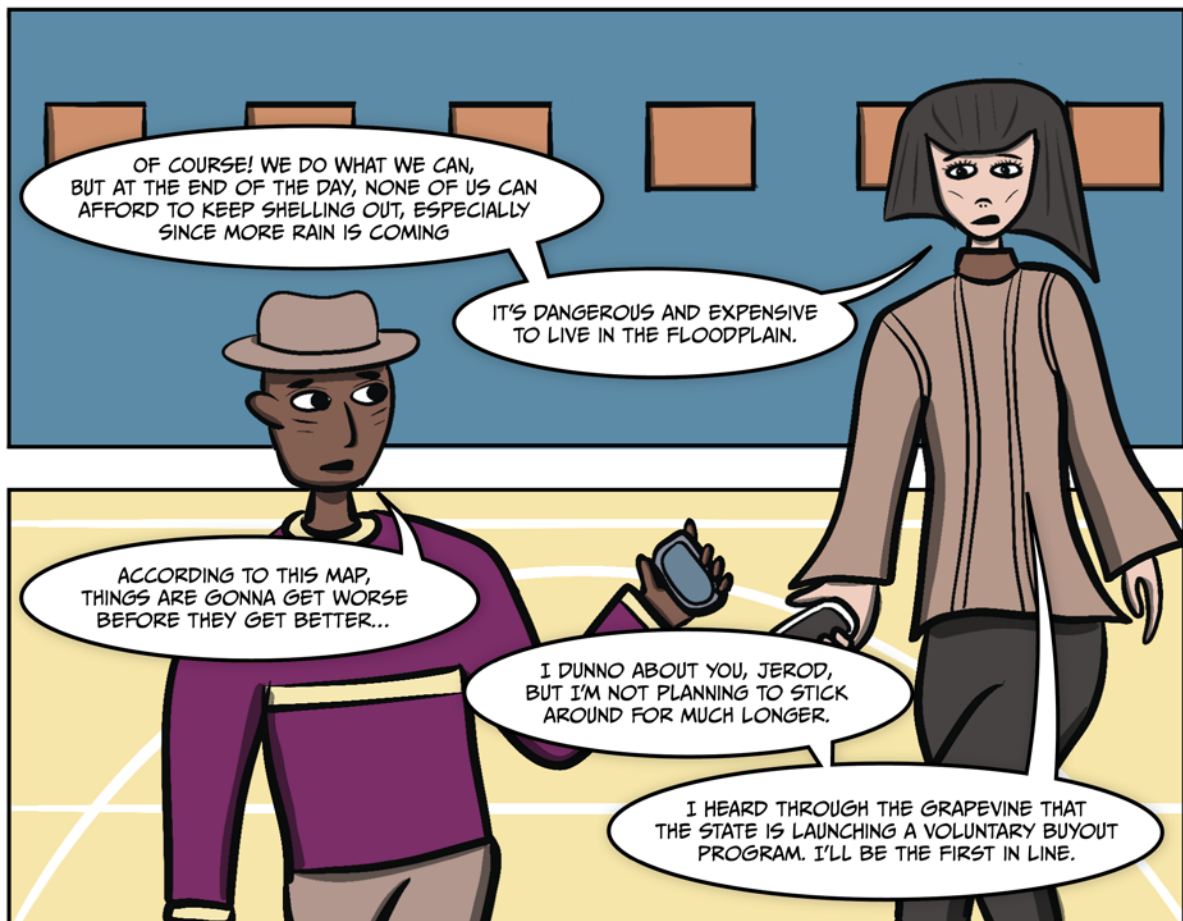
SOMEONE IN OUR BUILDING RECOMMENDED A CLEANING COMPANY THAT'S VERY GOOD AND CHEAP

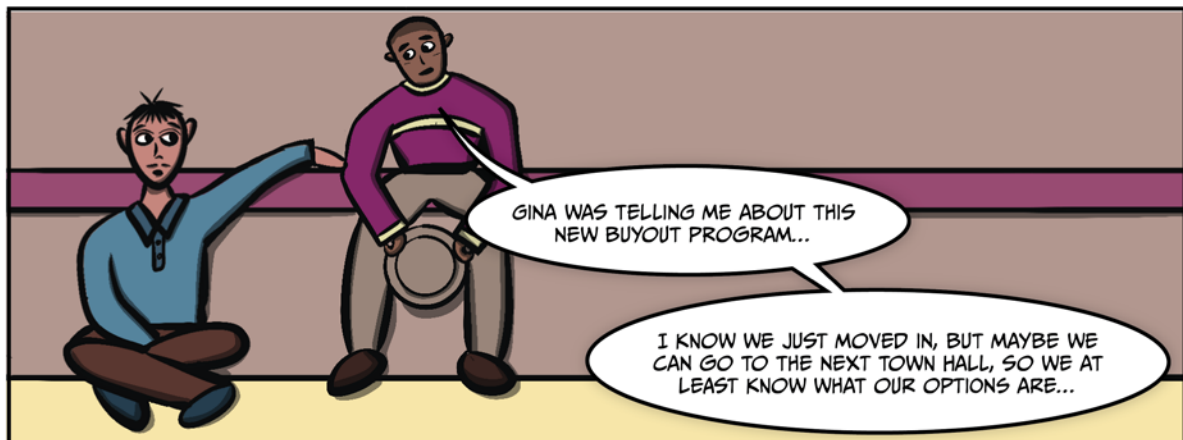
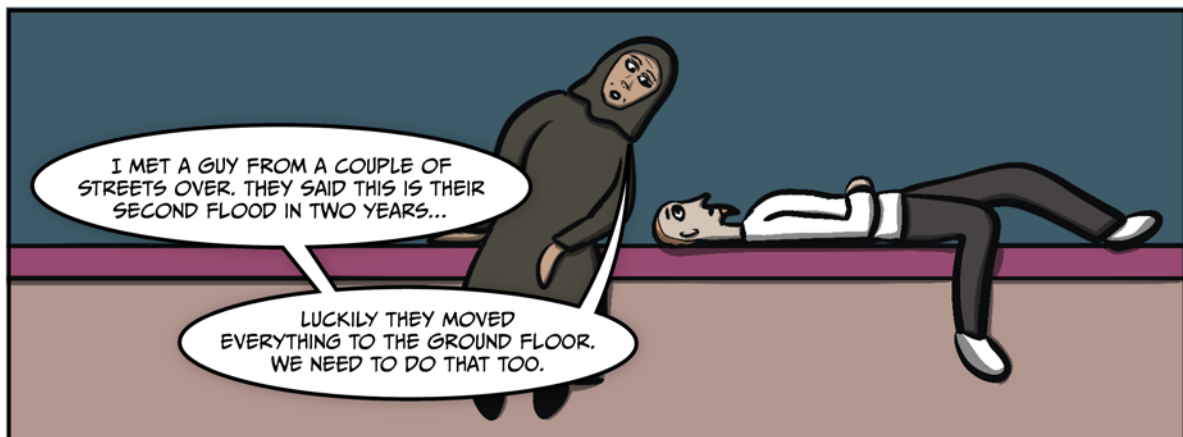
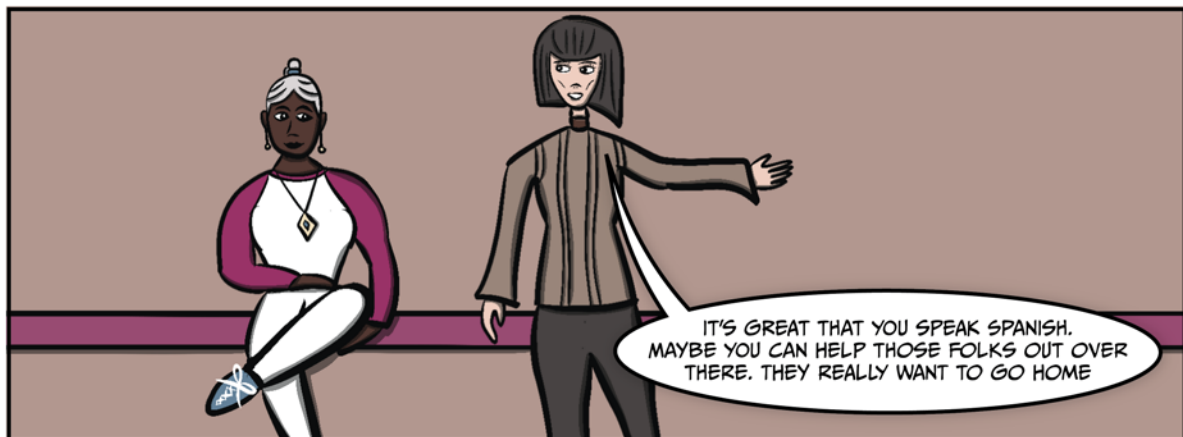
SEND IT TO ME! CAN'T BELIEVE I HAVE TO TOSS EVERYTHING AGAIN... MOLD IS MY WORST NIGHTMARE











## PAUSE AND REFLECT:

ARE YOU SIGNED UP FOR EMERGENCY ALERTS IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD? HOW DO YOU STAY CURRENT ON INFORMATION AND RESOURCES RELATED TO FLOODING?

