

"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.

For more information, please contact:
info@rebuildbydesign.org



FINDING GROUND:

A STORY OF FLOODS,
NEIGHBORS, AND NEW
BEGINNINGS

VOLUMES 1, 2, AND 3

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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)

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.

Illustrated by:

Hassan Saleem

Authored by:

Hassan Saleem, Jiefei Yuan, Amy Chester,
Johanna Lawton, & Matthijs Bouw

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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.

REBUILD
BY
DESIGN

one architecture
new york city amsterdam

Weitzman
SCHOOL OF DESIGN
UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

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.

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 HOME BUYOUTS

Recommendations to the New York State Office of Resilient Homes and Communities

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)

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:

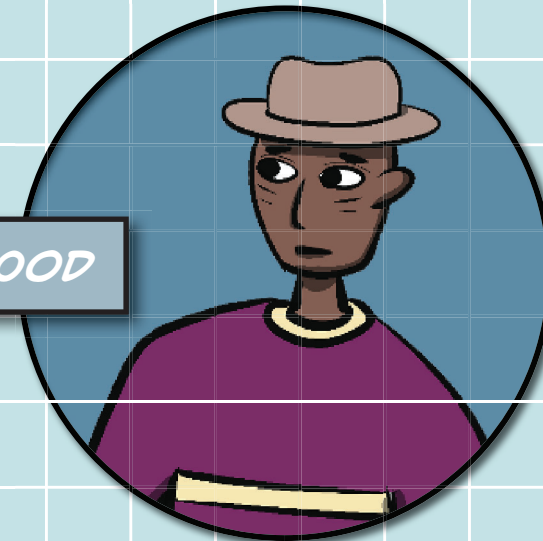
During times of crisis, our most vulnerable fare the worst. People with disabilities or health conditions, the elderly, pregnant women, and children experience disproportionate burdens when flood waters rise, power goes out, public transportation is suspended, and their mobility is restricted.

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.

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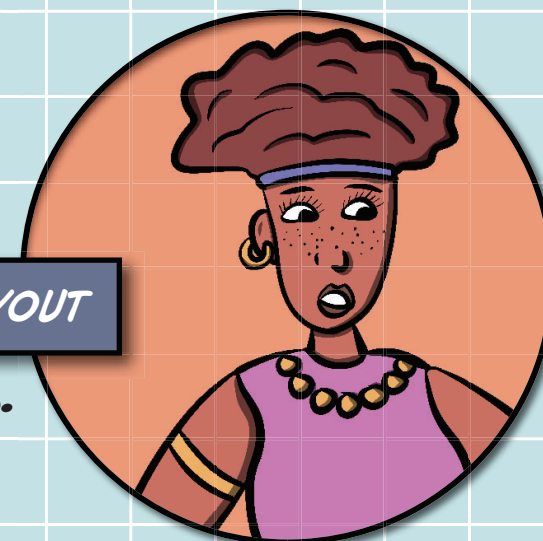
THROUGH JEROD'S EYES...

1 THE FLOOD



2 THE COMMUNITY MEETING

HOSTED BY PASTOR FRANK!



3 THE BUYOUT

FEMI ASKS THE QUESTIONS.

CHAPTER 1



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

THE FLOOD

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?

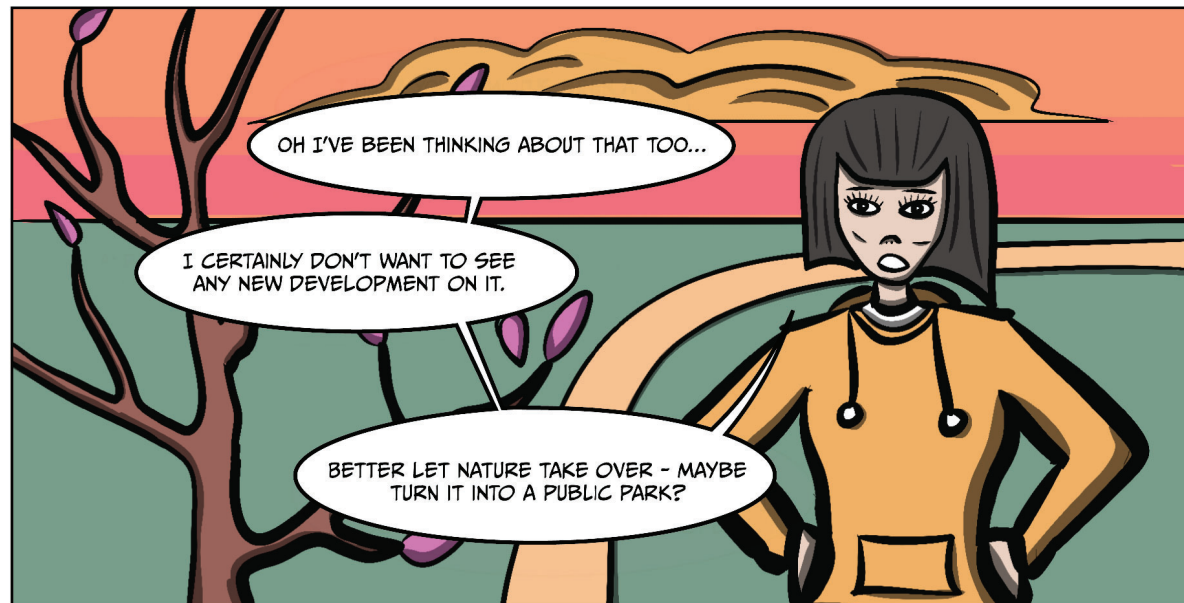
WHAT ACTIONS COULD YOUR COMMUNITY,
YOUR CITY/TOWN, OR YOUR STATE TAKE TO
REDUCE THE NEED TO RELOCATE?



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!

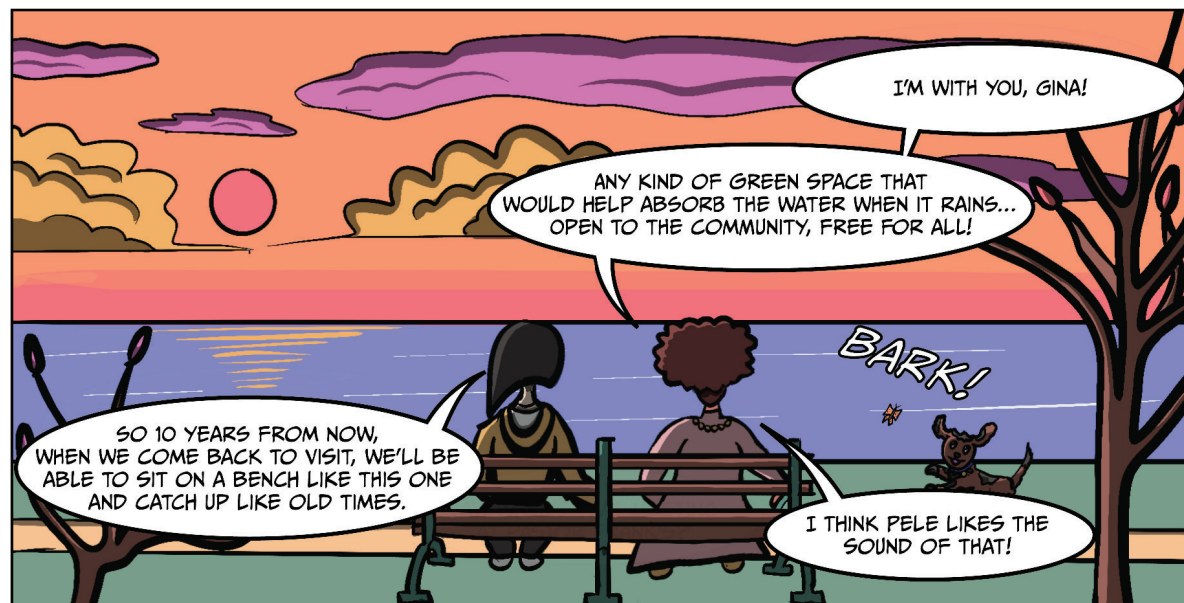
THE THOUGHT OF HAVING TO LEAVE
OUR HOME AND THIS LAND BEHIND...



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!

BARK!

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.

I THINK PELE LIKES THE
SOUND OF THAT!

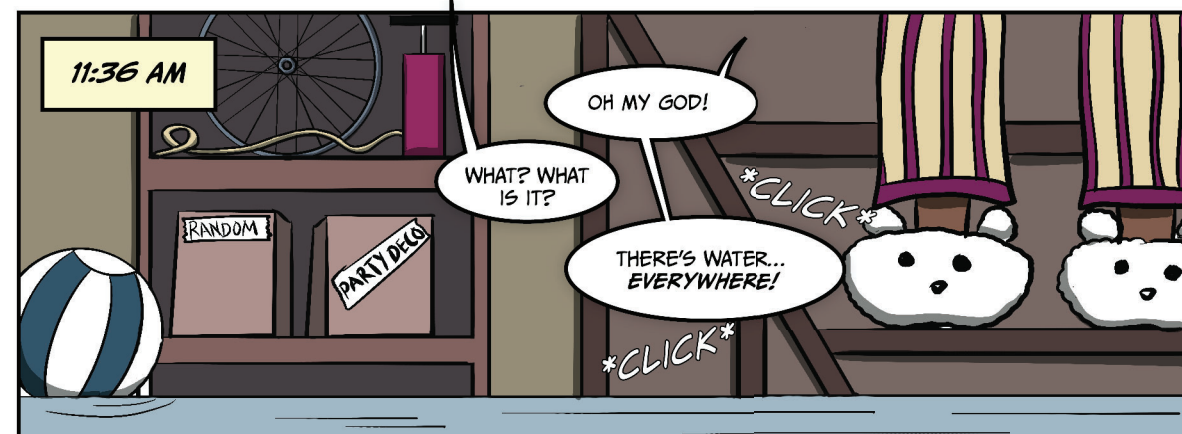


6:52 AM

IT'S PROBABLY
NOTHING, HONEY...

Emergency Alert
National Weather Service:
A FLASH FLOOD
WARNING is in effect for
this area until 11:30PM
EDT. This is a dangerous
and life-threatening
situation. Do not attempt
to travel unless you are
fleeing an area subject to
flooding or under an
evacuation order.

I DON'T LIKE THE SOUND
OF THIS FLASH FLOOD...



11:36 AM

WHAT? WHAT
IS IT?

OH MY GOD!

THERE'S WATER...
EVERYWHERE!

CLICK



12:05 PM

SHOULD WE STAY OR
SHOULD WE GO?

