

Donquitta Clements

June 28, 2023

Summary: Donquitta Clements is a mother, wife and lead of a nonprofit called Break the Cycle. This interview, recorded at Pray First Mission Ministries in East End Newport News, touches on her fears and concerns about coal dust as mother of young children; the expenses she has put down to mitigate the dust; what she would like to see different; what she loves about East End as a lifelong resident, and what she has seen in regards to the Choice Neighborhood Initiative and gentrification.

Note: There are audio issues in this interview starting at about 2:30 to 3:04 - the dialog is still discernible but distorted. The interview seems to conclude at about 44:30 but then resumes to briefly discuss the Department of Environmental Quality's Tidewater Air Monitoring Evaluation.

[00:00:00] **Donquitta Clements:** Okay. So I'm Donquitta Clements. I live on Ivy Avenue. I grew up in the East End, been here for the last 32 years of my life.

[00:00:08] **Adrian:** Nice. Nice. Um, and do you wanna say a little bit about, um, what you do in your organization?

[00:00:15] **Donquitta Clements:** Yes. I own an organization called Break the Cycle, and our main goal is to advocate for more equitable experiences that looks different on every level, and economic justice, social justice, environmental justice, educational research, pretty much anything that we can advocate for. We're gonna help. We're more of a collaborative, thriving organization. That's what we like to call ourselves. It's, oh, it is unorthodox, but it's necessary. So things like what you're doing, we always wanna jump on board to be of help in any way that we can. We can't do the political part, but we can definitely be a voice.

[00:00:56] **Adrian:** Yeah. Cool. Well, I'm really glad that we get to connect. Are you, are you from here?

[00:01:01] **Donquitta Clements:** Yes. Born and raised.

[00:01:03] **Adrian:** Right on.

[00:01:03] **Donquitta Clements:** From Virginia.

[00:01:05] **Adrian:** Um, so do you have like early memories of like the dust being in your life?

[00:01:13] **Donquitta Clements:** Yes. Okay. My first encounter, I was about-- telling my age. I was 17 years old. And I lived out in an apartment complex called Dickerson Court, and I couldn't figure out why I kept getting sick.

[00:01:28] When I finally went to the hospital, they swabbed my nose and all this black stuff came out and they were like, "Where'd you say you live again?" And they explained that my respiratory issues was coming from where I live. They advised me to get on what then was a waiting list for about three years, I think to be moved uptown. 'Cause I was living in Newport News Housing Authority. And eventually I ended up moving out because when they moved me, they didn't move me from that apartment complex. They moved me just across the street. I was still in Newport News Housing Authority, and the only way I got out at that age was moving to Hampton.

[00:02:06] **Adrian:** Wow.

[00:02:07] **Donquitta Clements:** But all my family still lived in Newport News, so I was still was affected and my grandmother was affected, my mom. Anything you could think of that would bring you home for family, I had to come home to do so. No one else ever moved.

[00:02:21] **Adrian:** Wow. Um, do you have asthma?

[00:02:25] **Donquitta Clements:** Yes, I do. I was diagnosed with that, about 21 years old. At first, I thought it was something that was like, um, from exercise, but again, the history went right back to this right here because I came back home and I lived downtown again at 1602 Jefferson Avenue again, right across from terminal. So they were like, "Hey, we think it's the same problem. You're just gonna have to figure out how to stay from down there."

[00:02:53] **Adrian:** Wow. That's what the doctor told you?

[00:02:55] **Donquitta Clements:** Mm-hmm. Sent to the hospital.

[00:02:56] **Adrian:** You said you were gonna have to figure out how to what?

[00:02:59] **Donquitta Clements:** How to get-- stay from down there.

[00:03:01] **Adrian:** Oh wow. To like just not live there.

[00:03:03] **Donquitta Clements:** Just move.

[00:03:04] **Adrian:** Wow.

[00:03:05] **Donquitta Clements:** Get as far away from it as you can. And at that time, by that time I had two children and they started to get respiratory issues and the doctor was like, "I hate to tell you, but that it's your neighborhood. They're not stuffy all the time for no reason. They don't have allergies. The headaches, it's coming from the coal dust." And mind you, it's not like the spawning of spring, it can be winter time and you can just swipe through your car with your finger and see that it was coal dust.

[00:03:36] Oh my gosh.

[00:03:38] **Adrian:** So did you move again?

[00:03:39] **Donquitta Clements:** Yep.

[00:03:41] And at that point, we began to notice it even more because you can begin to see it like on your windows, on your car. I went as I went all the way to Fort Eustis. And I'm just now coming back in the last three years and nothing's changed.

[00:03:57] So.

[00:03:58] I brung you pictures today to look at.

[00:04:01] I did it from different angles. I purposely left this can of spray paint on my windowsill for you to see.

[00:04:07] **Adrian:** How long did you leave that out?

[00:04:08] **Donquitta Clements:** A week.

[00:04:09] **Adrian:** Oh my gosh. It's like really dirty.

[00:04:12] **Donquitta Clements:** Mm-hmm.

[00:04:13] **Adrian:** It looks like it's just been left in a garage. For like a couple years.

[00:04:19] **Donquitta Clements:** Brand new spray paint.