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THAT YOU CAN HELP YOUR NEIGHBORS STAY SAFE DURING A FLOOD?

HOW CAN YOUR FAMILY PREPARE FOR A CLIMATE EMERGENCY?

ARE THERE PEOPLE ON YOUR BLOCK THAT MAY NEED EXTRA HELP IN TIMES OF EMERGENCIES?

DO YOU HAVE MEMORIES OF PREVIOUS FLOODS THAT RESURFACE FROM TIME TO TIME?

TO BE PREPARED TO LEAVE QUICKLY IN AN EMERGENCY, WHAT WOULD YOU INCLUDE IN YOUR GO BAG?

## CHAPTER 2



I DON'T KNOW IF I'D ACCEPT A  
BUYOUT MYSELF, BUT I WANT TO LEARN  
THE RISKS TO MY HOME.

# ***THE COMMUNITY MEETING***



HEY PETE! ARE YOU COMING TO THE COMMUNITY MEETING TONIGHT?

I VOTED ✓

**COMMUNITY MEETING!**

NEW YORK STATE X  
NEIGHBORHOOD ADVOCATES

come learn about

- ☐ flood infrastructure
- ☐ home floodproofing
- ☐ buyout program

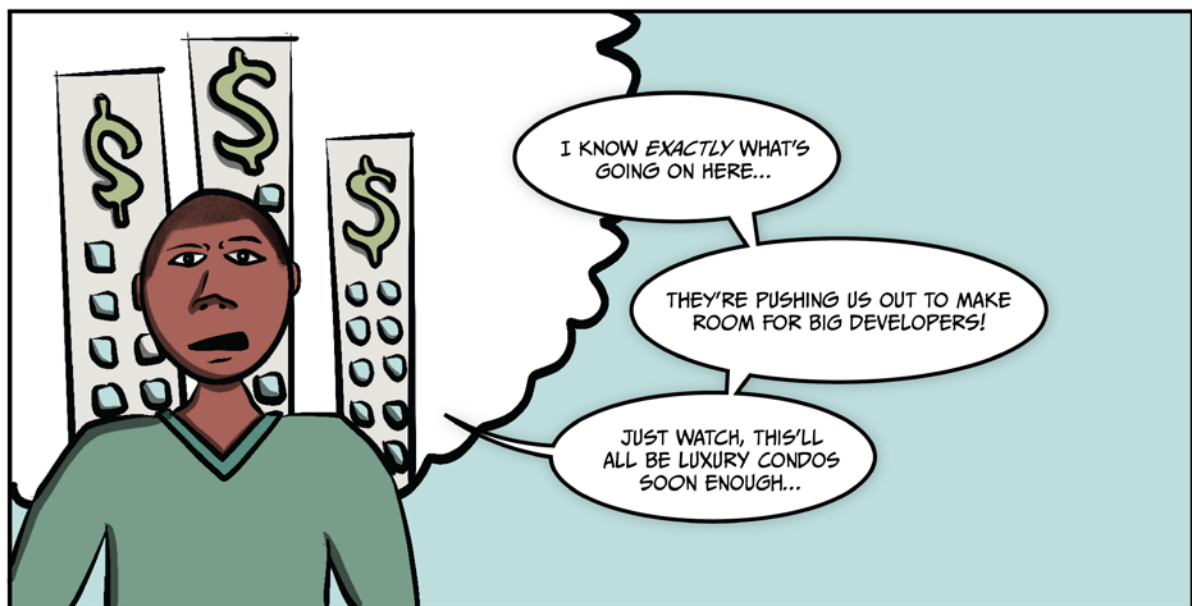
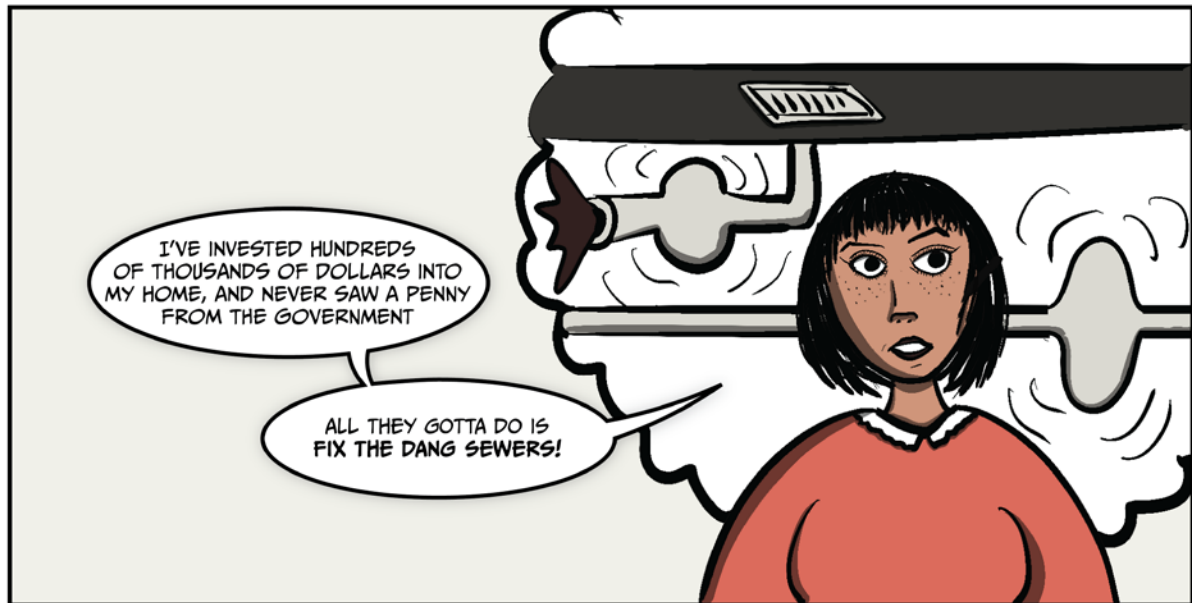
7PM - THE LIBRARY  
food & drinks served!



BUYOUT PROGRAM?  
INTERESTING...

I WONDER WHO ELSE  
WILL BE THERE!