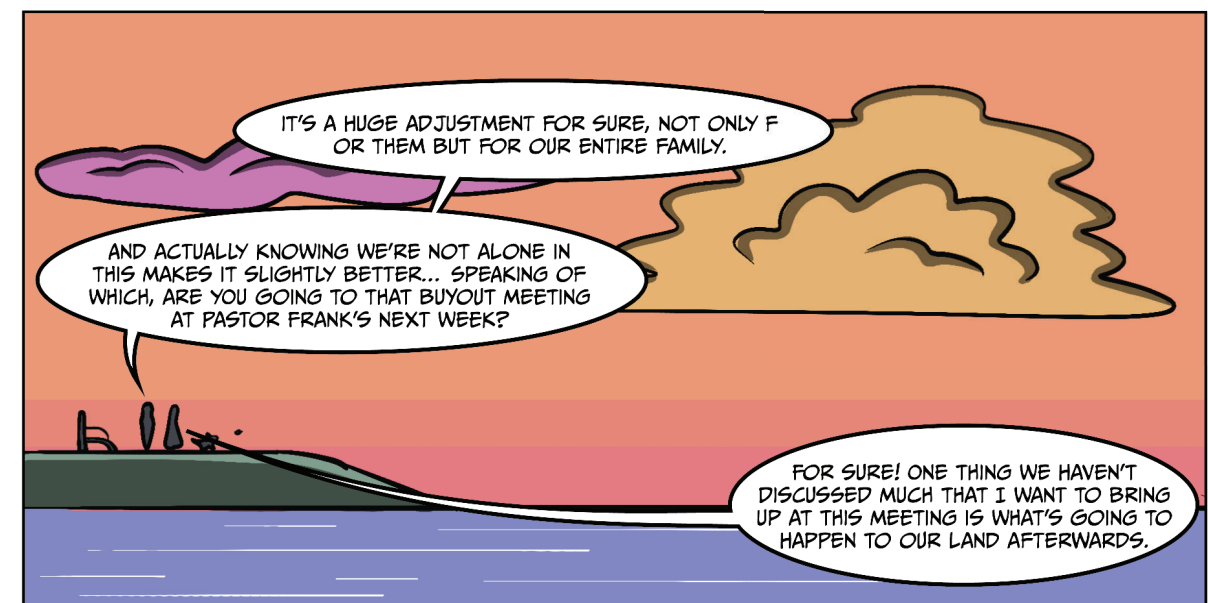
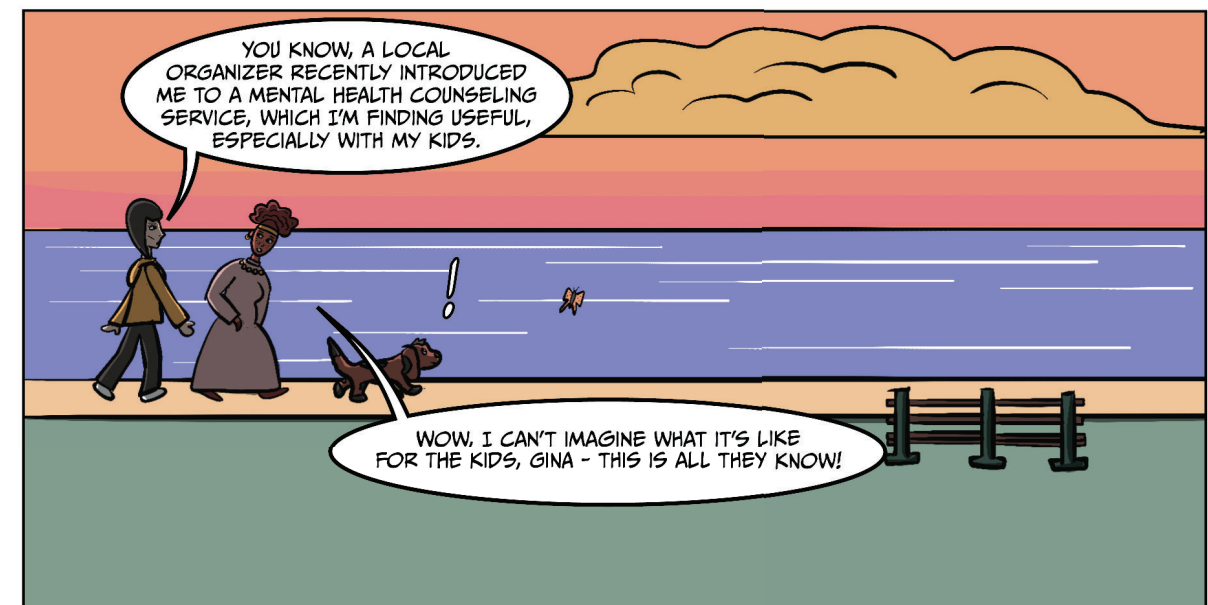
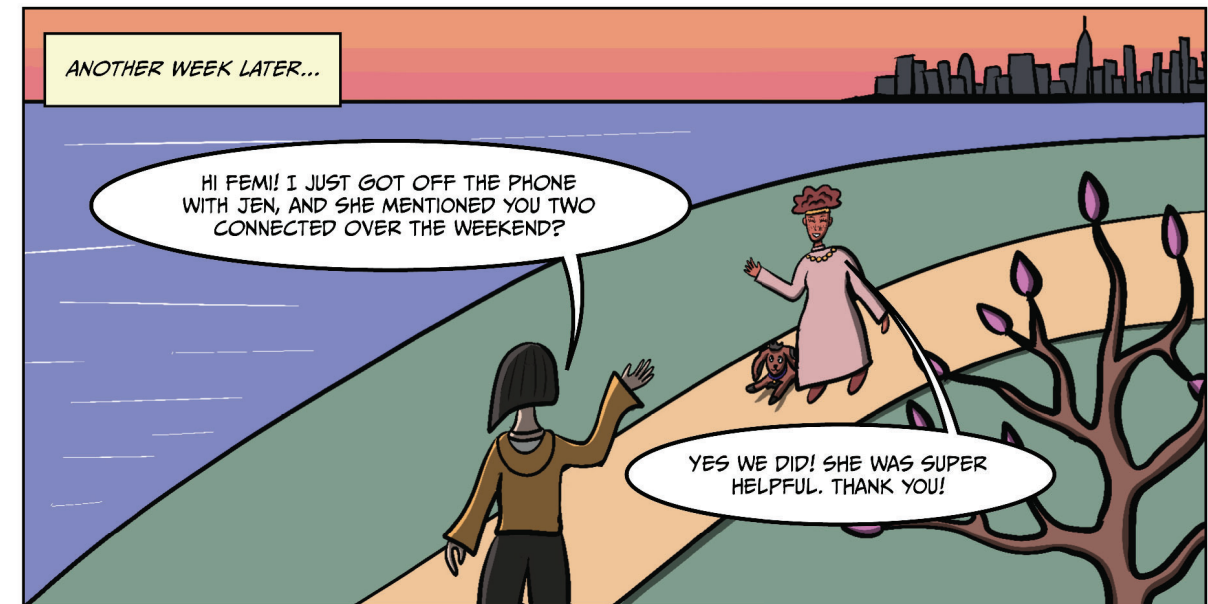
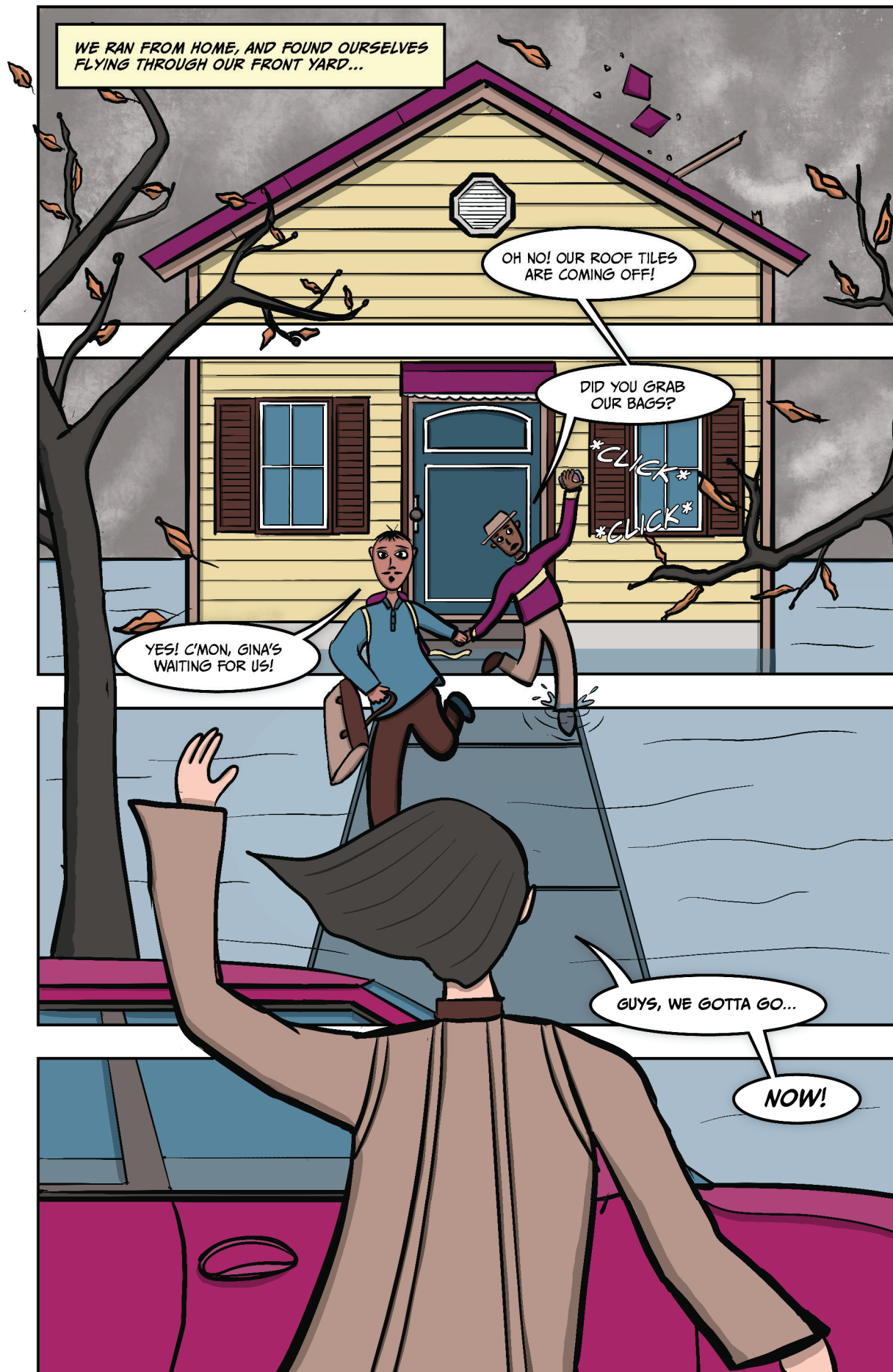
HONK!
HONK!
HONK!

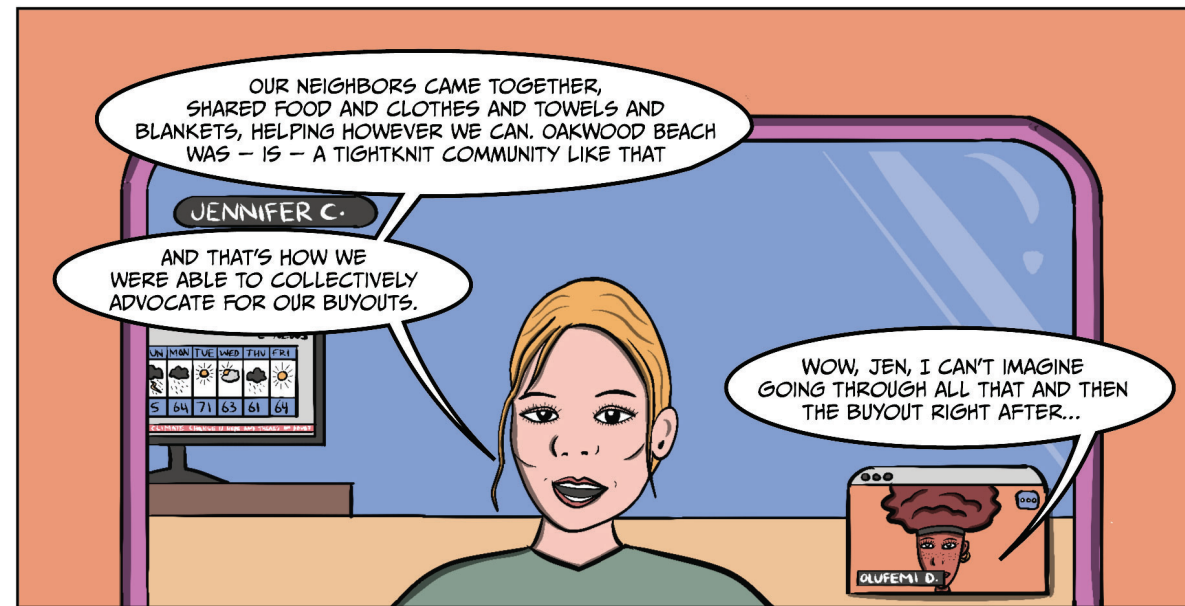


12:11 PM

AVI?! JEROD?!
YOU GUYS THERE?