[00:04:20] **Adrian:** It's a level of, um, like it just looks grimy. Like, it looks like if you've ever taken a lint roller--

[00:04:28] **Donquitta Clements:** Mm-hmm.

[00:04:29] **Adrian:** and lived in a house with like a lot of cats. And just like rolled every item of your clothing until it wasn't sticky anymore. Like the white lint roller with like the black like grime on it. That's what it looks like.

[00:04:43] **Donquitta Clements:** And then you have a window sill..

[00:04:46] **Adrian:** Oh my gosh.

[00:04:47] **Donquitta Clements:** That was cleaned a week ago.

[00:04:48] **Adrian:** Oh, that's one week! It's a different, it's like a couple of shades

[00:04:53] **Donquitta Clements:** darker. And you see what I did was I cleaned that to show you the [00:05:00] difference. Mm-hmm.

[00:05:00] **Adrian:** Wow. I mean it's,

[00:05:06] **Donquitta Clements:** Yep. I cleaned that off today so you can see.

[00:05:08] **Adrian:** It's so dirty. Mm-hmm. How often do you clean?

[00:05:11] **Donquitta Clements:** We try like every three days. 'Cause I got a lot of plants on my porch trying to help with the oxygen.

[00:05:16] **Adrian:** That sounds really annoying.

[00:05:18] **Donquitta Clements:** Very. And then that's our plant buckets.

[00:05:22] **Adrian:** Oh my God.

[00:05:23] **Donquitta Clements:** Mm-hmm.

[00:05:24] **Adrian:** Wow. It looks like, I mean, it's like. It looks like if you've ever seen like black mold growing--

[00:05:32] **Donquitta Clements:** Exactly.

[00:05:34] **Adrian:** like had the misfortune to see that in your home, it looks like that. Like the, just these like black spores, but it's dust.

[00:05:42] **Donquitta Clements:** Mm-hmm. And we can't open the windows, which everyone needs fresh air. Yeah. And our ventilation system, we noticed that when you put your filter at it turns black. Every time we change it within about, you know, how you supposed to have it for like a month?

[00:05:58] **Adrian:** Mm-hmm.

[00:05:59] **Donquitta Clements:** Not even two weeks.

[00:06:01] **Adrian:** Wow. Wow. Oh my gosh. How much do you spend on a ventilation system typically?

[00:06:08] **Donquitta Clements:** Oh, if you had to estimate to get, the new one we got was \$10,000.

[00:06:14] **Adrian:** Oh my God. That's awful.

[00:06:15] **Donquitta Clements:** Because the majority of the houses down there, they're so old, they don't have central air. So you have to make the investment to try to help yourself. They don't have any program, no subsidy. 'Cause they know it's happening, but they're not coming up with any plan to combat it. At least that I know of.

[00:06:35] **Adrian:** Wow. Hmm. Wow. So it's like 10 K down. Mm-hmm. For a ventilation system.

[00:06:43] **Donquitta Clements:** And don't forget, you have to then separately get a AC unit that goes on the outside of your house.

[00:06:47] **Adrian:** Which is another three, four hundred?

[00:06:50] **Donquitta Clements:** Thousand.

[00:06:52] **Adrian:** Okay.

[00:06:52] **Donquitta Clements:** Yeah. Another, I think a used one is about \$2,500.

[00:06:57] **Adrian:** And you don't want a used one. Because it, you don't know what it's been through. And so then you need filters to go in the, in the AC unit.

[00:07:07] **Donquitta Clements:** Yeah. It's like you have these, I don't even know, I guess it's called a furnace. A hood. You have, the way it's made up is you got your regular furnace, it goes into all of your air vents, and then you have that one chute where you put all your ventilators. We actually have two, because we have two chimneys, so I don't know. Don't ask. Okay. It's a old house. and we put the vent, one is above our refrigerator and one is upstairs in the hallway.

[00:07:31] And they both have the same issue every time. So we're constantly-- 'cause I have toddlers, right? So I have to constantly replace this. So the moment I see it looks outta whack-- and what, what makes me go check my, um, where my filters need to go is my ceiling fans, the dust collects on the walls and the ceiling fans just like the window.

[00:07:56] **Adrian:** So that's-- when you see that--

[00:07:57] **Donquitta Clements:** That's my indicator.

[00:07:58] Ceiling fan dirty, clean the ceiling fan. Go check the filter. And then it's bad because my kids can touch a wall. You know, kids are, kids are kids. If you touch the wall within a week, you'll see where the hand print is, but around it, it's dusty. So like whatever residue or oil the kid left on the wall is there, but the dust takes the rest of the wall.

[00:08:22] **Adrian:** And how far do you live from the terminal now if you had to estimate? Like a mile?

[00:08:27] **Donquitta Clements:** Oh, it's way less than a mile. I can walk and get there in about. Seven minutes, if not less.

[00:08:35] So from, like I said, it's Ivy, Jefferson Terminal, and I can walk there. So.

[00:08:40] **Adrian:** Like three blocks?

[00:08:41] **Donquitta Clements:** Yep.

[00:08:42] **Adrian:** Okay.

[00:08:43] **Donquitta Clements:** Very close.

