

Atsuko Bernot and Imani Newsome

August 2, 2025

Summary: This recording is from a live event hosted by the Repair Lab as Coal Dust Kills at Colley Community Center in Norfolk, VA. The conversation is with Atsuko Bernot and Imani Newsome, two long-term Lambert's Point residents who have been involved in campaigning for an end to coal dust pollution for over 10 years. They tell the story of experiencing coal dust in their neighborhood, the work they did with civic leagues and city council to try and get coal cars covered at Norfolk Southern's terminal, key points of failure in their wave of activity, and what they think is most important in carrying on the struggle. There are tangents reflecting on national politics and also a short conversation about the best way to store digital as well as physical data associated with Voices in the Dust archive.

Note: There is significant audio interference during the first 17 minutes of the recorded interview/ first 7 pages of the transcription. The audio posted on Voices in the Dust has been edited to trim out the interference; however, the intelligible words of the speakers are still transcribed below. In the text below, transcript that is audible is in black; transcript that has been cut out due to bad audio interference is in red. The interference persists pages 1-7, minutes 0:00-17:11. After page 7 / timestamp 17:11, the audio and transcription correspond completely til the end of the interview.

[00:00:00]

Atsuko Bernot: I'll be honest with you, I may have been an activist here in Norfolk since I came down from Pennsylvania. But I, I only started living in Norfolk in 2023. I lived down at the beach, but I always came down here to Norfolk from the time I was 15 years old. Going down to, to Ghent, to, the Norfolk Theater Center, you know, the old library.

Just that fact that you can roll this technology and the electronics off your tongue -- believe it or not, I was here in Norfolk when they were introducing World Wide Web. **I actually** attended that bloody thing in the early, early eighties. Yeah. And now I'm like, technology's like zoomed past me. It's amazing. My, my 9-year-old grandson knows more than me.

Imani Newsome: Isn't that always the way?

Adrian: Would you be comfortable saying your name?

Atsuko Bernot: Oh yeah, sure. **Atsuko Bernot.**

Adrian: Would you feel comfortable saying your name?

Imani Newsome: My name is Imani Newsome.

Adrian: So you were saying that **you, you were born here.**

Atsuko Bernot: And your name is?

Adrian: Oh, thank you. I'm Adrian. **Adrian, Adrian Wood.**

Atsuko Bernot: **Are you with the listening party thing as well?**

Adrian: Mm-hmm. **Yeah. yeah. So you were born--** born here, or you moved here?

Imani Newsome: Yes. Yes. I, as far as the City of Norfolk is concerned, I was born and reared in Oakwood and Oakmont North. And then, after I got married, soon after I turned 18, my husband and I-- Sekou Newsome, peace and blessings upon him. We moved to the neighborhood right by Norfolk State University and **later we moved into Huntersville. And when our children were about-- this was probably about eighty...-- we moved to Lambert's Point** community. And we had been there for over a decade before we realized that there was an issue with coal dust. And because the coal pier was right there, we never really paid attention. We, we didn't really go deep into the neighborhood. We went to, the places that, that were of interest to us, which were the playground and the community center. And so about, I'll say 10 to 12 years ago. an organization came into the neighborhood and

[00:02:29] introduced the civic league and the residents to the issue of the coal dust. And then the hashtag was "Cover the Coal." And so we got thoroughly into it, because we were already a part of a Neighborhood Development Improvement Committee.

Unfortunately, the executive board of the Civic League thought that that committee was simply for the four annual cleanups every year, and that was it. And so they were quite perturbed when we got involved with this organization and started campaigning for the railroad to cover their coal cars. There had been some research done by ODU and others that showed that the coal dust was

floating far from the tracks. Back then they said at least three miles on either side of the, along the tracks.

And so, one of the, one of the really core motivators for some of the other neighborhoods outside of Lambert's Point was that coal dust was discovered in attics in West Ghent and in Larchmont, which are more affluent neighborhoods than Lambert's Point.