LET'S GO!





OUR NEIGHBORS CAME TOGETHER, SHARED FOOD AND CLOTHES AND TOWELS AND BLANKETS, HELPING HOWEVER WE CAN. OAKWOOD BEACH WAS - IS - A TIGHTKNIT COMMUNITY LIKE THAT

JENNIFER C.

AND THAT'S HOW WE WERE ABLE TO COLLECTIVELY ADVOCATE FOR OUR BUYOUTS.

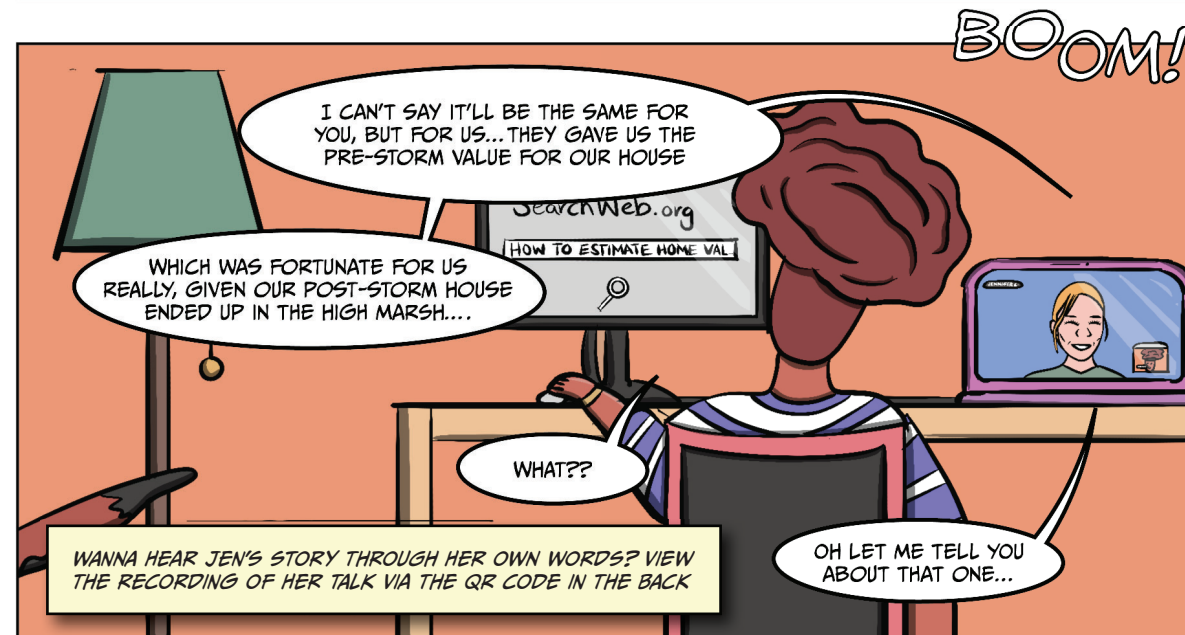
WOW, JEN, I CAN'T IMAGINE GOING THROUGH ALL THAT AND THEN THE BUYOUT RIGHT AFTER...



WELL, WE HAD A CASE MANAGER HELP US SEE THIS PROCESS THROUGH.

BUT WE STILL HAD A LOT TO FIGURE OUT ON OUR OWN - LIKE CHILDCARE AND TEMPORARY HOUSING, FOR EXAMPLE.

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



I CAN'T SAY IT'LL BE THE SAME FOR YOU, BUT FOR US... THEY GAVE US THE PRE-STORM VALUE FOR OUR HOUSE

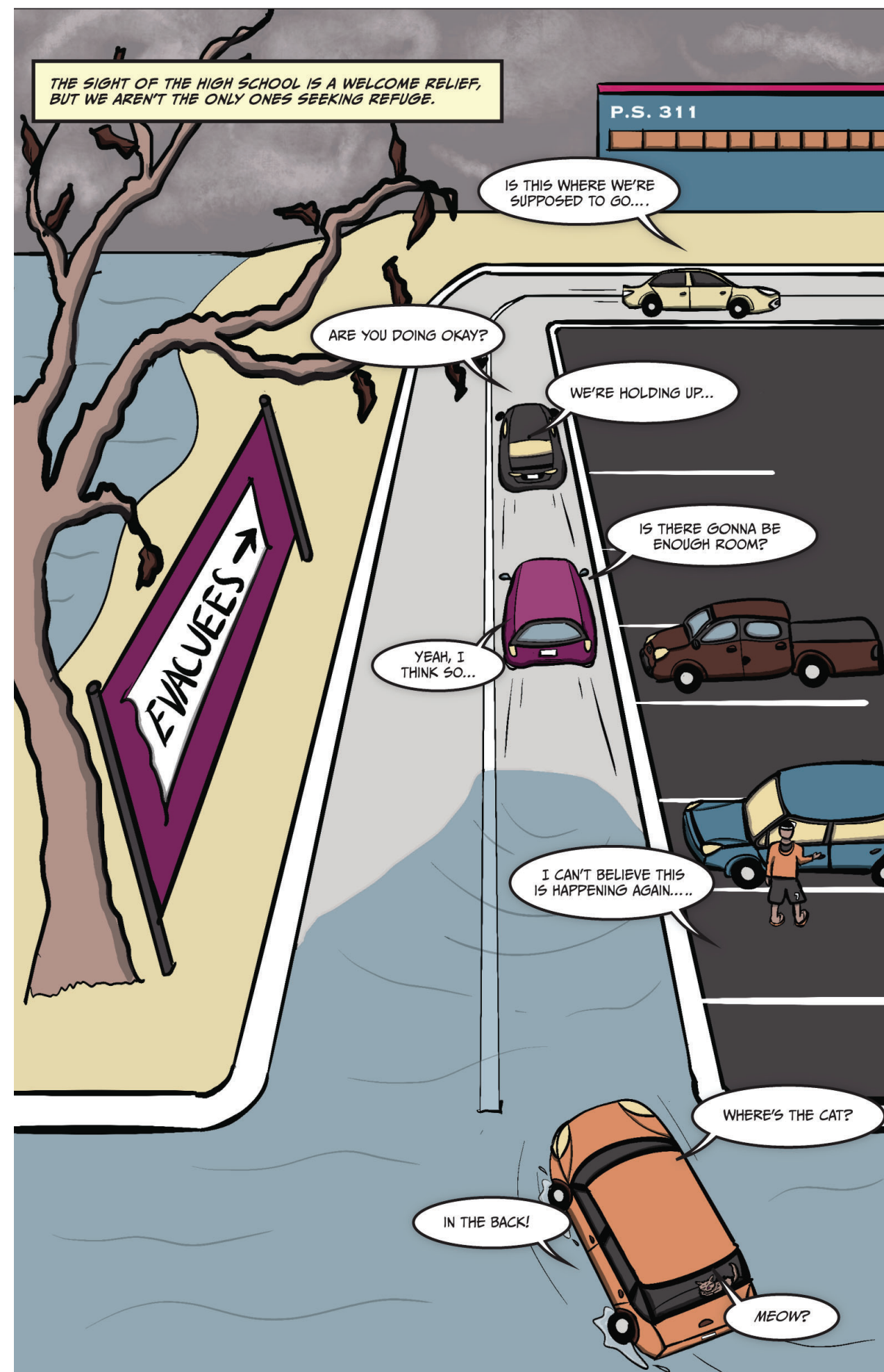
WHICH WAS FORTUNATE FOR US REALLY, GIVEN OUR POST-STORM HOUSE ENDED UP IN THE HIGH MARSH....

WHAT??

OH LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT THAT ONE...

WANNA HEAR JEN'S STORY THROUGH HER OWN WORDS? VIEW THE RECORDING OF HER TALK VIA THE QR CODE IN THE BACK

BOOM!



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

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

ARE YOU DOING OKAY?

WE'RE HOLDING UP...

IS THERE GONNA BE ENOUGH ROOM?