[00:08:45] **Adrian:** Wow. What have your conversations with your neighbors been like around that?

[00:08:50] **Donquitta Clements:** Um, they don't really care. They like, "We used to it. Nobody's gonna do anything to change it. We've been living like this for years. They knew when they put it there. They don't care." And they're elderly also, so they just kind of, they've been having to deal with it for some 60, 70 plus years. So we don't know. We don't know how to make them re-care. I guess that's the better way to say it. They're like, "Y'all can go combat that, but we've shot already and they're not gonna do anything different. Because if they were, they would've done it by now."

[00:09:26] Kids, I would say at least-- what's that? Six, seven decades? Going to the hospital complaining about respiratory issues. One thing that I notice in my own child is the two toddlers always have a cough. They're always waking up trying to clear their, it's like they're stuffy every day.

[00:09:49] So by the time, you know, they walk through the air filter. They're probably about, let's say, two or three hours in, it's like they're not stuffy anymore, but [00:10:00] that's a daily fight. And they don't, again, they don't have, they've never been diagnosed with anything allergy wise. When we lived in 23608? Never had the problem. Here? I feel like I probably buy congestion medicine at least twice a month. In the--

[00:10:19] **Adrian:** How much do you spend on that?

[00:10:21] **Donquitta Clements:** Ooh. About \$150 a month. 'Cause Bert Bee's beads is not cheap. And it's two of them, so. Yeah, it's unfortunate, but that's why we have you thankfully, trying to combat in some shape, form, or fashion, because I would think we would have more than just CNU talk about it. And again, I'm not saying that no one else talks about it, but the biggest, the loudest person has been Professor Finn.

[00:11:00] There's a whole like movie called Coal-Blooded that Professor Finn helped. It really maximizes what's really going on, but how many people have actually gotten to see it or even know about it. That's my concern, because I really feel if more people knew, more people would probably help. But then on the other hand, it's a Catch- 22 for me because I've always thought since a kid, like, how do you help something so big? It's not small, it's humongous. I'm like, "Hmm." And then I've heard. Rumors about like the skirt and all that.

[00:11:41] I'm like, what? What does that even mean?

[00:11:43] **Adrian:** Rumors about the what?

[00:11:44] **Donquitta Clements:** They're gonna put like a skirt up to kinda, I guess, block some of it from coming to us. Then you know, there's the, "Oh, it's not the coal dust, it's the congestion combustion from the traffic." And we're like, "What? So the smoke from the cars are in our house." That brings me to, well, why is there that many interstates in our neighborhood? But that's a conversation that always gets shut down as well, so.

[00:12:18] **Adrian:** There are cities that have rerouted interstate.

[00:12:21] **Donquitta Clements:** Mm-hmm. We know.

[00:12:22] **Adrian:** It's possible.

[00:12:23] **Donquitta Clements:** We know. Yeah. Our last election, it was a very big topic around here. Not sure how many people can make those type of changes, but we hear it on the tv, but we don't see the actual action after people are elected. Especially, I can't really get into those conversations, but I can watch from afar and I can say from the a-- afar eye, I don't see the changes that people promise. I don't see it happening, at least not right now.

[00:12:54] **Adrian:** Mm-hmm. But that was a topic of conversation and what-- when was the most recent election cycle?

[00:13:01] **Donquitta Clements:** Uh, November.

[00:13:02] **Adrian:** Oh, this past November?

[00:13:03] **Donquitta Clements:** Mm-hmm. And that was something people were talking about, the local level, like city level. There was a lot of questions from citizens saying like, "What are you gonna do about the coal dust? What's,

you know, what's going on with Dominion Energy? How are they combating the issue?" No one had real answers. It was always, "It's the cars, it's, it's just so many cars. It's the shipyard cars, the traffic." 'Cause we do get a lot of traffic. Uh, I don't, again, I'm not a professional in that, but I don't think the cars would be leaving that much black stuff on my windows or my doors or my car that you saw.

[00:13:41] And my plants, I'm so concerned about my plants 'cause my kids are very small and they see a blueberry. They're gonna wanna pick it but I'm afraid that if they eat it, they may even, they may get sick. Versus if I live in 23608, I wouldn't mind.

[00:13:58] **Adrian:** Is that the Hampton zip code?

[00:14:00] **Donquitta Clements:** No, it's, it's the other part of Newport News. They call it the North. So I'm in the East End now, but I moved back here from the north side of Newport News and I don't think that we've ever saw any dust that far inland goin' in towards Richmond.

[00:14:19] **Adrian:** Mm-hmm. Yep. Can you tell me more about your garden?

[00:14:25] **Donquitta Clements:** Um. It's a hobby. When I learned that plants can help with your breathing, I began to put 'em all through the house.

[00:14:35] My favorite one so far has been snake plants, 'cause we can keep those alive the longest. Um, we have pothos, we have elephant ears. Working on banana leaves, we'll see. Um, we have onions, ginger, blueberries, strawberries. Figs. Trying our hand at peaches [00:15:00] and mangoes this year. Wish us luck 'cause they have not done anything yet.

[00:15:04] Um, what else do we have? Squash, cucumbers. Sunflowers and roses.