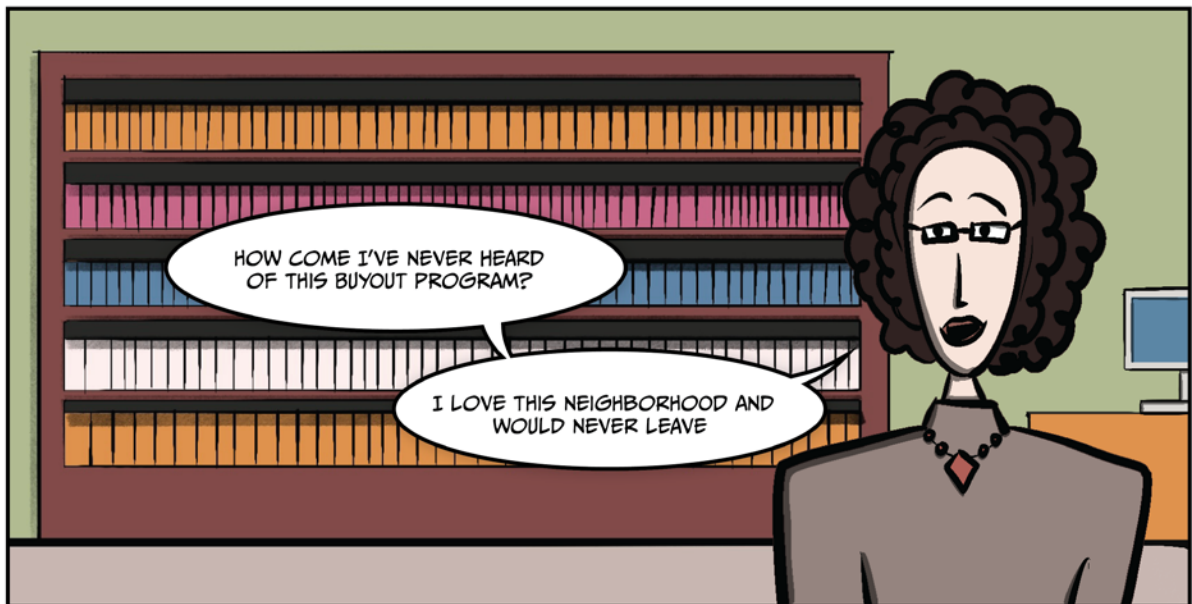
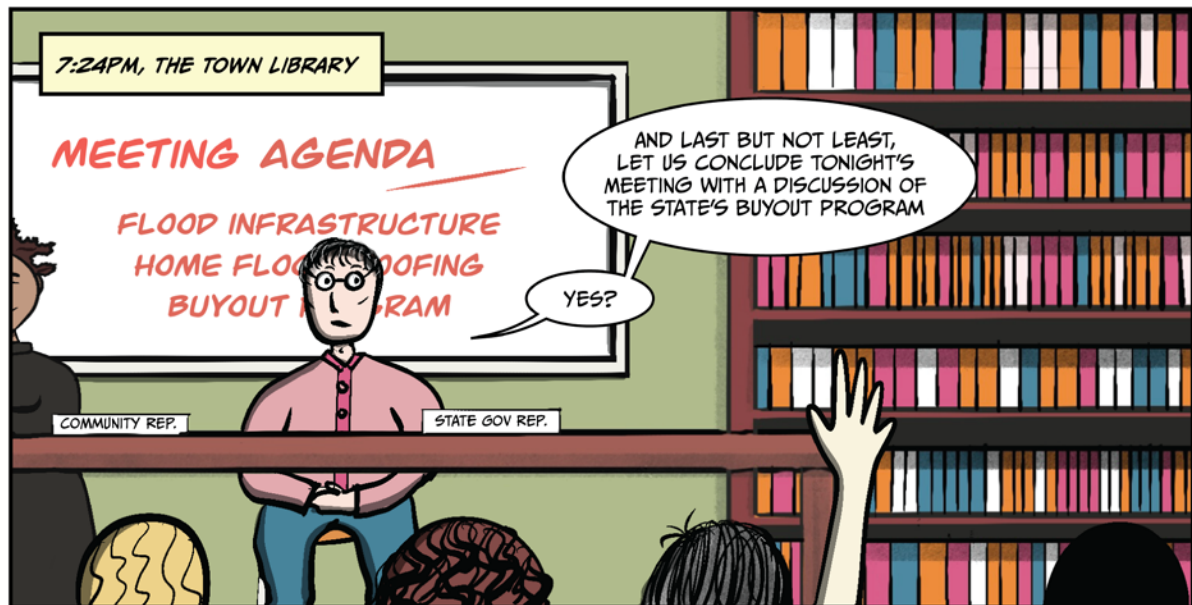
WAIT... WHERE DID YOU GUYS  
HEAR ABOUT THE MEETING? WAS  
IT POSTED SOMEWHERE?

I SAW A TEXT ABOUT IT IN THE  
WHATSAPP GROUP. I'M GONNA TRY TO GET  
THERE EARLY AND SCOPE IT OUT.

I'LL HAVE TO SEE IF SOMEONE  
CAN COVER MY SHIFT... WISH I  
WAS GIVEN MORE NOTICE...

I HAVE A CHINESE NEIGHBOR  
WHO ISN'T GOING BECAUSE THE  
MEETING WILL ONLY BE IN ENGLISH  
WITH NO TRANSLATOR.

I NEED TO FIND A LAST-MINUTE  
SITTER... BUT WHAT IF I CAN'T? WILL  
IT BE RECORDED?





EXIT

SIR, MY MORTGAGE AND I  
HAVE NO TIME FOR THIS.

WE SHOULD KEEP TALKING ABOUT  
FLOOD CONTROL OPTIONS...

I'LL SAY IT AGAIN -  
IT'S ALL ABOUT FIXING  
THE SEWERS!

... WHAT HAPPENED TO THAT  
SEAWALL YOU GUYS TALKED ABOUT  
A FEW YEARS AGO?

WHAT DO YOU EVEN MEAN WHEN  
YOU SAY 'BUYOUT'? ARE YOU BUYING MY  
MORTGAGE OUT TOO?

## MEETING AGENDA

IF I MAY  
INTERJECT -

YES PLEASE,  
REVEREND!

THESE GOOD PEOPLE RAISE  
EXCELLENT POINTS!

EXACTLY, AND-  
HUH?



LET ME START BY SAYING WHAT WE WANT TO TALK ABOUT HERE ARE *VOLUNTARY* BUYOUTS. THAT PART'S IMPORTANT! NO ONE HERE IS GOING ANYWHERE THEY DON'T WANT TO...

I DON'T KNOW IF I WOULD ACCEPT A BUYOUT MYSELF, BUT I WANT TO LEARN THE RISK TO MY HOME... AND IF I'M GIVEN THE OPTION... IT BETTER BE THE BEST DEAL I CAN GET! AM I RIGHT?

MEET

SO HOW ABOUT THIS, LET'S GO AROUND THE ROOM. AND LET THESE OFFICIALS KNOW WHAT IS YOUR #1 CONCERN WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD 'BUYOUT'

HOME  
BUYOUT PROGRAM

UNITY REP.

STATE GOV REP.





8:47PM

THE LIBRARY HAS GIVEN US THE SIGNAL TO WRAP HERE. BUT WOW, THIS HAS BEEN SUCH AN INSIGHTFUL DISCUSSION!

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR QUESTIONS. WHILE I DON'T HAVE CONCRETE ANSWERS FOR EVERYONE YET, I DO HOPE THIS IS THE FIRST OF MANY CONVERSATIONS TO COME, AS WE FIGURE OUT THE TIMELINE AND DETAILS FOR THIS NEW PROGRAM TOGETHER.

## MEETING AGENDA

FLOOD INFRASTRUCTURE  
HOME FLOODPROOFING  
VOLUNTARY BUYOUTS

BEFORE WE HEAD OUT, I SUGGEST WE GATHER SOME FOLKS IN THE ROOM TONIGHT AND FORM A COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUP.

FIRST AND FOREMOST CONSOLIDATE ALL OF OUR NOTES FROM THIS MEETING TO SHARE WITH FOLKS FROM OUR NEIGHBORHOOD WHO WEREN'T ABLE TO MAKE IT TONIGHT. WHAT DO YOU ALL THINK?

GREAT IDEA!

I WOULD LOVE TO STAY CONNECTED. AND I WOULD LIKE TO VOLUNTEER TO BE ON THIS ADVISORY GROUP TO HELP SPREAD THE WORD.

NOW WHO'S READY TO SIGN UP??

## PAUSE AND REFLECT:

WHERE DO YOU FIND OUT ABOUT  
COMMUNITY MEETINGS?

HAVE YOU BEEN TO A COMMUNITY MEETING  
WHERE FLOODING IS BROUGHT UP?

WHO WOULD YOU INVITE TO A FLOOD-RELATED  
COMMUNITY MEETING?

DO YOU HAVE CONCERNS THAT ELECTED OFFICIALS  
OR CITY AGENCIES COULD ADDRESS?

WHAT TOPICS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE PRIORITIZED  
ON A COMMUNITY MEETING AGENDA?