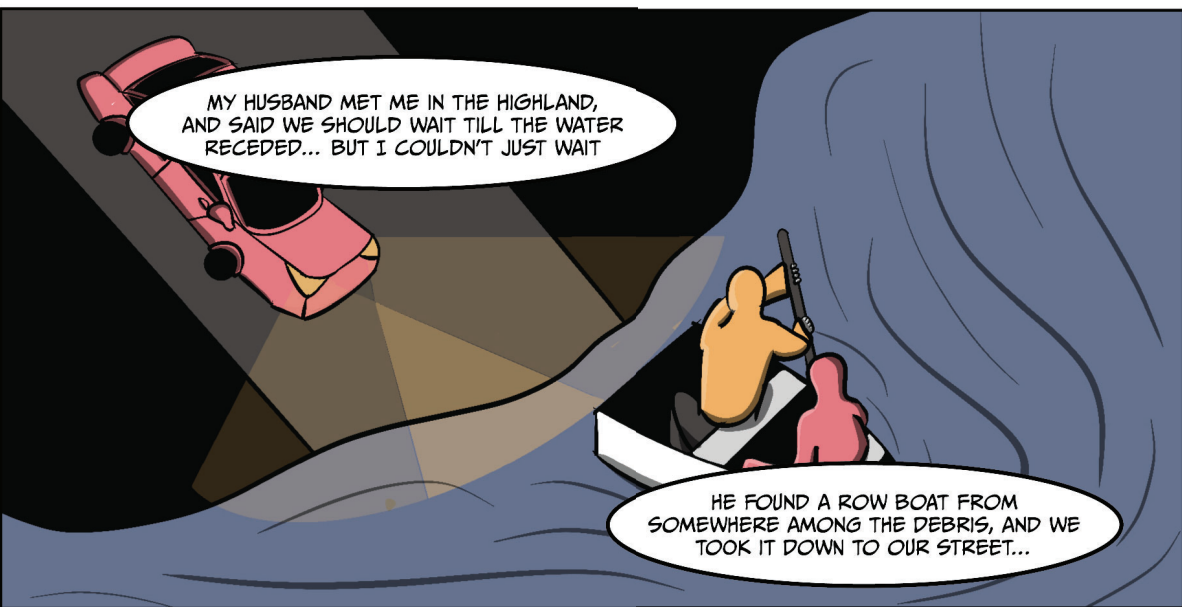
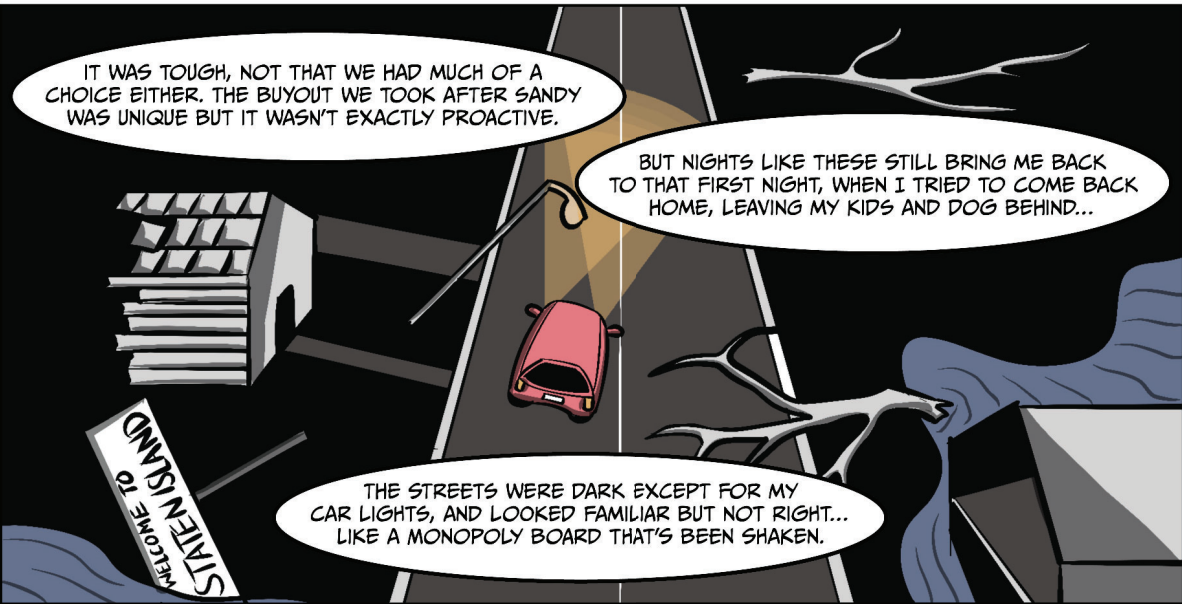
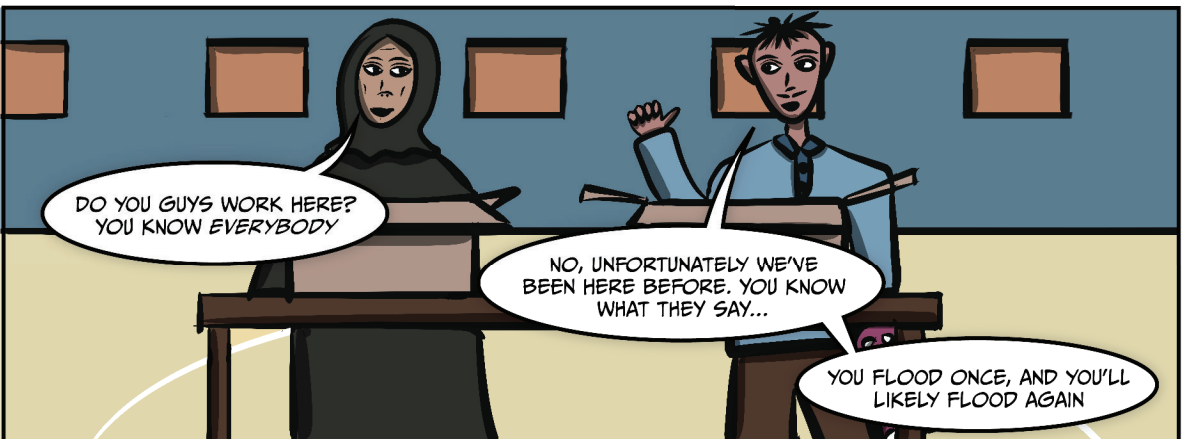
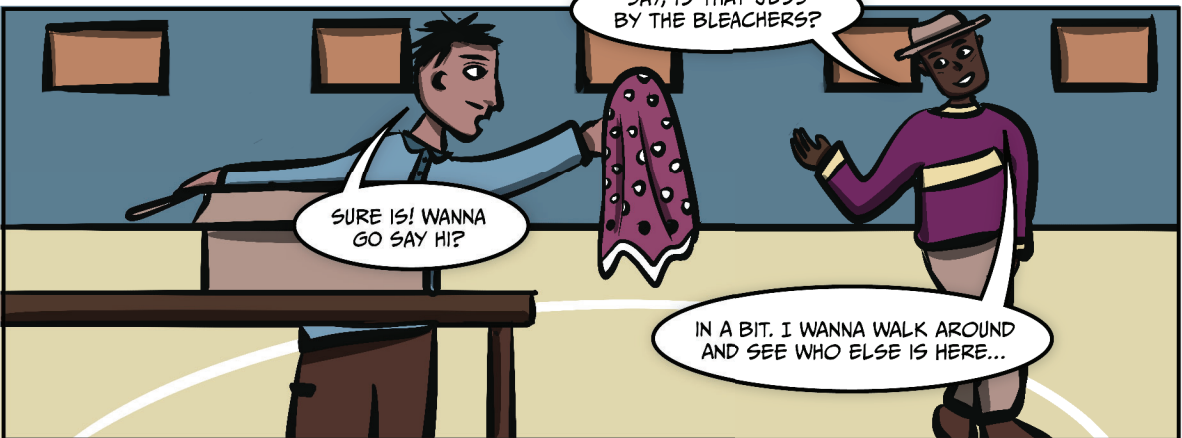
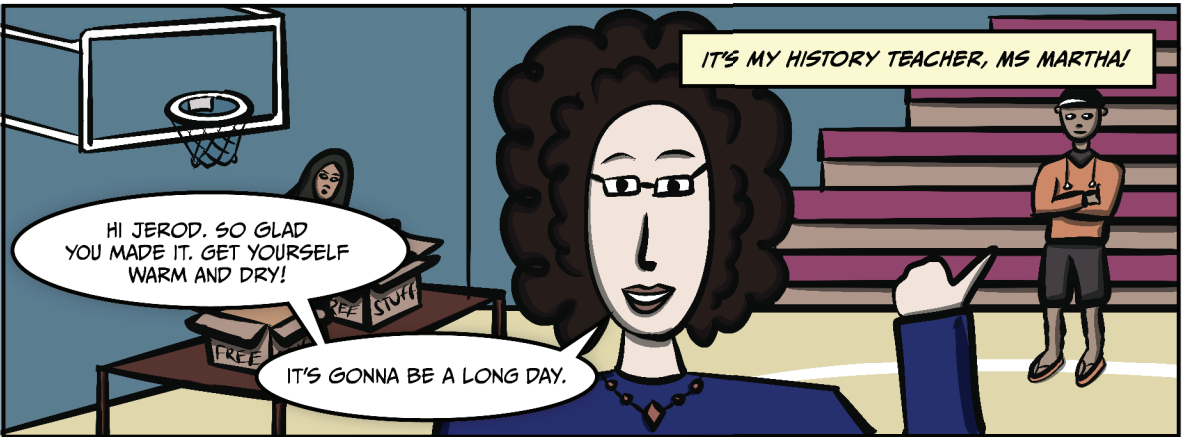
YEAH, I THINK SO...

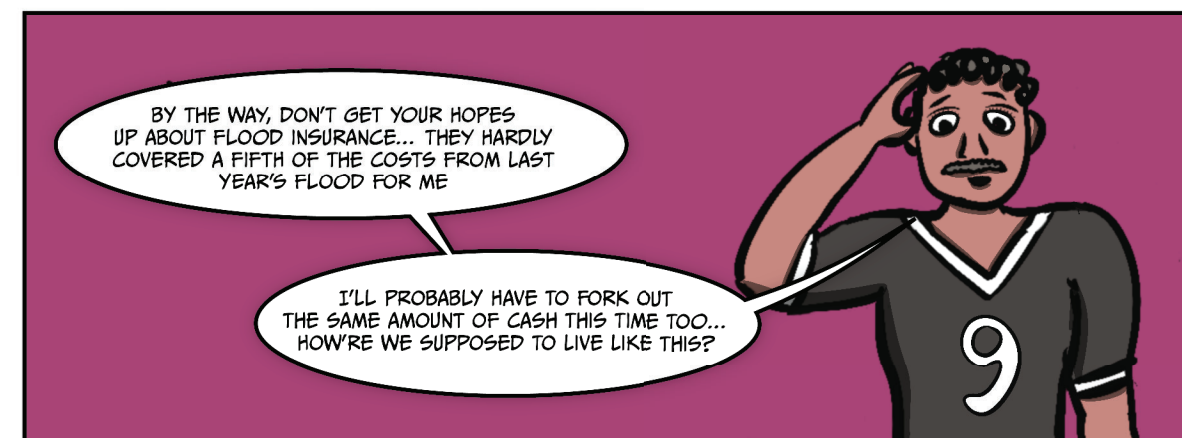
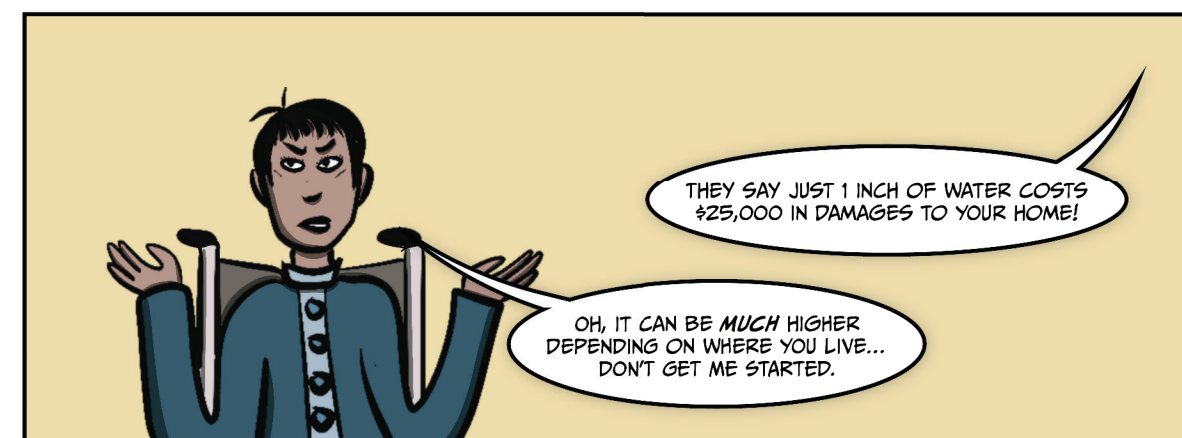
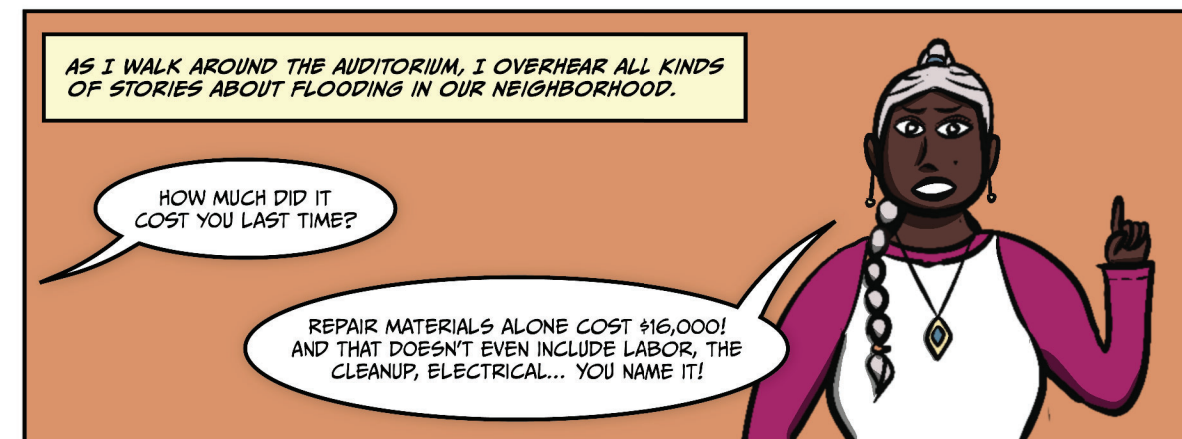
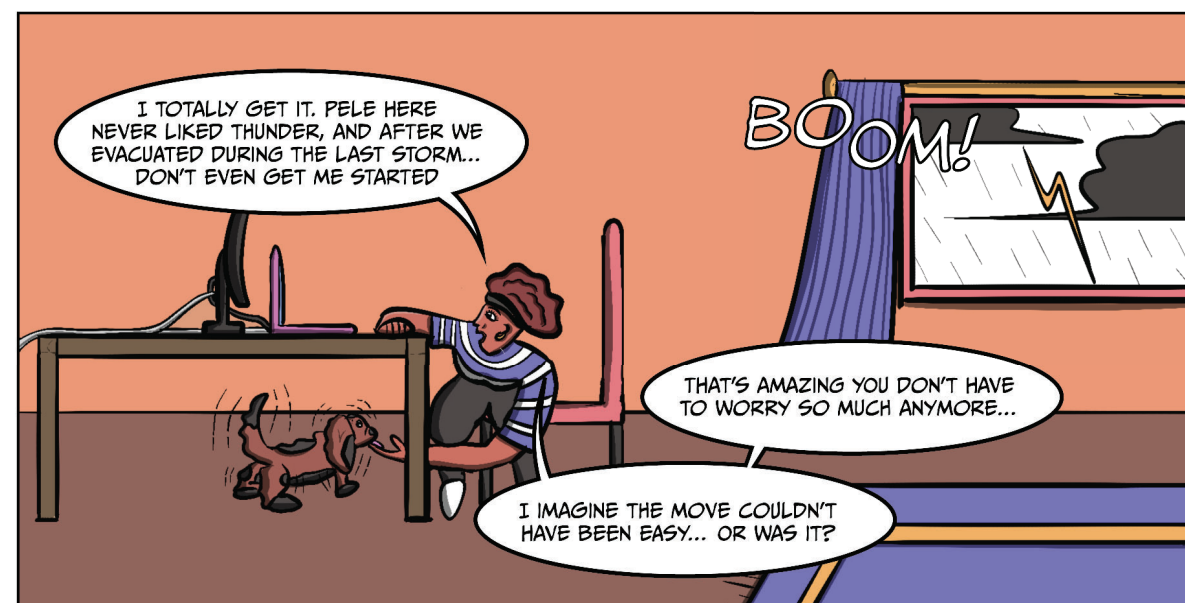
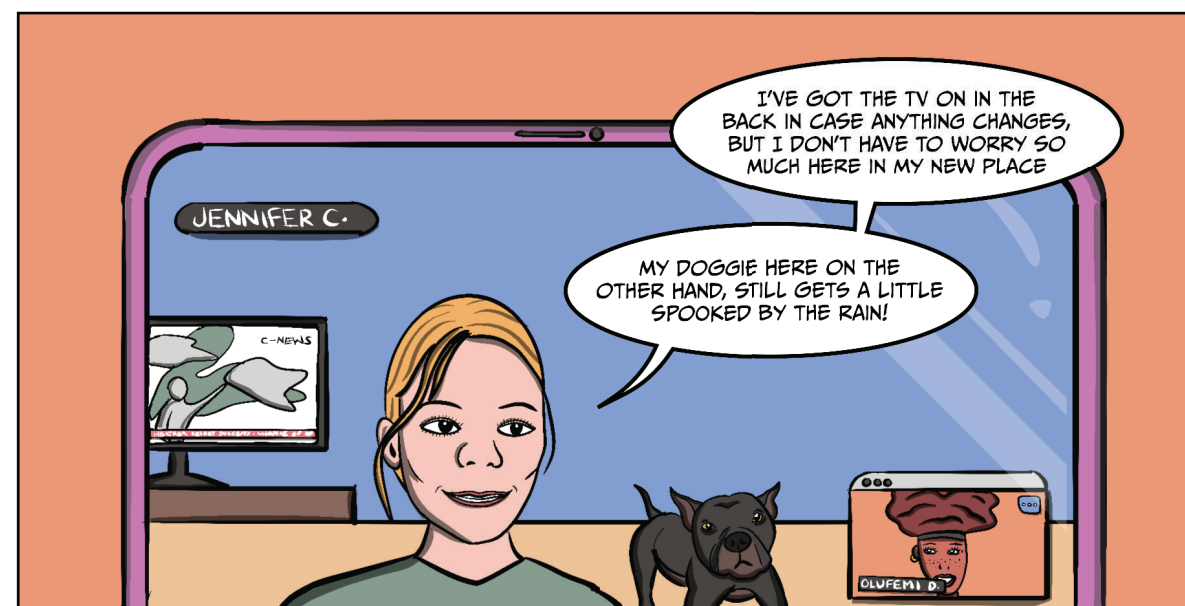
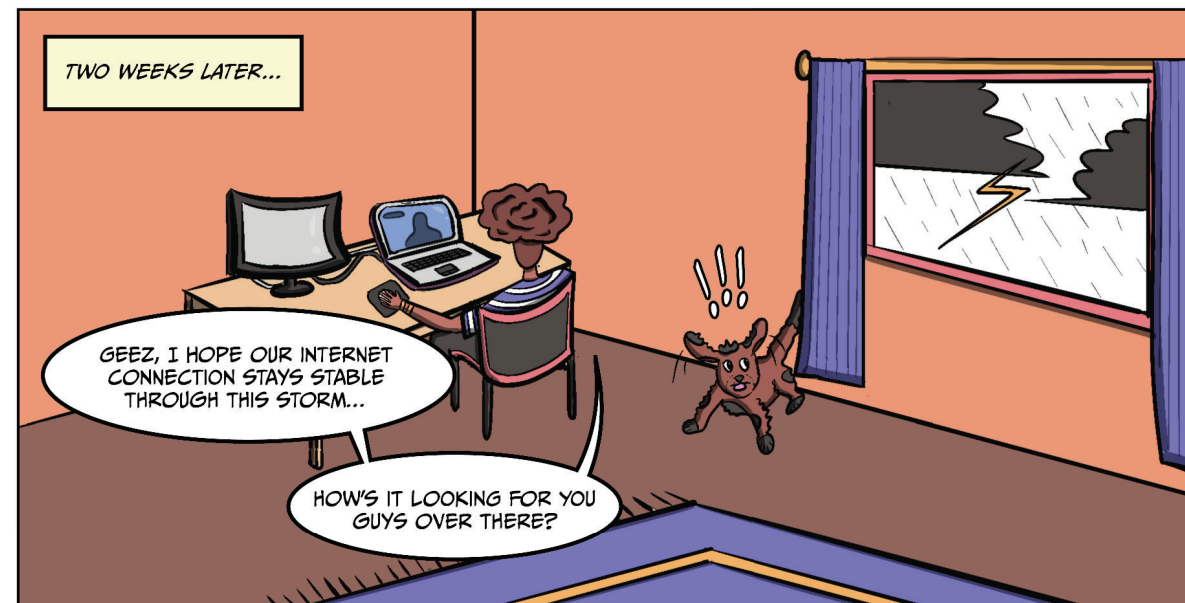
I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING AGAIN....