[00:15:13] **Adrian:** Wow. Yeah. Sounds like a little more than a hobby.

[00:15:16] **Donquitta Clements:** Yeah. It is something to do to keep my mind from in, in my mind, I think the more plants that are in my house and on my porch, I'm combating some way. You know, we don't, they're trying to take all of the trees, so we're trying to figure out how to keep plants at least in close proximity.

[00:15:34] 'Cause those little ones, they get attacked first. So I'm like, if I have plants by their windows, if I have plants in their rooms, in the bathroom. It's... I'm psyching myself out probably, but at least that's what I've, I think I'm helping.

[00:15:48] **Adrian:** Are you saying that the city is interested in cutting down trees in the neighborhood?

[00:15:54] **Donquitta Clements:** They've cut down several. We, I don't even think there's a number we lost for the, the two neighborhoods that they took, the three rather-- Dickerson Court. Harbor Homes and Ridley Circle-- all those trees are gone. Every tree that those three neighborhoods had, they're non-existent. And I wanna say at minimum, one co-- one community had 293 families.

[00:16:24] So that's mom, dad plus children. So that's a lot of people, lots of trees now gone. Maybe they may replant them. Not sure, but. I haven't seen anything planted here recently with the new construction.

[00:16:39] **Adrian:** Have you, are you aware of like the city's reasoning for taking those trees down?

[00:16:45] **Donquitta Clements:** We're getting new apartments.

[00:16:47] We are getting, um, I never say this right, is it Virginia Peninsula?

[00:16:54] It's a new college, the new Thomas Nelson. I always mix, mess the name up, so forgive me.

[00:16:59] Virginia Commonwealth.

[00:17:01] **Adrian:** Okay.

[00:17:02] **Donquitta Clements:** So whatever Thomas Nelson is now, they're coming to the corner of 16th in partnership with like Mary Peak.

[00:17:09] Um, and then daytime they're gonna do child, you know, um, primary care. And then in the evening students can come and take those type of classes to help them run that type of a center. Um, I'm not sure if Thomas Nelson's gonna have any other trades, but right now we're only hearing about the early childhood development stuff.

[00:17:30] We're gonna get a few houses. Last, I was told between 24 and 26. I don't know how you mix that number up. And then we're getting the community, they calling them town homes back a trail with a water fixture and a seafood market.

[00:17:50] **Adrian:** Okay, so that's. Is it all like that new development that's going on?

[00:17:57] **Donquitta Clements:** It's called the CNI. The CNI project. From what I'm told.

[00:18:01] **Adrian:** How do you feel about it?

[00:18:05] **Donquitta Clements:** In all honesty, I think it's a great idea to redevelop, reconstruct anything that needs help. But consider the people is always at the forefront of my mind. And based off of the experience that I've had in the last year and a half, the neighbors are not considered as much as at least as much as they should be because we have a lot of questions.

[00:18:32] We have a lot of concerns. We go to city council, we ask for them to consider what we're saying and what we're seeing a lot of right now is, "We know what you said, but this is what we're doing anyway." So it's not really for us, if you're telling us that this neighborhood is for the, the people who lived here and they, you know, all their blood, sweat and tears in their community, but then you turn around and 80% of them can't come back 'cause they don't qualify.

[00:19:03] Or some parameter, you know, and I hate to say it, but it seems created because in the beginning of the process when I got here, I was told that these citizens were not gonna have anything that to stop them from coming back home. This was their neighborhood. It was being built for them just to turn around.

[00:19:25] And we're about a year and a half out of finishing and we're losing residents buy the boatload. 50 plus? Oh, you're not qualified. 80 plus, you're not qualified. But we're trying to figure it out. And then on the next meeting we'll hear, "We're not obligated to track them and see if they're okay." How? How did we go from "Nothing will stop them from coming home. They're going to be productive. We're gonna empower them--" to, "Oh, they're, they have barriers."

[00:20:00] The majority of them had barriers before they left. They were living in public housing. And we were trying to help, but they didn't wanna do it the

way of the community. They wanted to do it the way of the people that are in charge this way, I'll say that.

[00:20:16] **Adrian:** Mm-hmm.

[00:20:16] **Donquitta Clements:** So we have contact with those residents and they're not happy and they're trying every which way to get someone to respond in a more positive light. Instead of saying, "Hey, you no longer qualify, there's nothing we can do." The residents are saying, you know, "Why wasn't that told to us from the beginning, and you knew we had certain situations or barrier bills, or whatever the case may be. You knew before the fact and now you're saying you're not gonna help us, but you said that our voucher was our way back." So some of them don't even understand what type of voucher they have because that wasn't explained to them properly either. So it's kind of like a lack of, I'll just say a miscommunication.

[00:21:02] Because the people think they're coming home, there's tons of residents, hundreds of them, and sitting in the zoom, you're hearing they're not is, is so conflicting. How do you go tell a group of people that think they're coming home that they don't have a home to come home to, but when they ride through their neighborhood, there's new homes.

[00:21:22] **Adrian:** Hmm. Yes. Does the miscommunication feel intentional to you?