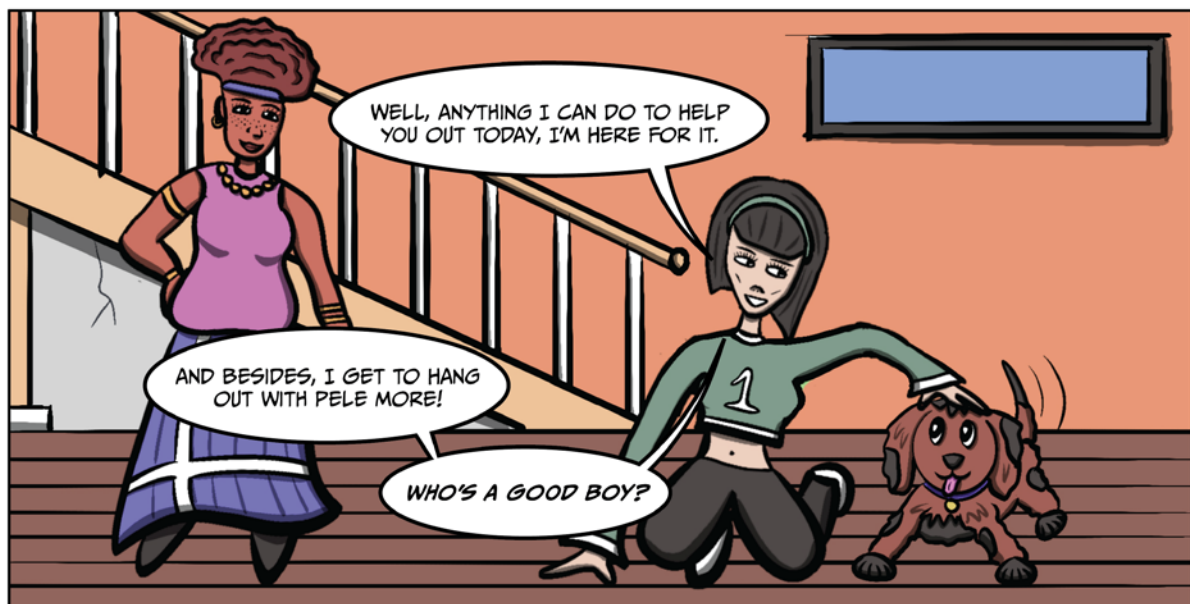
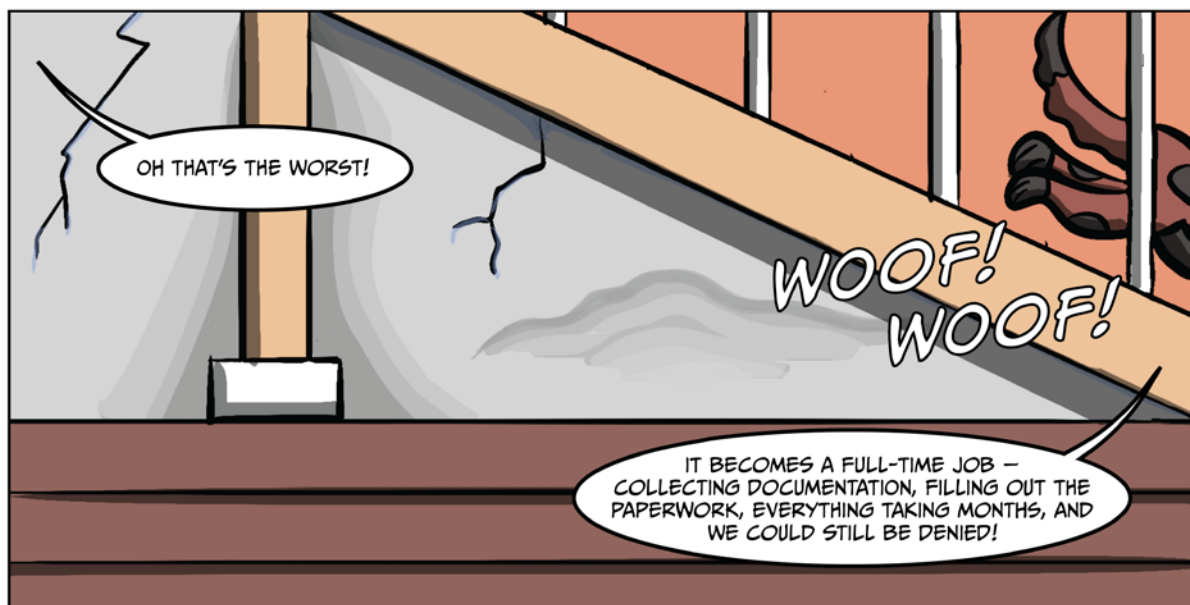
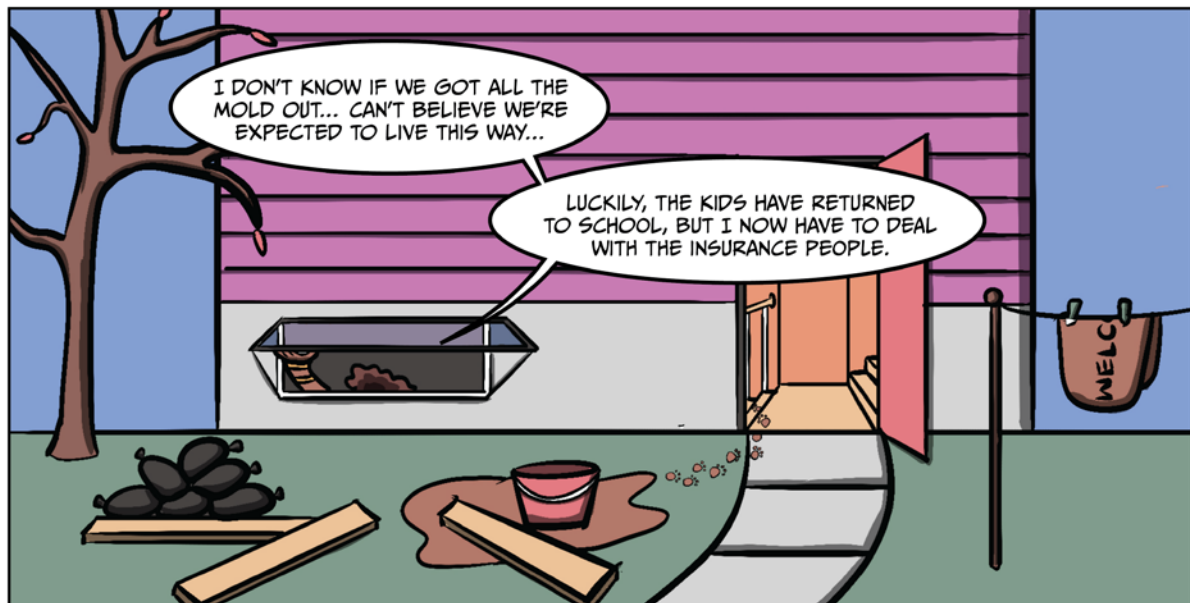
CAN YOU THINK OF SOMEONE WHO'S UNLIKELY  
TO ATTEND A COMMUNITY MEETING BUT COULD  
GREATLY BENEFIT FROM GOING TO ONE?