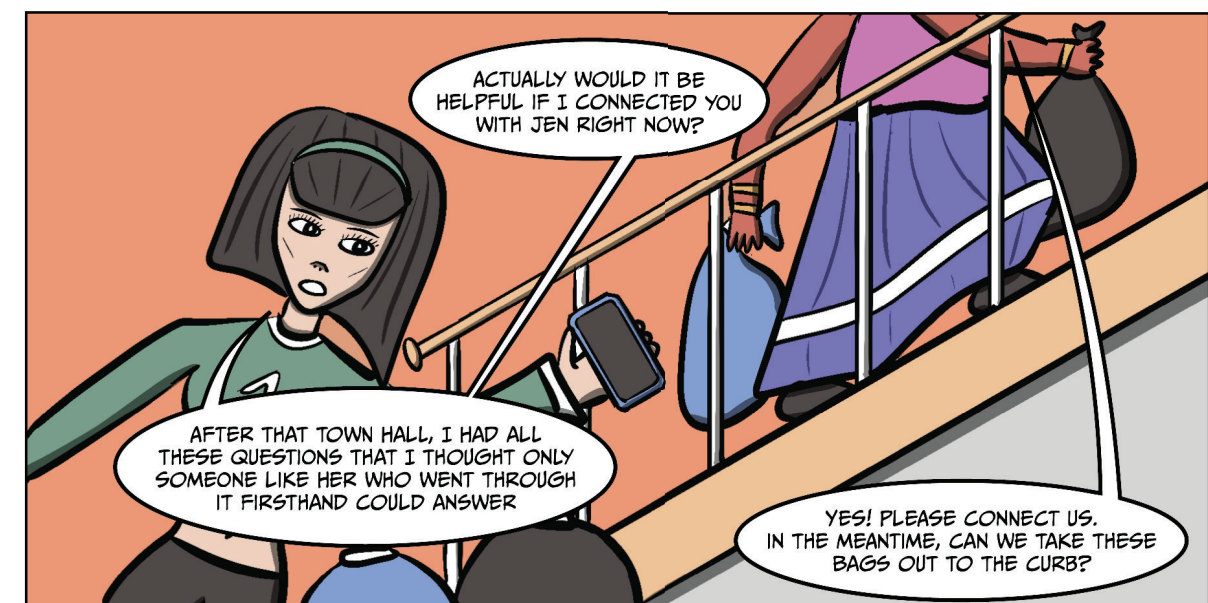
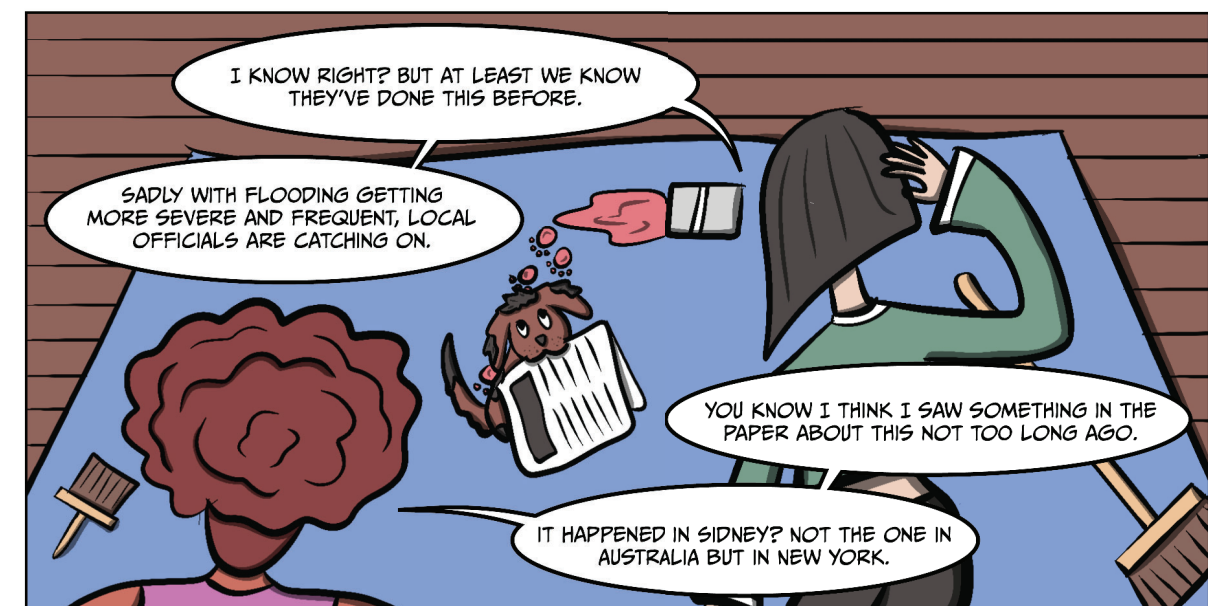
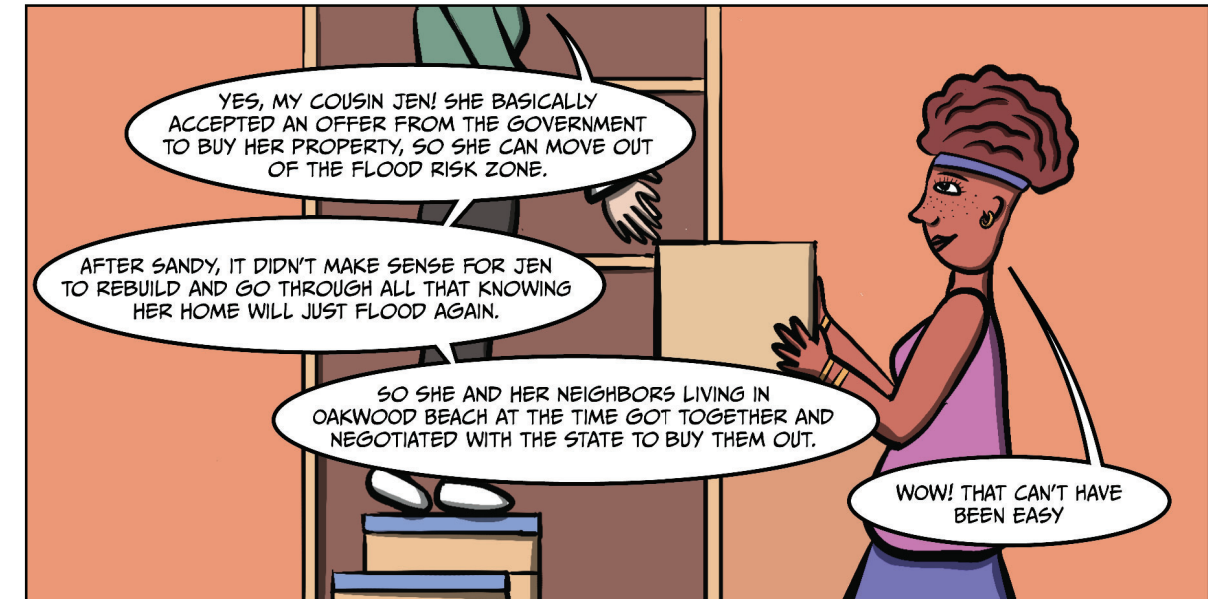
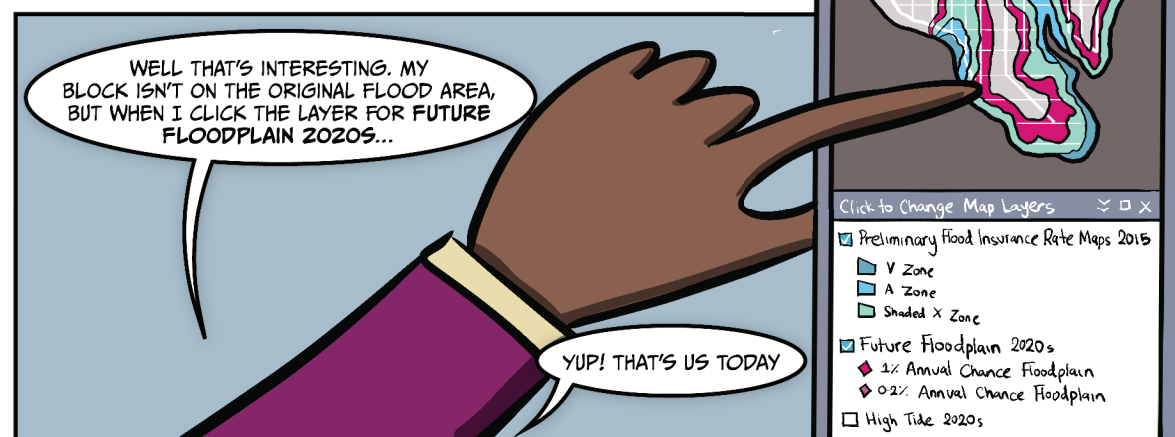
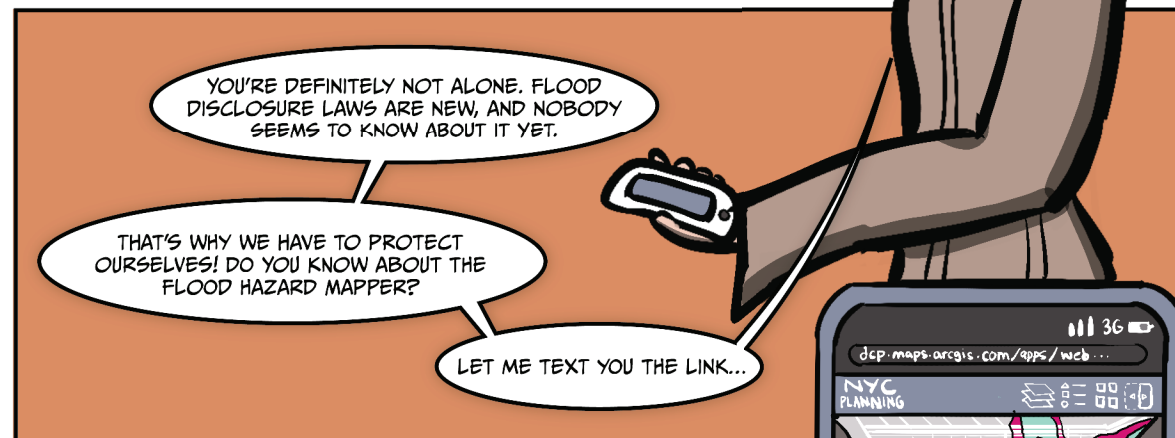
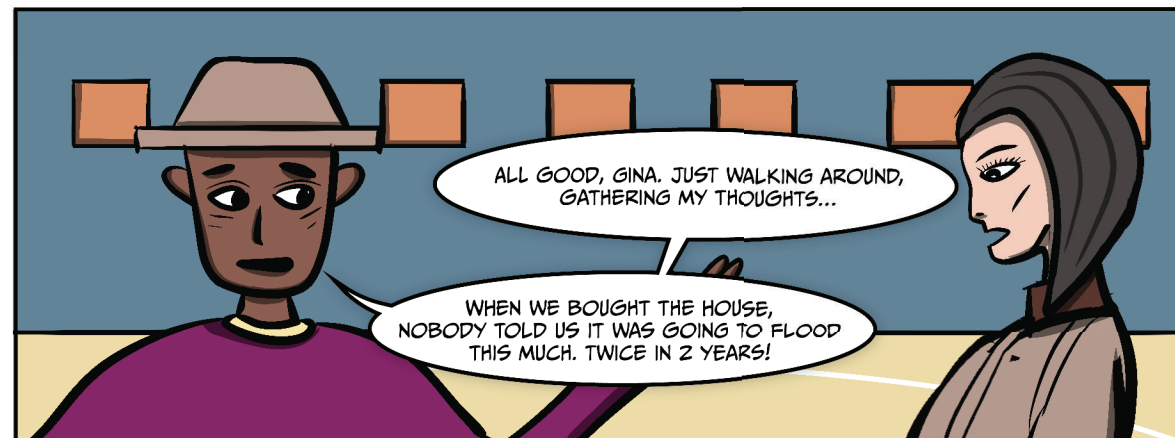
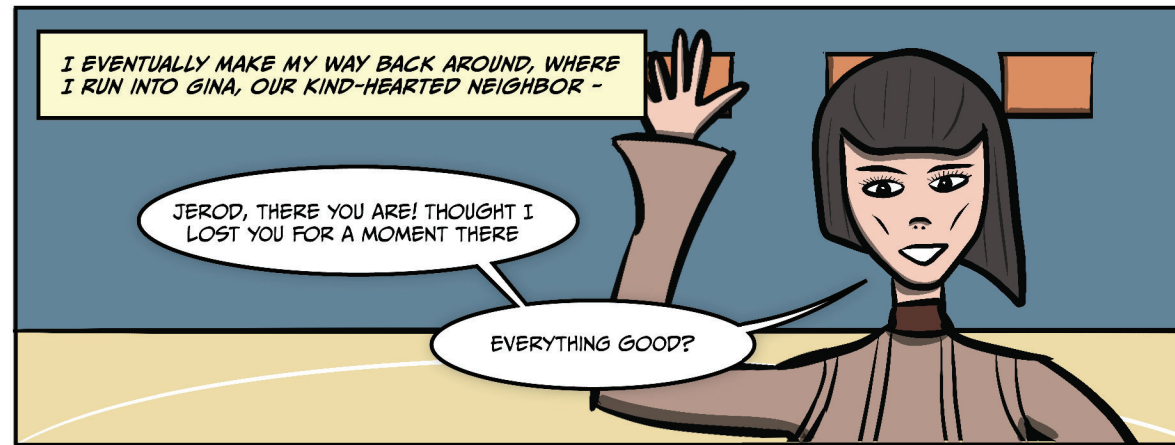
WHERE'S THE CAT?