[00:21:27] **Donquitta Clements:** Absolutely. It feels definitely intentional. I feel like, um, they don't wanna mix the classes, you know, that's a conversation that's normally swept under the rug, but we're talking strictly based on income to starting \$350,000 homes. How would you match that up in one room? It doesn't, it normally wouldn't fit. So with rent. Some of these people didn't have rent at all. They just had to go to school. So now that they are, say, graduated from school, they no longer qualify 'cause they don't have any income. But it's supposed to be based on income property.

[00:22:09] So our counterparts that are like trying to advocate, we don't know what else to do because we bring these issues to the boards and the powers that be and they say things like I said, um, "We are not required to worry about that any longer." So once they don't qualify, they're just kind of homeless. Hopefully not, but I don't know which other way you swing, something like that. 'Cause if you don't qualify to come back home, but you're in a special program to keep your home, are you now homeless because you don't qualify?

[00:22:45] **Adrian:** Mm-hmm.

[00:22:46] **Donquitta Clements:** That's a conundrum. Because if you left with the voucher, you should come home with the voucher. But based off of the new requirements that were created, your voucher no longer works here. That seems intentional, especially when you are the one creating the rules and regulations of whatever the stipulations are gonna be.

[00:23:08] **Adrian:** Yep.

[00:23:09] **Donquitta Clements:** That's right there in the East End.

[00:23:12] **Adrian:** Um, so when you like think about that process happening and thinking about, like, I'm just trying to imagine a bunch of new, like maybe higher income or like higher class people moving into the neighborhood. But, um, how do you, how do you imagine that, like, interacting with the coal dust?

[00:23:42] Because it is really close, right?

[00:23:46] **Donquitta Clements:** I don't think the majority of the people, and I say headed this way, because anytime there's a new development, people are headed this way. I don't think they know. I don't think they understand the severity of what they're coming to because it's shiny. In the beginning it's, "Oh, look at the new house. Look at the new neighborhood." Granted, new Newport News is a wonderful city to live in. It's a wonderful city, but that's still something that's harming us as a people. Period. It doesn't matter about your race, your, your class, you're going to be affected. Your plants will be dusty, your house will be dusty. Your outside. You will constantly be sweeping and mopping and power washing, and most importantly to me, your health will be affected by it. And as I was saying, I'm learning that it's now studies where that same coal dust is starting to affect our mental health. It can bring about Alzheimer's faster than it normally would. We should be talking about something like that because the majority of our population in that particular area where I live, they're retired. They don't go nowhere but home unless they're on vacation. So that's scary. So for the new neighbors that don't know, I feel [00:25:00] like it's, it's really sad. 'Cause you're gonna bring, like say for instance, we got a lot of military here.

[00:25:07] Your, your, your spouse gets stationed here, your new baby comes here and you're trying to figure out why their, their respiratory is so bad, but you don't know that. Right? A couple of blocks behind you. There's a coal mine

that's been affecting us for years. But you didn't get that memo from your realtor.

[00:25:26] I feel like that's unfair.

[00:25:27] **Adrian:** Mm-hmm.

[00:25:29] **Donquitta Clements:** That's like a, I don't even know what you call it, but it's not nice. Shady. Shady lending. Shady realtor practices. 'Cause I feel like if I'm moving into your neighborhood as a mom, I ask things about like the school. What's the environment? What's the crime? Most moms are not asking, "How's the cold dust?"

[00:25:49] You don't think you need to ask something like that. And then you're moved in and you're like, what is all this black stuff on the, you know, the lawn furniture or whatever. You can't call your realtor back and say, "Hey, I want a new house." You cannot tell your loan officer, "I wanna go somewhere else." You can't do that.

[00:26:08] It's, and buying a home is such a big deal. And they're gonna be coming in by the droves. 'Cause the, the layout is gonna be beautiful, but they have no idea. That there's this situation that's awaiting them.

[00:26:22] **Adrian:** Can you tell me more about the mental health effects that you're considering?

[00:26:28] **Donquitta Clements:** Um, I do feel like it's affecting a lot of people because I sit on my porch a lot and one of the symptoms in the article I read back in April, they were saying it, um, it affects people like the, it gives them, it can give them depression.

[00:26:47] I see a lot of things on my street, and I really do feel like if they're suffering from any type of mental illness that the coal dust does, definitely does heighten it because we see behavior up and down our street that you normally would on a regular day in another neighborhood, and some would say lack of resources, but mental health is mental health.

[00:27:09] No matter where you go and people don't look happy. They're sad. Um, we just had a situation where a young lady, unfortunately was, uh, she feel like she was tricked out of her home. That's the way that she put it. Her landlord called, got it closed down, said that it was some stuff going in there that he didn't like, so that he can get her out and then go back, fix it and repair.

[00:27:35] She sat in front of the store for about a month, and you literally can see her mental health decline. Most people would just go, you get what I'm saying? And I often wonder, did that have any, you know, did the environment, the pollution, have anything to do with what her actions was? Because by the time she got arrested, she was not the same person she was when she got in front of that store.

[00:28:03] When I say at all, I mean, at all. By the time they arrested her, it's because she was just pretty much harassing all the neighbors. No-- she felt like she was all alone. No one could help her. It's almost as if she had had like a mental break. Granted, homelessness is already an issue, but to have to breathe, eat, sleep, like her everyday became a part of the coal dust.