## CHAPTER 3

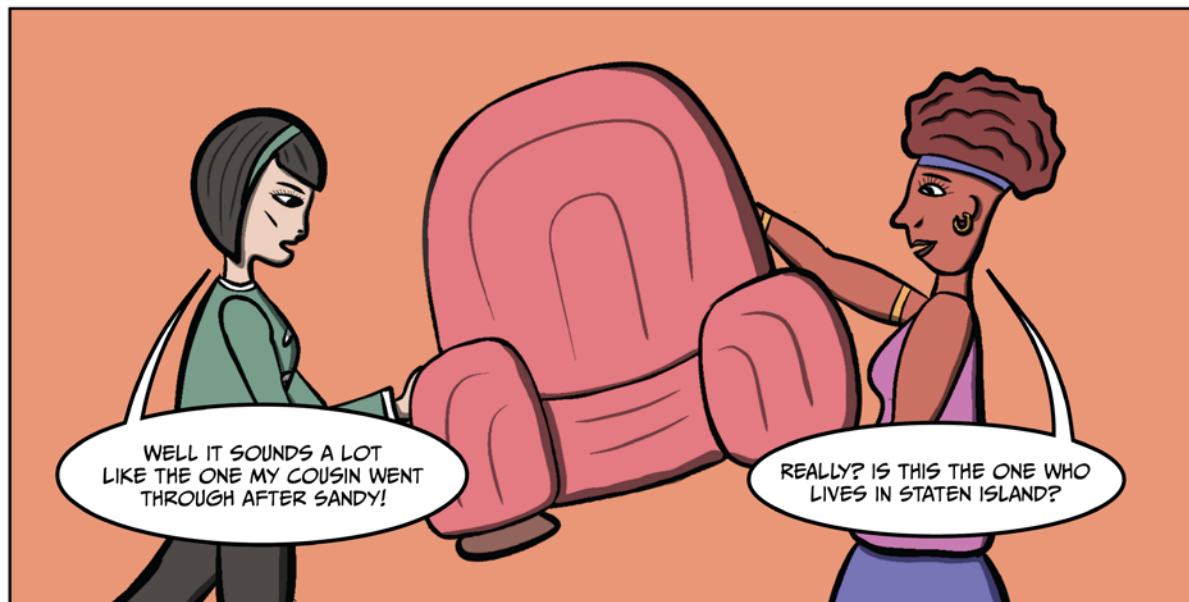
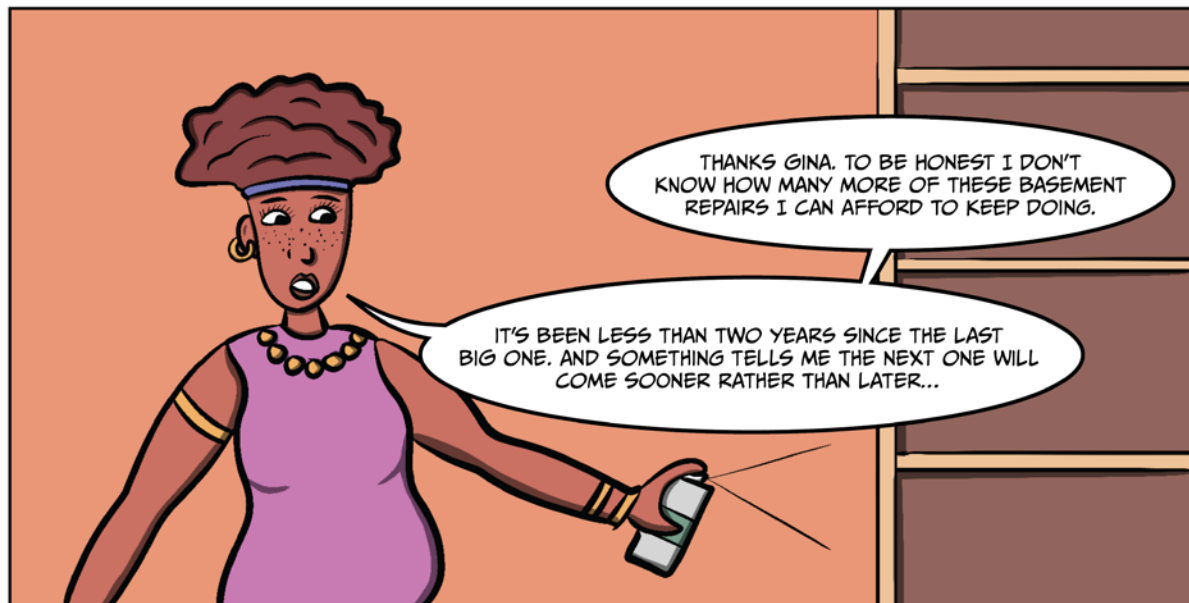


I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND  
ME ASKING, BUT DID YOU GET A FAIR  
PRICE DURING THE BUYOUT?

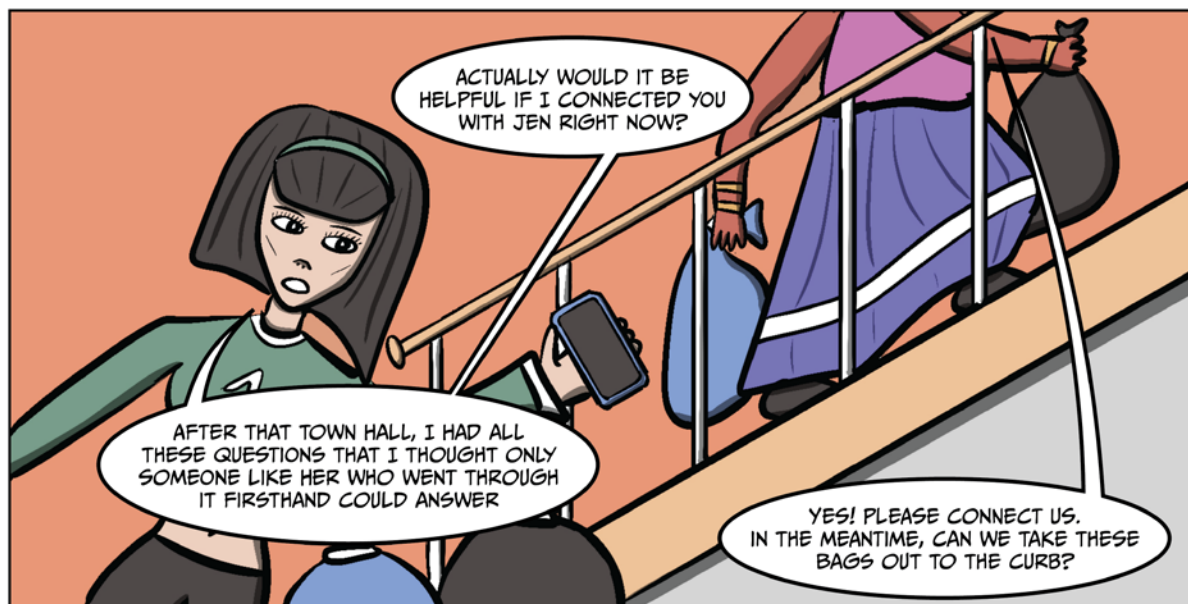
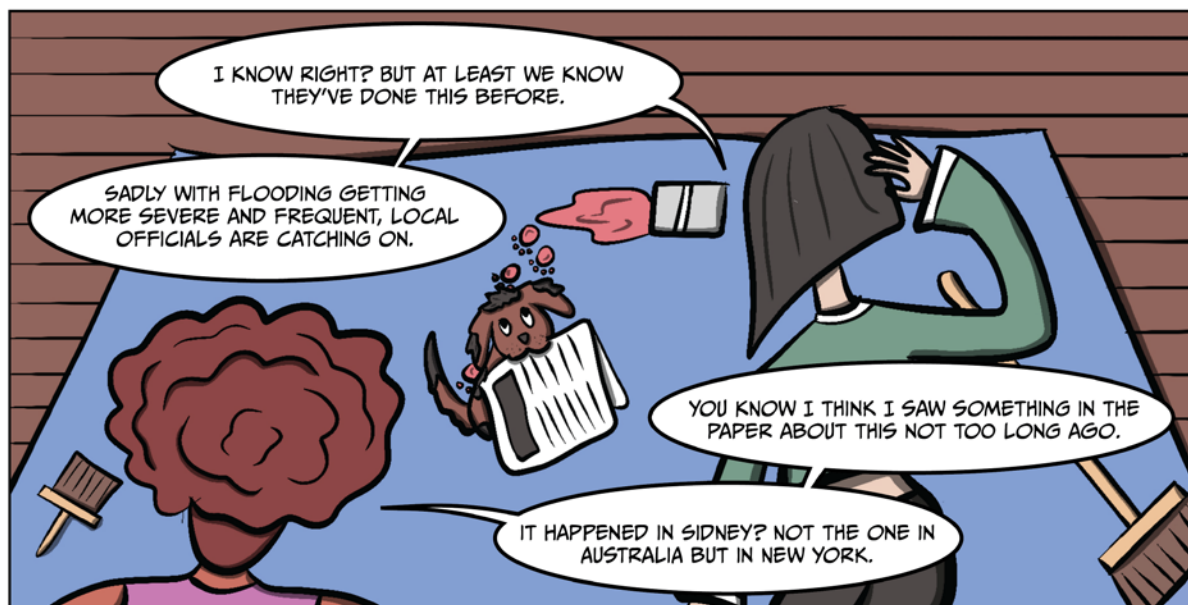
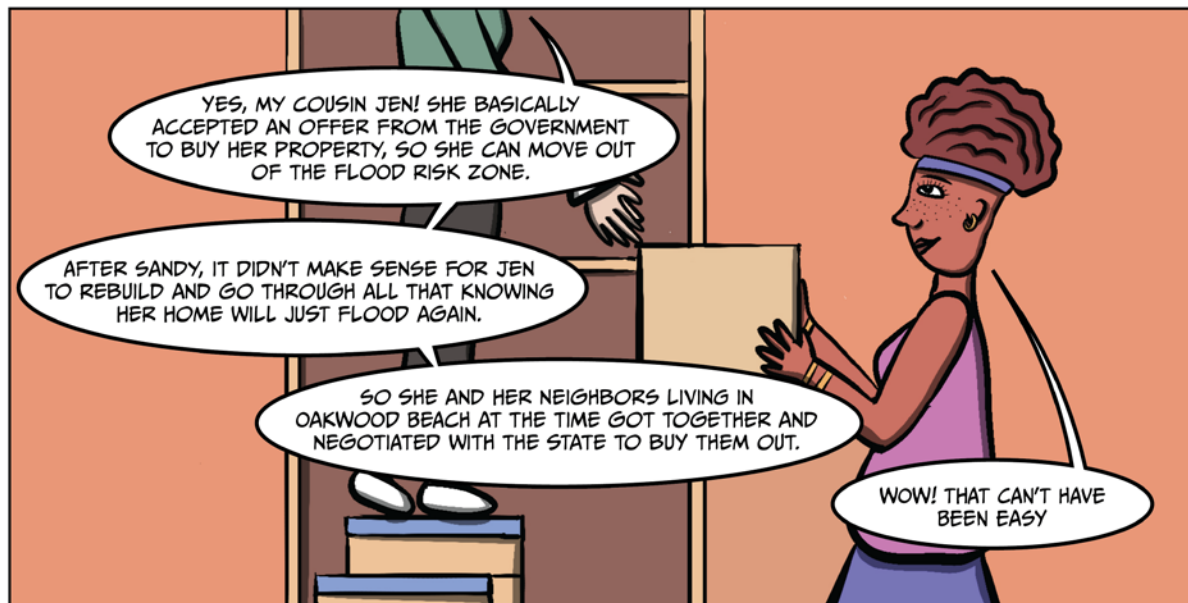
# ***THE BUYOUT***