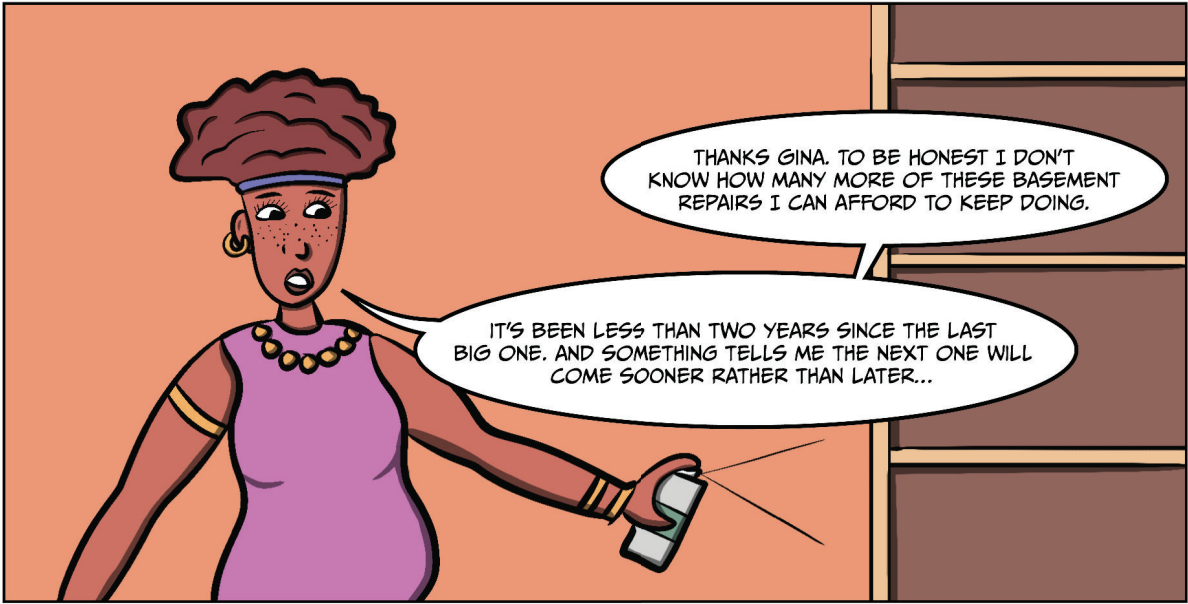
IN THE BACK!

MEOW?



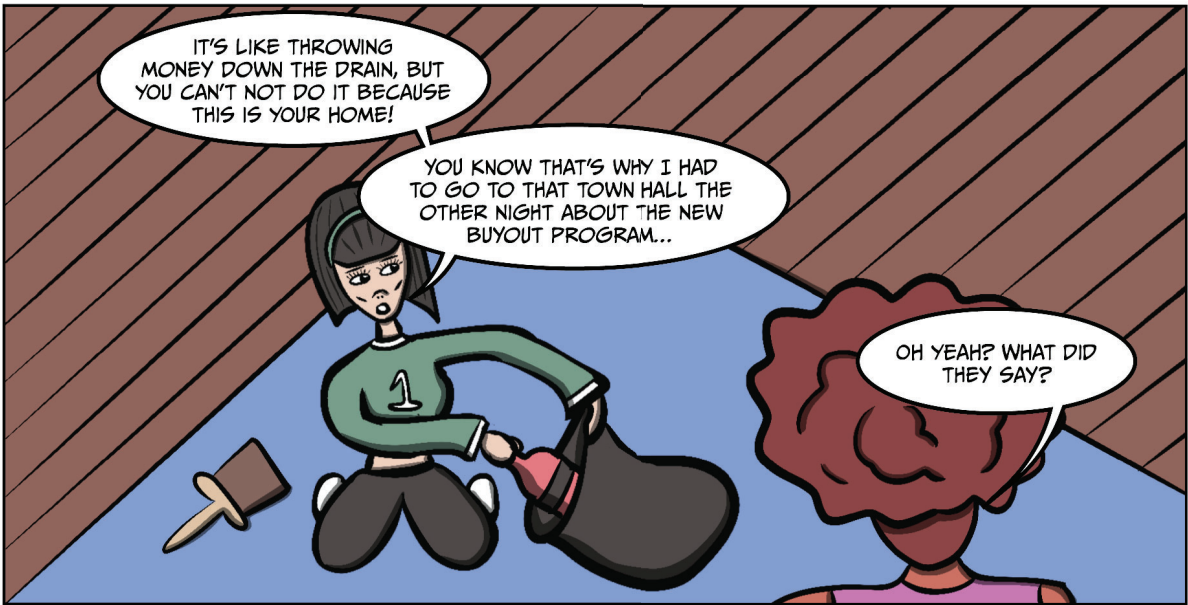






THANKS GINA. TO BE HONEST I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY MORE OF THESE BASEMENT REPAIRS I CAN AFFORD TO KEEP DOING.