[00:28:29] In front of the store, you can see her like put up her wind-- like her little clothes and stuff, and she would have to shake them off and she would complain to us, do y'all have a broom or anything? I need to get this coal dust off my clothes, off my bags, off my chair. Like she really had made the storefront her home and eventually we had talked about it at like a, um, a city representative meeting and next thing you know. She had been removed for disturbing the peace.

[00:28:57] Pretty much we didn't mind 'cause of what had happened to her, but she is homeless, but she was still affected by it in firsthand account. I got to go and speak to her and ask her if everything is okay. She's like, "No." An' her main complaint was, "If they're gonna shut my house down, why don't they shut everybody house down? Look at all this dust that is on my porch."

[00:29:21] And I will never forget that they took her door off the hinges. It was so bad because I guess she wouldn't leave. And she was like, now the dust is gonna come in my house. So it's when I say, from your child playing at the playground till you planting your plants, you're going to be affected somehow.

[00:29:41] And I don't know how a city could combat this issue, but I think they should get on it as soon as possible.

[00:29:51] **Adrian:** Are those mental health effects things that you've dealt with personally?

[00:29:56] **Donquitta Clements:** I would say no because I'm just getting here, but [00:30:00] I wouldn't put it past that prolonged-- 'cause I planned on living on Ivy for the rest of my life-- I can't say that it won't be me. Because I plan to sit in my rocking chair and plant and play in my garden.

[00:30:14] So I will continuously breathe it in until it affects me the same way as well. So I don't, I don't feel like I'm set apart in, in any way tomorrow. That could be me. And you know, dealing with mental health varies. So if I woke up depressed, I wouldn't know whether or not it was coal dust or just. The neighborhood itself, but because I know those studies are there, I would, I would definitely question it because no, like you said, no one wants to clean up every single-- it's like you can't stop the dirt from coming.

[00:30:51] You can't keep it. You can't keep it from coming. The dust is just there, front porch, back, porch, tree, car. It can get exhausting. So I can see how they're linking it to like depression and anxiety and agitation. I'm like, "Ugh." I never thought about it that way, but it makes sense when I hear it out loud for sure.

[00:31:17] **Adrian:** What have your conversations been like with, um, your representatives? Like I remember you mentioning you had spoken with city council reps. Is that Tina Vick who's representing your, um, district?

[00:31:31] **Donquitta Clements:** Yeah. Um, I've never heard her come out and just say what she would do, but when ever asked in a room where we were all present like a neighborhood watch meeting or anything like that, she's always, it's like a script for all of them.

[00:31:50] I've heard, um, Ms. Sandra Cherry say it's just the cars. I haven't heard anything too much from Mr. Eley 'cause he's our newest representative. And Ms. Vick has always been the same. It's the car, it's the traffic, it's the combustion. It's not the cold dust. And that's odd for me because she lives on our block.

[00:32:10] So it's very odd that you're not affected by what the entire block is affected by at your one home on the whole block. It doesn't make sense. And then you've heard Mayor Price, former Mayor Price, say he's been affected. He's always having to wipe his back porch down, his front porch down. So everybody is affected.

[00:32:33] But I guess based off of who you're talking to and who you're in front of, they have a different dialogue. But for us as citizens, we just want them to be open and honest with us because we know that we, we know what's happening to us. And if you live in close proximity, how is it not affecting you either.

[00:32:51] That doesn't make sense. Yeah.

[00:32:54] **Adrian:** Yeah. Wow. So have you had conversations with, um, other reps?

[00:33:01] **Donquitta Clements:** Um, I, I never really, after hearing the car thing over and over, I kind of digressed. I just started doing things like the social justice conference to see if I can find people that understood. And people like Professor Finn, he always says, "If you all need anything, you know, reach out. Have questions, call me. Let's get together." His efforts are awesome. So we start, I started to feel there was no need.

[00:33:31] **Adrian:** Hmm.

[00:33:32] **Donquitta Clements:** Because again, as a nonprofit, I can't get too political. I don't really wanna ever cross the line. 'Cause you know, I can lose my organization. I don't even like that. That's a parameter, but it is. So those conversations, they come to a real halt once you get into a certain room, I'll say. So I just say-- 'cause the majority of what we saw on the political side of it was, "If you vote for me," you know, you hear that a lot in transit. "If you vote for me, this is what I can do and this is how I'm combating that issue." This was a like a campaign pitch and you hear it. And you're like, well, how would they turn that around after all these years with just a vote? So I started to just as an individual, I started to just not even care to ask them anymore. I just tried to figure out what I can do on my own.

[00:34:28] **Adrian:** What would you change?

[00:34:31] **Donquitta Clements:** I would we, we should not have a coal plant in our backyard.

[00:34:35] I mean, there are tons of places to put such a thing, but to have it in the middle of so many people. That, you know, have so many children, it's just wrong, especially when we know the actual effects of it. If we didn't know, I would probably be on the fence because it is something that's supposedly helping, but I don't see a reason [00:35:00] for us to have it where it's at.