TWO WEEKS LATER...

GEEZ, I HOPE OUR INTERNET CONNECTION STAYS STABLE THROUGH THIS STORM...

HOW'S IT LOOKING FOR YOU GUYS OVER THERE?

I'VE GOT THE TV ON IN THE BACK IN CASE ANYTHING CHANGES, BUT I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY SO MUCH HERE IN MY NEW PLACE

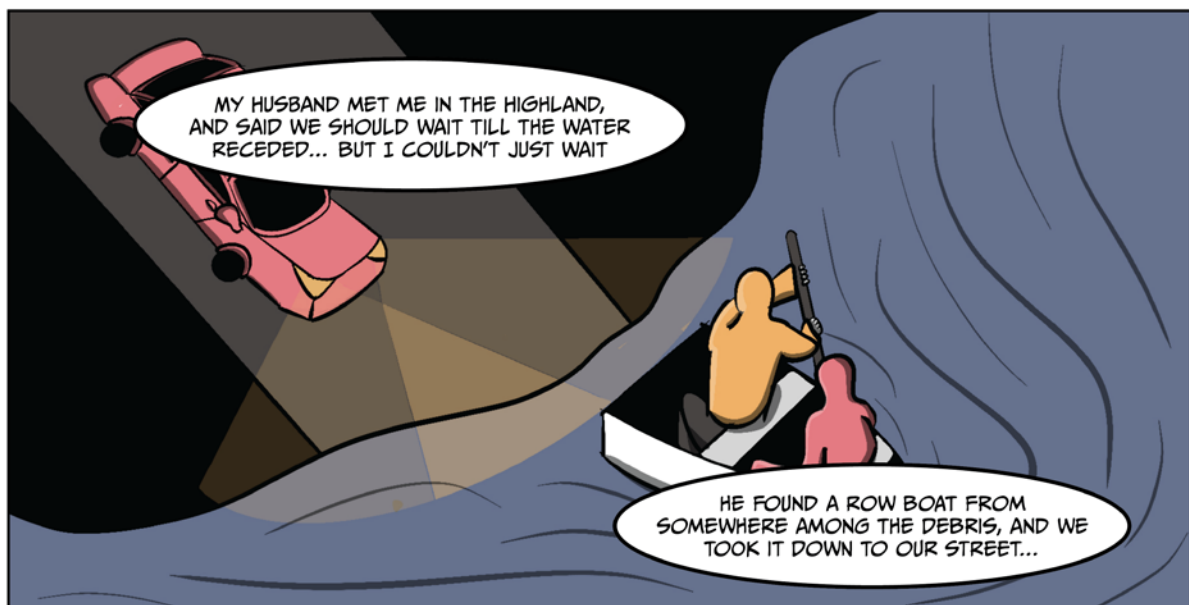
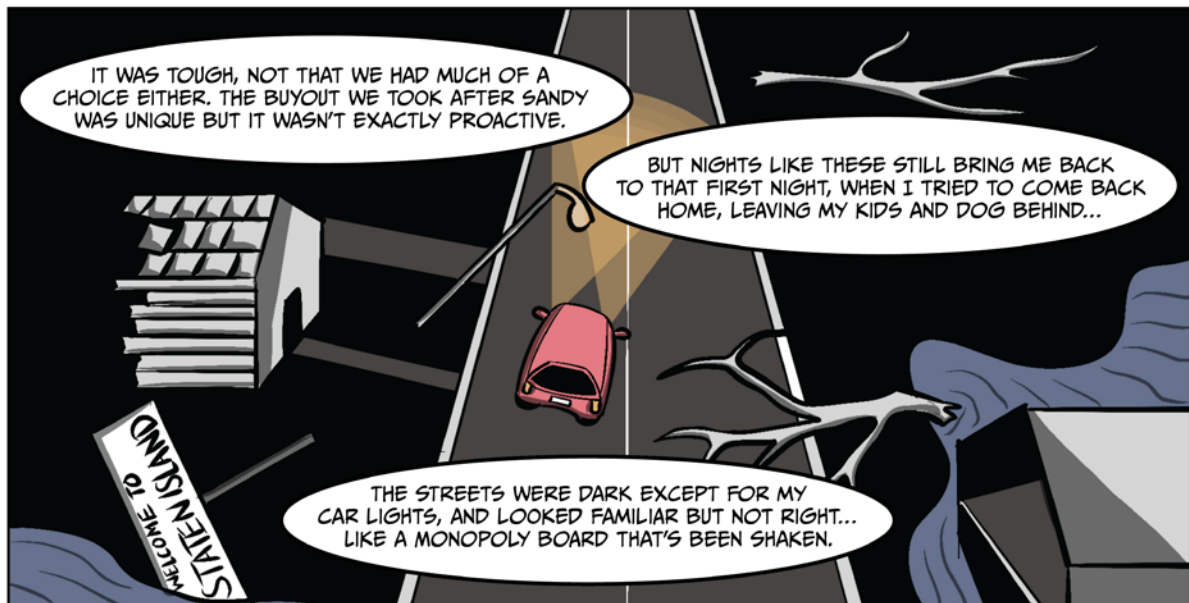
MY DOGGIE HERE ON THE OTHER HAND, STILL GETS A LITTLE SPOOKED BY THE RAIN!