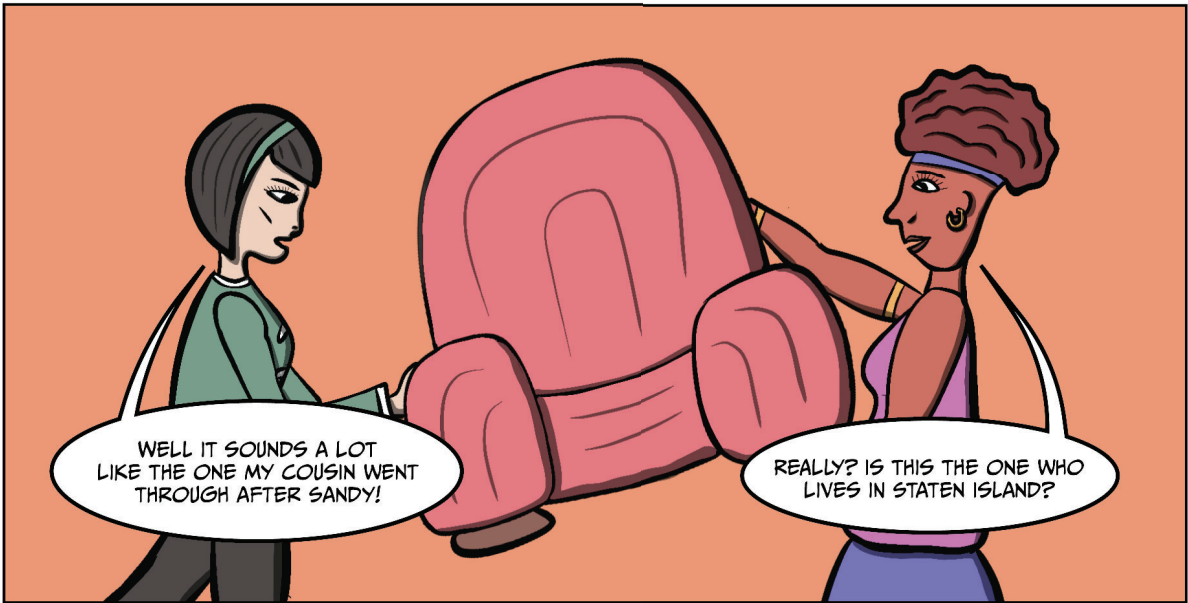
IT'S BEEN LESS THAN TWO YEARS SINCE THE LAST BIG ONE. AND SOMETHING TELLS ME THE NEXT ONE WILL COME SOONER RATHER THAN LATER...



IT'S LIKE THROWING MONEY DOWN THE DRAIN, BUT YOU CAN'T NOT DO IT BECAUSE THIS IS YOUR HOME!

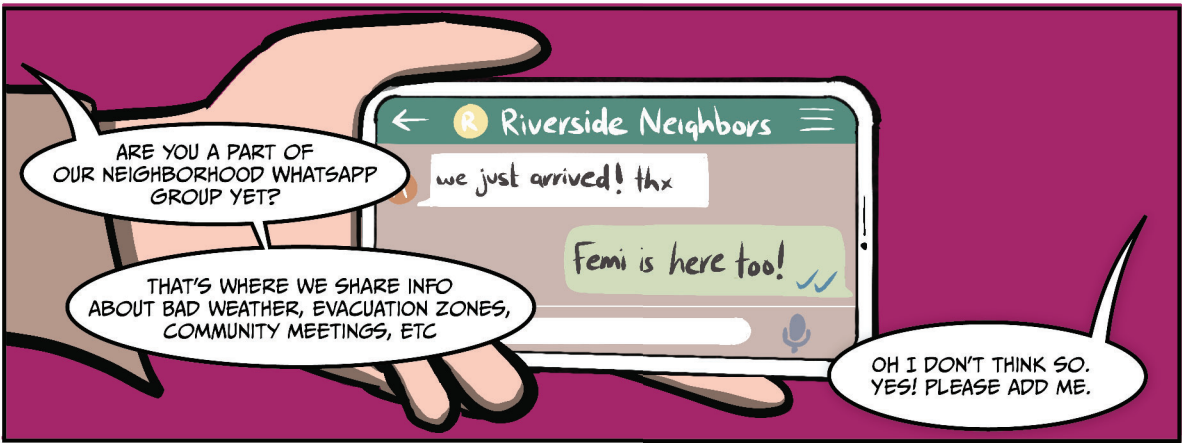
YOU KNOW THAT'S WHY I HAD TO GO TO THAT TOWN HALL THE OTHER NIGHT ABOUT THE NEW BUYOUT PROGRAM...

OH YEAH? WHAT DID THEY SAY?



WELL IT SOUNDS A LOT LIKE THE ONE MY COUSIN WENT THROUGH AFTER SANDY!

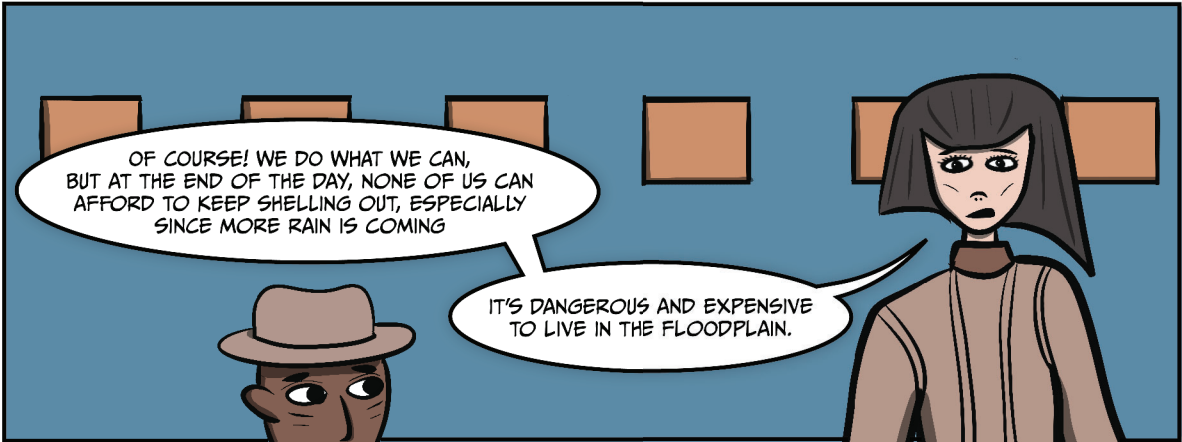
REALLY? IS THIS THE ONE WHO LIVES IN STATEN ISLAND?



ARE YOU A PART OF OUR NEIGHBORHOOD WHATSAPP GROUP YET?

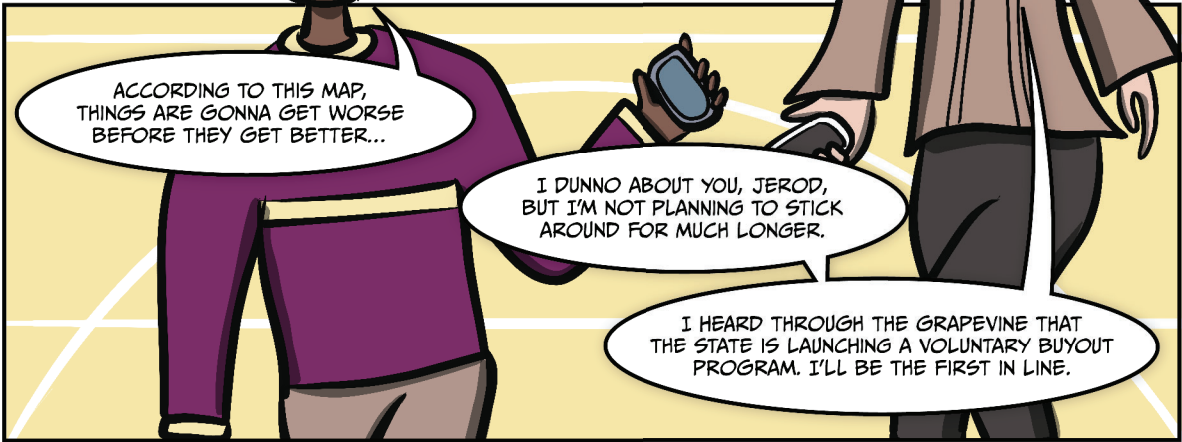
THAT'S WHERE WE SHARE INFO ABOUT BAD WEATHER, EVACUATION ZONES, COMMUNITY MEETINGS, ETC

OH I DON'T THINK SO. YES! PLEASE ADD ME.



OF COURSE! WE DO WHAT WE CAN, BUT AT THE END OF THE DAY, NONE OF US CAN AFFORD TO KEEP SHELLING OUT, ESPECIALLY SINCE MORE RAIN IS COMING

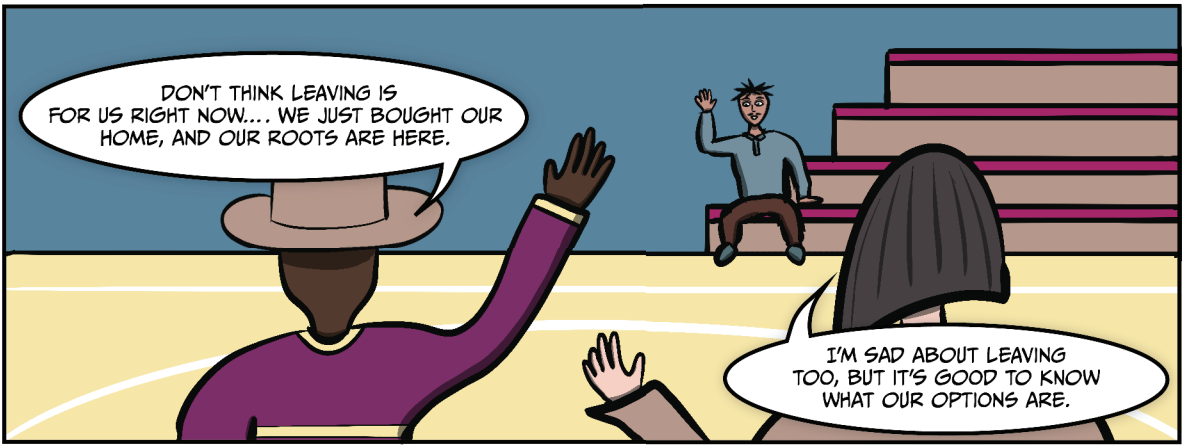
IT'S DANGEROUS AND EXPENSIVE TO LIVE IN THE FLOODPLAIN.



ACCORDING TO THIS MAP, THINGS ARE GONNA GET WORSE BEFORE THEY GET BETTER...