[00:35:02] If there's any other source of renewable energy as they say, I would rather that than this. Because again, I wouldn't have to clean my porch off daily. I wouldn't have to worry about my walls getting dusty. I wouldn't be spending more money than usual on filters. Kids wouldn't constantly be at the hospital for respiratory issues.

[00:35:22] The playground wouldn't have this film of black dust daily. I mean, kids don't deserve that. They go to play. They don't go to slide down and slide and then their whole outfit is dirty on the back. That's not cool. I don't think-- I don't think I would allow it. That's the best way I know how to put it. I would, I would move it. I would give people more trees. We don't have enough trees in that area for them to have what they have right there. I would've rather it been on the water where the Navy ships go. Versus, 'cause I mean, at least right there, there's already a mixture of things going on that are pollutants, but in the backyard of people in droves, like a whole communities.

[00:36:14] I don't think that's fair. Mm-hmm. So I definitely would move it where to whole nother topic, but I would definitely move it.

[00:36:25] **Adrian:** Yep. Do you know anybody who works at the terminal?

[00:36:29] **Donquitta Clements:** No. I actually don't even know how to get in it. I've always seen it going over the interstate, coming back at the courthouse. I don't even know how people even get over there.

[00:36:41] I've never known how you enter, you, you see the motion and the water. Never known how to even get a job there. Now I have to go do research 'cause you sparked my interest.

[00:36:53] **Adrian:** It's just weird because I, I really would like to talk to somebody who works there, but nobody I've asked has. Known anybody who ever, who has worked there, which I'm like,

[00:37:03] **Donquitta Clements:** Well, how is it in existence?

[00:37:05] **Adrian:** Who works there? Where do they live? Hmm. Interesting. Um, yeah, if you could, if you could talk to the person who's the head of the terminal, what would you have to say to him?

[00:37:20] **Donquitta Clements:** Please figure out a way to make it so that the people who have to live beside it are not as affected by it. We, we don't wanna harm their business, you know what I'm saying?

[00:37:37] But we don't wanna be unhealthy either. As a mom, I don't wanna have to keep taking my baby to the hospital or to the doctor's office because of respiratory issues that I know at this point, after five years, are coming from that place. So please come up with a solution that is more community based. It can't always be about the dollar, it has to be about the people. Because without the

people, you have no dollars. So we all got up and walked away. How would that plant even run?

[00:38:12] We don't wanna be Indiana. That's how I feel.

[00:38:17] **Adrian:** What, what do you see happening in Indiana?

[00:38:20] **Donquitta Clements:** Um, there is a ghost town in Indiana actually, and I don't know if it's because of the, you know, environmental stuff, but there's this long stretch of Indiana where no one is ever at anymore, and I feel like if they don't get a handle on stuff like what we're talking about, that could be us.

[00:38:42] It doesn't matter how pretty the neighborhood, how much money you invest in it. If you are not considering the lives of the people who you are in charge of you, you lose them. I don't see any other way. I was always taught the power of the pocketbook. If we don't fund the economy, there is no economy.

[00:39:03] If so, and somehow we're funding this coal mine because like you said, it's there, someone's working it. If all the workers went on strike, how would you-- because it's, it's just simply a conversation and it only takes one. That's my opinion. 'Cause how do we know the people who work there are even okay with what's happening to the people that are affected by what's happening over there?

[00:39:32] Until we get first hand information from them, we don't know. Do they live in our neighborhood? Are they affected day to day like we are? We don't know that conversation.

[00:39:47] **Adrian:** Not yet.

[00:39:47] **Donquitta Clements:** Yeah, not yet. Thankfully.

[00:39:51] **Adrian:** I heard you say that you wanna live on Ivy for the rest of your life. Can you tell me what you love about the neighborhood?

[00:39:57] **Donquitta Clements:** Um, [00:40:00] growing up there, I met my best friend and my husband, so moving back was just like a sense of like, "Hey, you know, we did something good." Because we didn't come back because we wanted to be a part of the coal dust of course. We came back because it, it was just not good news over and over and over again, and we wanted to help.

[00:40:22] And we feel like if we come and try to be of some help and grow some plants and ask about community gardens and rally the kids to do positive things, that this can be an area that finally gets some light shed on it versus the negativity that's always talked about it. We, we've lived there, we've grown up there, and now we plan to grow our own family there.

[00:40:47] And we know that our children will benefit from it years to come if they have ownership. But the goal is to, if I as many houses as I can get on Ivy, I would rather, because my goal is to establish generational wealth in a place that-- it's a be-- it's beautiful. I don't think any, not many people know how much a waterfront sits at the corner of Ivy Avenue.

[00:41:15] It's beautiful. It's a wonderful place. If you love water, there's lots of walking space. The playground is awesome. And the people, 100%. The community is like, it's like everybody wants to give you a hug. You walk to the store, it's like, "Hey, you got a dollar?" The kids, you can't. You can't beat it. And then they're like, "What y'all doing today? Can I come to your house?" Then you have all the adults. If something happened, we're all hands on. We don't have much of that in many other places. It's almost like a little small town at this point, and I know it's changing, but I feel like that part won't. I feel like no matter what they build there, the community effect will not go away.