I TOTALLY GET IT. PELE HERE NEVER LIKED THUNDER, AND AFTER WE EVACUATED DURING THE LAST STORM... DON'T EVEN GET ME STARTED

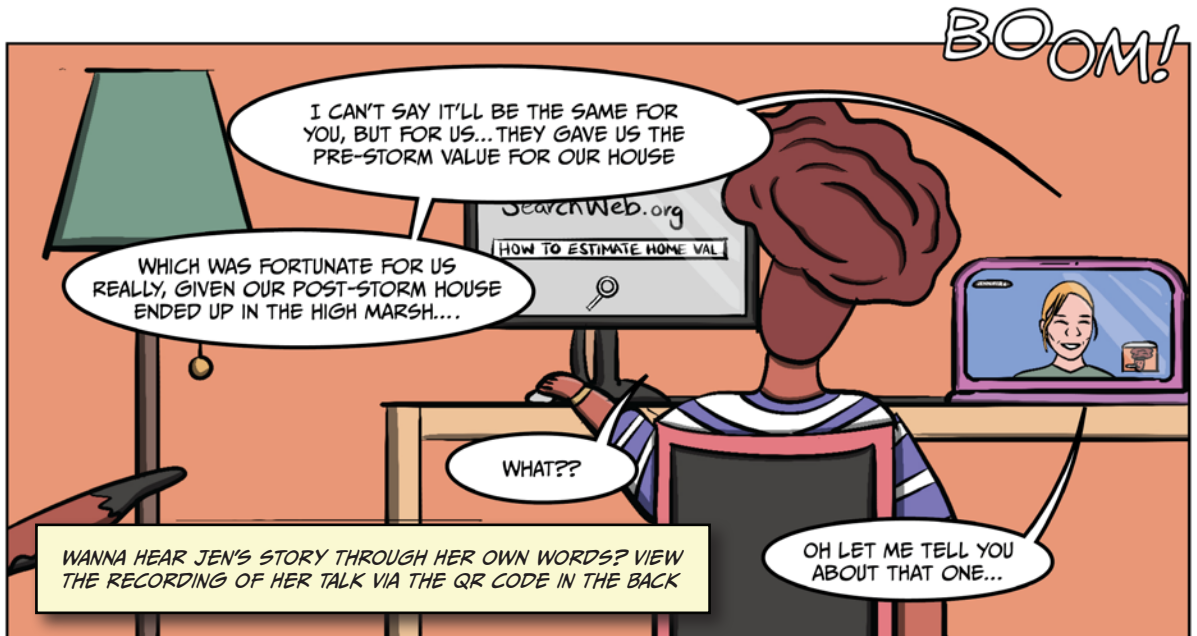
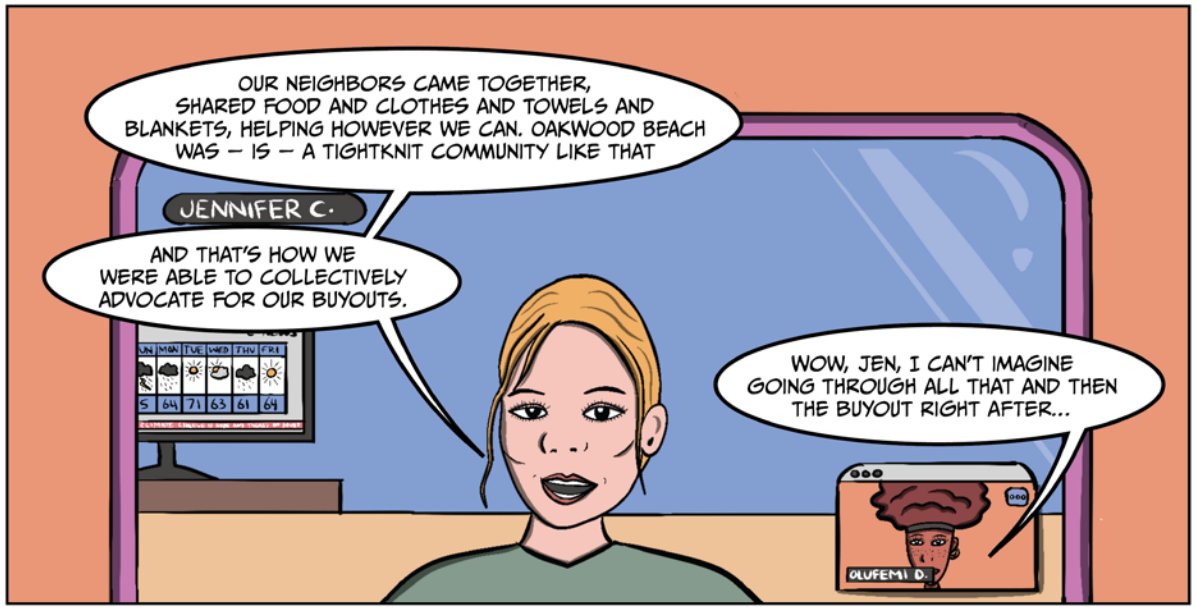
THAT'S AMAZING YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY SO MUCH ANYMORE...

I IMAGINE THE MOVE COULDN'T HAVE BEEN EASY... OR WAS IT?

BOOM!







ANOTHER WEEK LATER...

HI FEMI! I JUST GOT OFF THE PHONE WITH JEN, AND SHE MENTIONED YOU TWO CONNECTED OVER THE WEEKEND?

YES WE DID! SHE WAS SUPER HELPFUL. THANK YOU!

YOU KNOW, A LOCAL ORGANIZER RECENTLY INTRODUCED ME TO A MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING SERVICE, WHICH I'M FINDING USEFUL, ESPECIALLY WITH MY KIDS.

WOW, I CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT IT'S LIKE FOR THE KIDS, GINA - THIS IS ALL THEY KNOW!

IT'S A HUGE ADJUSTMENT FOR SURE, NOT ONLY FOR THEM BUT FOR OUR ENTIRE FAMILY.

AND ACTUALLY KNOWING WE'RE NOT ALONE IN THIS MAKES IT SLIGHTLY BETTER... SPEAKING OF WHICH, ARE YOU GOING TO THAT BUYOUT MEETING AT PASTOR FRANK'S NEXT WEEK?

FOR SURE! ONE THING WE HAVEN'T DISCUSSED MUCH THAT I WANT TO BRING UP AT THIS MEETING IS WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO OUR LAND AFTERWARDS.



MY HUSBAND AND I  
IMMIGRATED HERE FROM NIGERIA  
OVER TWENTY YEARS AGO

IT TOOK US SUCH A LONG TIME TO FIND  
OUR DREAM HOME, AND MANY MORE YEARS TO  
MEET ALL THESE WONDERFUL PEOPLE,  
INCLUDING YOU GINA!

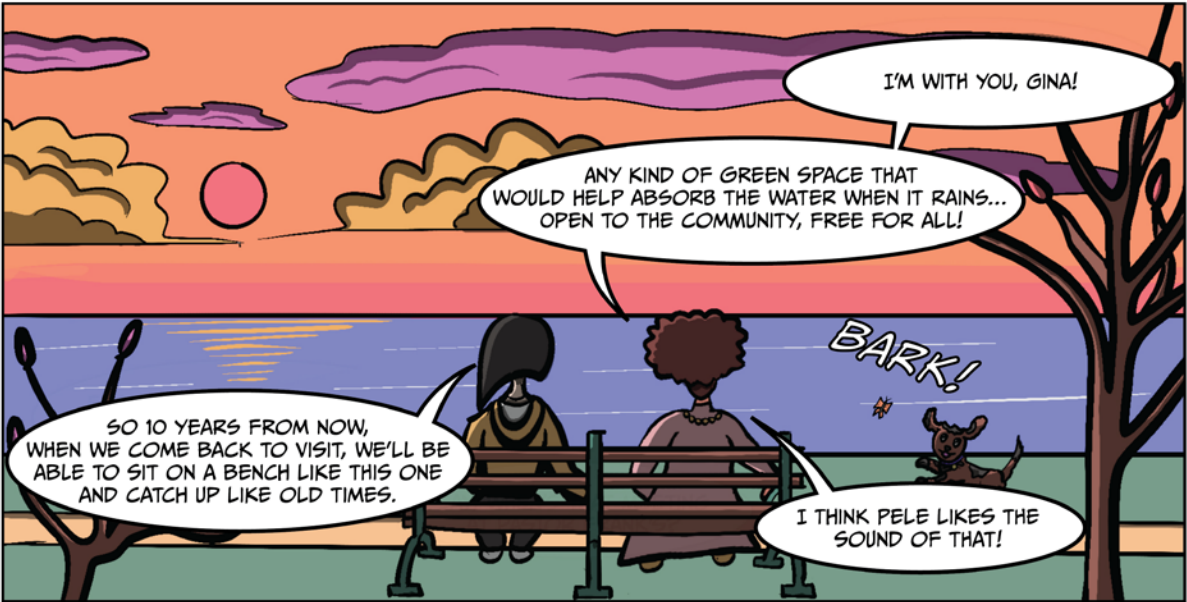
THE THOUGHT OF HAVING TO LEAVE  
OUR HOME AND THIS LAND BEHIND...