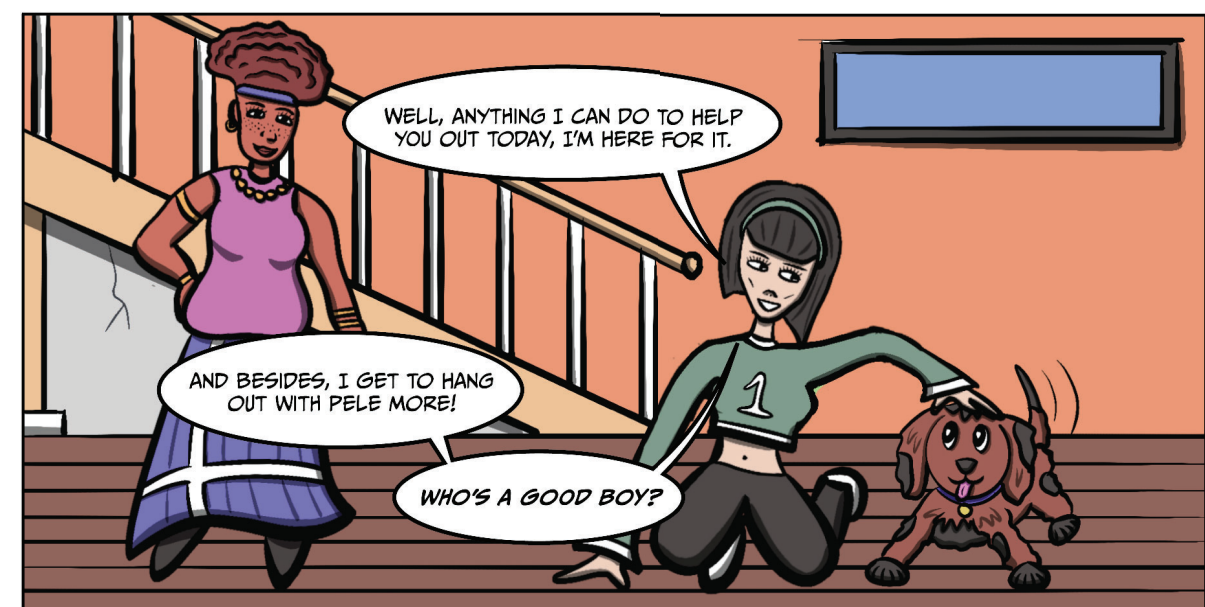
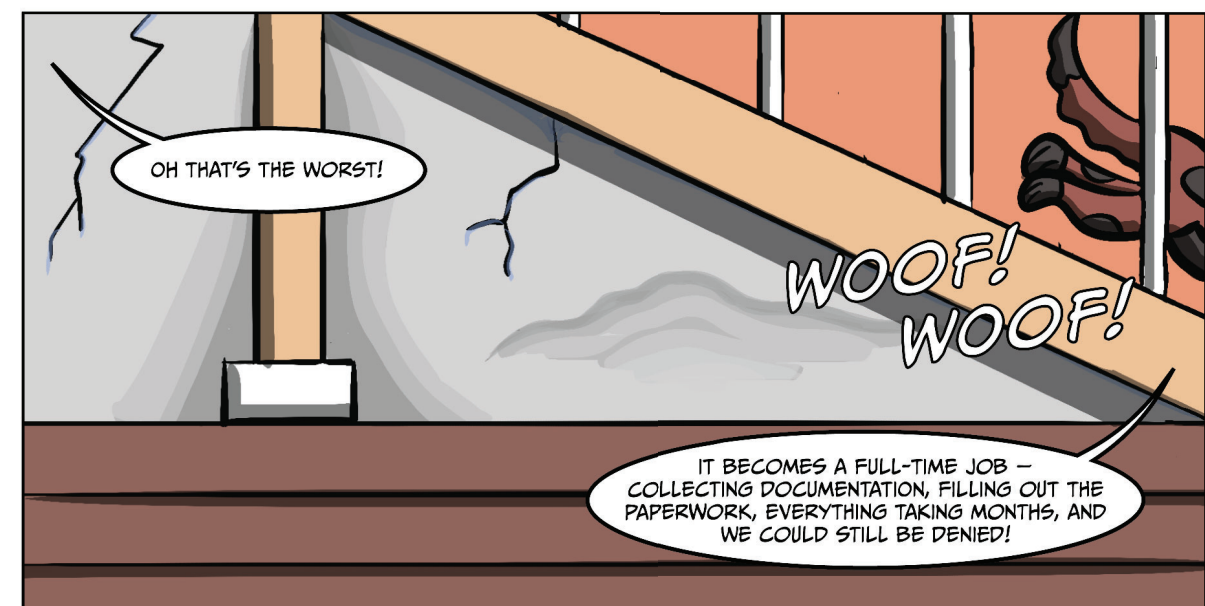
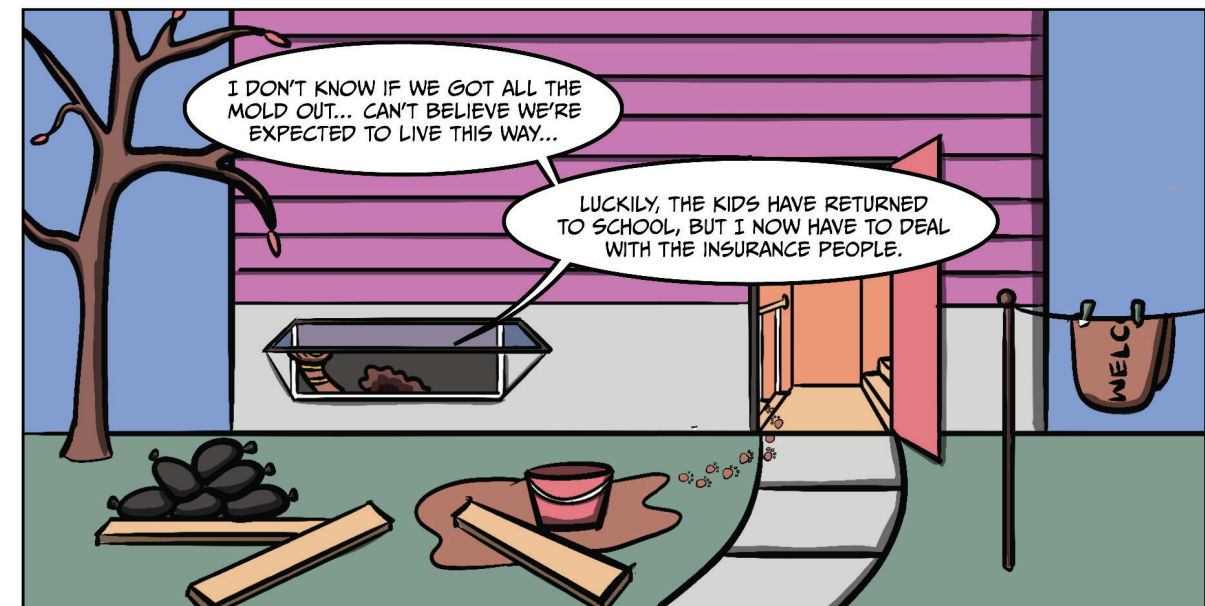
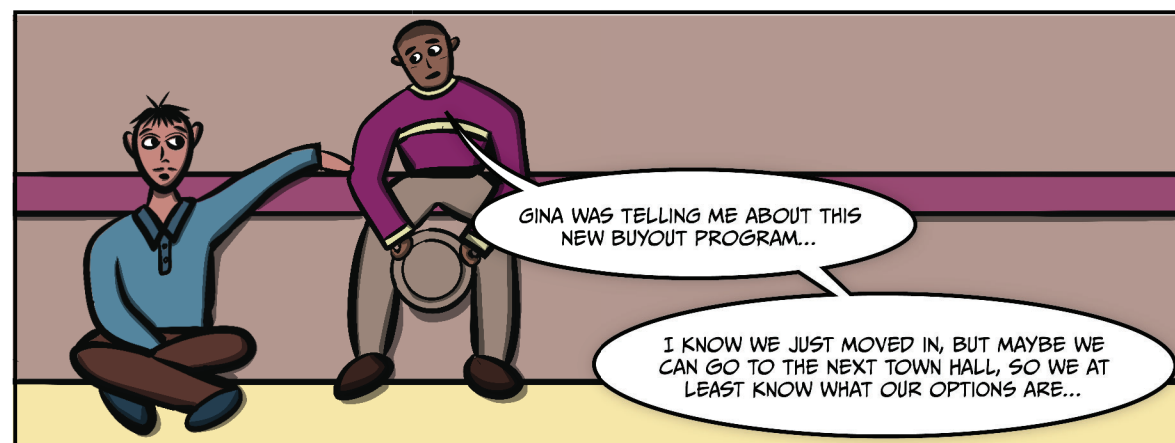
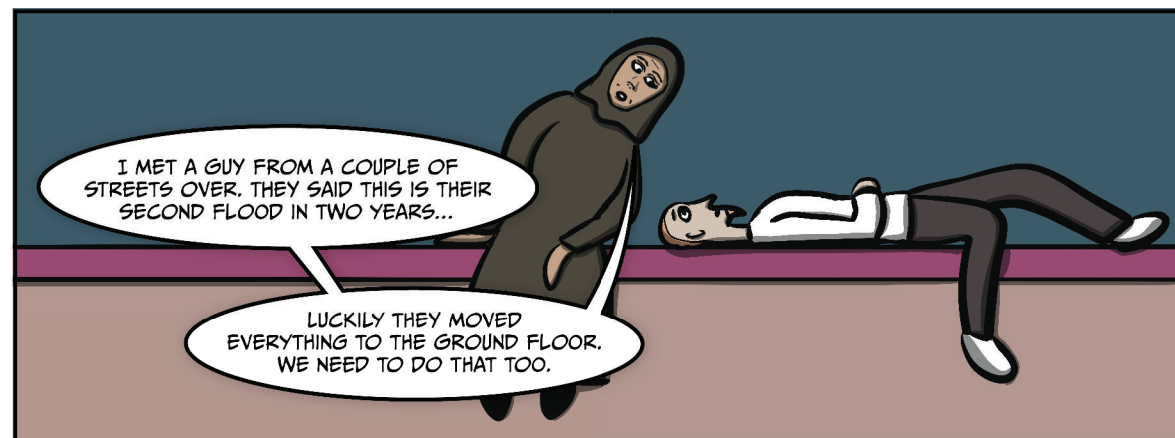
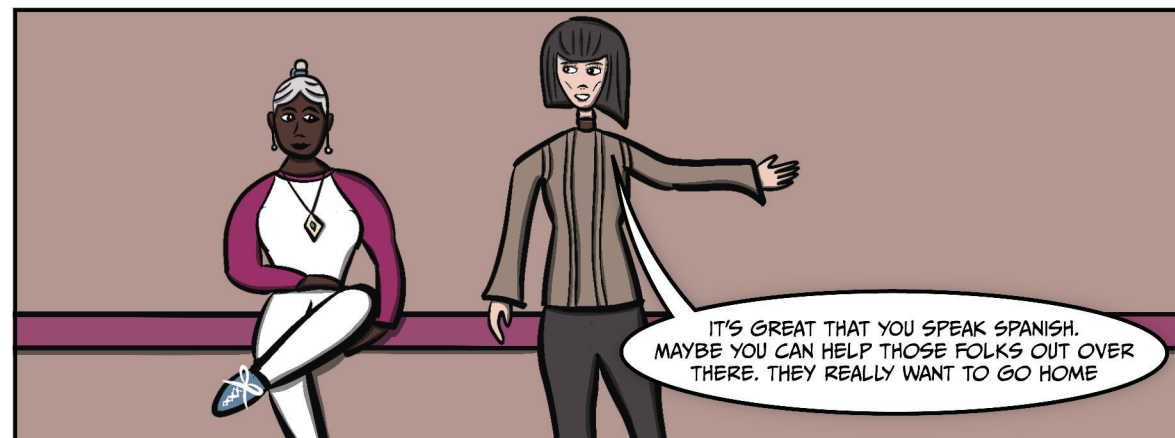
I DUNNO ABOUT YOU, JEROD, BUT I'M NOT PLANNING TO STICK AROUND FOR MUCH LONGER.

I HEARD THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE THAT THE STATE IS LAUNCHING A VOLUNTARY BUYOUT PROGRAM. I'LL BE THE FIRST IN LINE.



DON'T THINK LEAVING IS FOR US RIGHT NOW... WE JUST BOUGHT OUR HOME, AND OUR ROOTS ARE HERE.

I'M SAD ABOUT LEAVING TOO, BUT IT'S GOOD TO KNOW WHAT OUR OPTIONS ARE.



CHAPTER 3



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

THE BUYOUT

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

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?