[00:41:58] And that part means the most to me. To be a part of something where I know full circle: I ran these streets, I played at the playgrounds. I ran to the corner store. I bought icee from the candy lady. And now to see my kids in transition of doing it, it is like, yeah, I did the right thing. And then we saw coal dust.

[00:42:21] So it's like my husband was like, "That's not a reason to move." And I'm like, "Okay." So I'm planting my feet and hopefully they really get, we know that it's not gonna happen overnight, but hopefully they get a handle on this issue because it is an issue and it should not be ignored any longer at all.

[00:42:42] **Adrian:** Mm-hmm.

[00:42:43] **Donquitta Clements:** And I'm happy that you're taking your time out to do this because we need more people to do this. Definitely. Professor Finn can't be alone.

[00:42:58] **Adrian:** Cool. Um, what, what gives you hope?

[00:43:02] **Donquitta Clements:** Hmm. The fact that I know I can make a difference, even if it's just a little, little, little, little small mustard seed. As long as I'm getting up and I'm putting in effort, I can continue to be hopeful for change because I've learned that it's not change that people don't like, it's transition.

[00:43:25] I'm willing to go and be a part of the transition, so. That, that's what keeps me hopeful. I show up like today, so.

[00:43:34] **Adrian:** Yep. Amazing. Well, thank you for being here.

[00:43:38] **Donquitta Clements:** No problem.

[00:43:40] **Adrian:** Um, is there anything that I didn't ask you that you want to talk about?

[00:43:45] **Donquitta Clements:** No, I think we covered everything. We talked about the community, we talked about the playground, talked about the coal dust, we talked about our elected officials in our neighborhood.

[00:44:01] Um, I think we're moving forward as far as the lack of resources part goes. So I think that that's, yeah.

[00:44:13] **Adrian:** Yeah. Yeah.

[00:44:15] **Donquitta Clements:** I try to keep it all in. Well-roundedness. I think I've talked about everything.

[00:44:23] **Adrian:** Right on

[00:44:24] **Donquitta Clements:** for now. Yeah.

[00:44:25] **Adrian:** Cool. Well, with that, I think we can wrap. I'm gonna stop. Okay.

[00:44:32] (The interview resumed after a brief conversation off-tape revealed that Donquitta had more to share about the Department of Environmental Quality's Tidewater Air Monitoring Evaluation.)

[00:44:32] **Adrian:** So tell me about the first meeting.

[00:44:34] **Donquitta Clements:** Um, after the first meeting, I felt like it was very. I feel like it was rushed. Um, after talking to people like Miss Angela who had been already doing similar work, I feel like they didn't, the community input isn't as valued as it should be, and it [00:45:00] shouldn't have taken this long. But off my soapbox, it's happening now. The monitors are up. Um, lately we've been hearing about a better model coming out. I don't like that we don't have the actual, like we, we can't see the data right now. I'm sure there's like a, you can call and ask, but I would like it to be where we can check it ourselves.

[00:45:25] Maybe not daily, 'cause you know, that's a lot of power, but ...

[00:45:28] **Adrian:** I think it's on the internet .

[00:45:29] **Donquitta Clements:** Probably. Yeah. But I, I like to see it on the box. Like, you know how you can put like a indicator into the water and you can know. I was wondering like why they didn't do it in that aspect.

[00:45:44] But then again, they said there were so many things in our air that they couldn't just pinpoint it to one thing. So that's what those monitors are for. But that's just me. My nerd brain said, why not make a device that shows us, like if there's carbon monoxide, you know, we get a beep. Is there a smoke?

[00:46:02] There's a beep. If there's coal dust, can we get a beep? So maybe one day.

[00:46:09] **Adrian:** Hmm. Okay. So you haven't interacted with the, with the project a lot?

[00:46:14] **Donquitta Clements:** No, I've, I've looked at it. I've got onto the interface with Ms. Ana Grace, but that was probably about two times. 'Cause I opted out of getting one on my house because I didn't need to to let them see whether or not we had it.

[00:46:26] 'Cause we already physically see that we have the coal dust. She lives in a different area than I do, so I understand why she did it, but I didn't need a monitor to tell me that this is what that was.

[00:46:39] **Adrian:** I see. Yeah. Okay. Yep. Yeah. Do you have any more thoughts about that project?

[00:46:49] **Donquitta Clements:** Um. I think it's great that they're trying.

[00:46:53] **Adrian:** Mm-hmm.

[00:46:55] **Donquitta Clements:** I don't know. 'cause we haven't really heard, and I'm saying specifically my community, we haven't really heard any of the like results or where we are currently. And I think in my particular community, we wanna see more communication about stuff like that. Like, "Hey, this is where we are, this six months or this," you know what I'm saying? Some data where we're not having to stop what we're already doing, get on the computer, figure out what the computer says, when we can just get it from the, the professional.

[00:47:30] **Adrian:** Mm.

[00:47:31] **Donquitta Clements:** A more streamlined process, in my opinion.

[00:47:33] **Adrian:** So you, what you would prefer would be to like, look at the instrument? Almost like a rain gauge or something you'd be...

[00:47:40] **Donquitta Clements:** like, yep, absolutely. Like that. Okay. I'm sure that costs way more money than these, but. Again, because it's been an issue for that long, why not fund that?