OH I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT THAT TOO...

I CERTAINLY DON'T WANT TO SEE  
ANY NEW DEVELOPMENT ON IT.

BETTER LET NATURE TAKE OVER - MAYBE  
TURN IT INTO A PUBLIC PARK?



I'M WITH YOU, GINA!

ANY KIND OF GREEN SPACE THAT  
WOULD HELP ABSORB THE WATER WHEN IT RAINS...  
OPEN TO THE COMMUNITY, FREE FOR ALL!

SO 10 YEARS FROM NOW,  
WHEN WE COME BACK TO VISIT, WE'LL BE  
ABLE TO SIT ON A BENCH LIKE THIS ONE  
AND CATCH UP LIKE OLD TIMES.

BARK!

I THINK PELE LIKES THE  
SOUND OF THAT!

## PAUSE AND REFLECT:

HAVE YOU HEARD THE TERM "BUYOUT" OR "VOLUNTARY BUYOUT" BEFORE READING THIS COMIC? WHAT WAS YOUR INITIAL REACTION?

HAS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF "BUYOUT" EVOLVED SINCE YOU FIRST LEARNED ABOUT IT?

WHAT ARE THE PROTECTIONS OR SUPPORT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE IN A VOLUNTARY BUYOUT PROGRAM?

WHERE DO YOU CURRENTLY GET YOUR INFORMATION ABOUT GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS?

IF YOUR HOUSEHOLD WERE TO TAKE A BUYOUT, HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE THE LAND BE USED?

WHAT ACTIONS COULD YOUR COMMUNITY, YOUR CITY/TOWN, OR YOUR STATE TAKE TO REDUCE THE NEED TO RELOCATE?



# DON'T FORGET TO.....

## 1 **Know Your Risk:**

Get to know your local flood risk by exploring online mapping tools.

FEMA provides a National Flood Hazard Map Layer with current and future risk. Many academic institutions and local governments across the U.S. also provide local flood risk maps for storm surge (coastal flooding), stormwater (heavy rainfall), and sea level rise.

Some digital real estate platforms (like Zillow and Realtor.com) now provide a flood risk score for properties that are on the market for purchase or rent, so you can know a property's risk before you purchase a home or sign a lease.

## 2 **Stay Informed:**

Sign up for local emergency alerts to stay informed of any hazardous flood conditions. Join neighborhood group chats or Facebook groups, and follow your local emergency management agencies on social media. And stay up to date on your local evacuation zone!

## 3 **Check on Your Neighbors:**

During times of crisis, our most vulnerable fare the worst. People with disabilities or health conditions, the elderly, pregnant women, and children experience disproportionate burdens when flood waters rise, power goes out, public transportation is suspended, and their mobility is restricted.

Get to know your neighbors and create a plan to check in on one another when storms hit. When neighbors look out for neighbors, we all fare better.



# THE RESOURCE LIBRARY

## *DEVELOPING A BUYOUT PROGRAM: CENTERING COMMUNITY IN PROGRAM DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION*



**LEAD WITH LISTENING: A GUIDEBOOK FOR COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS ON CLIMATE MIGRATION (CLIMIGRATION NETWORK)**



**BUILDING BETTER BUYOUTS THROUGH LIVED AND LEARNED EXPERIENCE (NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL)**



**BEST PRACTICES FOR VOLUNTARY BUYOUTS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NYS'S OFFICE OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY RENEWAL (JOINT REPORT)**



**FLOODPLAIN BUYOUTS: CHALLENGES, PRACTICES, AND LESSONS LEARNED (THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE & THE NATURE CONSERVANCY)**



**FLOOD ADAPTATION HIERARCHY: A BETTER WAY TO ADAPT TO A WORLD OF FLOODS, RISING SEAS, AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY (THE NATURE CONSERVANCY)**



**MANAGED RETREAT TOOLKIT (GEORGETOWN CLIMATE CENTER)**

# FLOOD SENSOR AUNTY

Flood Sensor Aunty, created by Sabina Sethi Unni, is a play about a flood sensor working at her aunt's chai shop who really wants to be a movie star. Halfway between really funny devised theater and community disaster prevention, this show is about how the best way to protect yourself from flooding, climate change, and despair is through knowing your neighbors. The final number in the musical, the "Go Bag Song," reminds us of all the critical supplies we should have ready in case of an emergency. Learn the song and stay prepared – it's the one song you'll want to have stuck in your head!

## "GO BAG SONG"

WRITTEN AND COMPOSED BY SABINA SETHI UNNI FOR FLOOD SENSOR AUNTY

### ENSEMBLE sings

72 hours of food  
and water  
for you and all your  
pets

pads  
headlamps  
and don't forget your  
meds

first  
aid kit  
but really most of  
all

### PERFORMER 1, spoken

My headshots!

### ENSEMBLE, spoken

NO!

### PERFORMER 2, spoken

It's your important documents in a waterproof  
container.

### ENSEMBLE, spoken

Your important documents in a waterproof  
container.

### AUDIENCE, spoken

Your important documents in a waterproof  
container.

### ENSEMBLE, sung

written contacts  
for those  
you need to reach  
a lot

facemask  
your keys  
a little bit of  
cash

phone  
and charger  
but really most of  
all

### PERFORMER 3, spoken

A worm?

### ENSEMBLE, spoken

NO!

### PERFORMER 4, spoken

It's a hand-crank or battery-operated AM/FM radio  
and extra batteries, ideally with NOAA channels.

### ENSEMBLE, spoken

Hand-crank or battery-operated AM/FM radio and  
extra batteries, ideally with NOAA channels.

### AUDIENCE, spoken

Hand-crank or battery-operated AM/FM radio and  
extra batteries, ideally with NOAA channels.

### ENSEMBLE, sung

A notebook  
and pen  
eyeglasses  
batteries

name of  
your doctor  
copy of  
your lease

activities  
like cards  
but really most of  
all

things you can't  
live without  
big  
or  
small  
(ideally small and right by the door)



Watch and sing along! Scan the QR code to view a  
performance of "Go Bag Song" at Orchard Alley Garden on the  
Lower East Side of Manhattan.



*"How do you prepare for disaster? Get to know your neighbors. In a disaster, they will be the people you count on first. Afterward, working together helps you advocate for resources and make sure folks get a fair deal. Disaster isolation is deadly. Protect yourself and your family by getting to know your neighbors now."*

**-- Lucy Cummings, Director of Faith Sector Resilience,  
New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS)**

***Finding Ground*** follows the experiences of a New York community impacted by flooding and the challenging conversations that emerge among neighbors.

After a major storm impacts NYC, the flood forces an evacuation, and residents are confronted with a difficult decision to stay and rebuild once again, or engage in the town's new voluntary buyout program. Residents must ask themselves, ***"Can my family weather another storm? Can this relocation program help me build a better future? How can we make sure our voices are heard in future planning efforts?"***.

This is a story about making difficult decisions and individuals taking the initiative to plan for a future that reflects ***new climate realities***.



Learn more about climate relocation, buyouts, and displacement.

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