So, at first they, you know, there was a lot of rah-rah when it, when they first, when the information was first, put out. But it fizzled out as there was more and more denial by the city, more and more denial by the railroad and, an' all interested parties. So, the Civic, the executive board of the Civic League, they did not support us. They did not support our committee, and eventually they disbanded our committee.

We, we were doing, we were doing the annual cleanups for the neighborhood. We also were, were rallying to beautify the neighborhood so that it would look more like the beautifications that were being done in Larchmont and ODU's campus. And, and across the tracks over in West Ghent. And we were also campaigning to put a crosswalk on 38th Street, which runs down the middle of the neighborhood and is often used to pass through-- traffic to pass through, to avoid some of the lights along Hampton Boulevard.

So we were, we were trying to-- I suggested lowering the speed limit, and everybody thought I was nuts. But, you know, 10 years later now, the speed limit is not-- is down to 20, 20 miles an hour. I was campaigning for 15, because there were some narrow streets, you know, and there had been some tension between resident-- long-term residents and students. You know, kind of like the, what is it called, when you're, on a narrow street and nobody wants to give away—

Adrian: Chicken.

Imani Newsome: Chicken. (laughing) So, you know, we have lived in this neighborhood since-- my family has lived in the neighborhood since 1990. We never intended to stay that long. It just turned out that way. (laughing) And the coal dust campaign, again, it fizzled out because the political organization that came into the neighborhood and got us all stirred up--they moved to another issue equally as important, which was residents being displaced from downtown in Tidewater Park.

Tidewater Park, Young Park and Calvert Park. And, sometimes, colloquially called Calvary Park because there's a church called Calvary in the neighborhood. And so for the longest time, everybody called it Calvary Park until one day I saw the sign and I was like, "We've been saying it wrong all this time." (laughing)

But, as far as the coal dust issue. Before we moved in, when we lived in Huntersville, we didn't have any-- my husband didn't have any health issues, other than cholesterol and, and, you know, just his cholesterol. And, then we moved into this neighborhood and that's when, after we had been here about a decade, he was diagnosed with asthma.

And then we found out that a lot more residents, they were being diagnosed with COPD and, and other respiratory issues. Unfortunately or fortunately, they eventually moved out of the neighborhood because of their health issues. We were not able to move out, because it just wasn't financially possible for us.

So we tried to do things to reduce the coal dust that was already floating in the house and floating all through the neighborhood. We loved days when it would rain, because then negative ions, less dust. Oh, we prayed for rain, we prayed for rain. When it rained, all the windows were open, all the fresh air going through the house.

And then as soon as it stopped, slammed back down because, you know, you can look at the, awnings and the siding on the houses even today and how discolored they are. And when you're trying to be all diligent about spring cleaning and cleaning windows, there's always dust on the windows and on the sill. And no matter how much you clean a couple of days later, it's right back there. So.

Atsuko Bernot: [00:08:46] Yeah. And it's not just your lungs. 'Cause it gets in your eyes, it gets in your hair. **I was fortunate, I grew up in the Beach.** I came down from Pennsylvania in '69, **but I have been-- 1969, the kind of awareness** in Virginia Beach in those days-- I grew up in Croatan. There were like 10 families that lived there all year round. And you know, they had more public **transportation** back then than they do now.

And, I used to come down to Freemason Street to the old Norfolk Library where, Stan Fettison had the Norfolk Theater **Center**, and I took drama classes there, but I wasn't made aware of the **coal dust issue** until I was talking with a **group** of activists that had their monthly sell on in West Ghent.

Al Markowitz and, you know, (laughing) and, Angelo Macisco and Joe Philipowski, all of those, and amongst them was a refugee from Hurricane Katrina. And that was, that was Joe Cook. And Joe made us aware of issue and how economically challenged-- because as Imani just said, you know, Larchmont and Edgewater, you know, they, they did care about it. But, Joe was working with MoveOn and then from MoveOn he realized that, you know, coal dust was a big thing. And our community garden is right across the street from Monroe Elementary, which as it turns out, you know, Malcolm, you know, was familiar with since he was from the neighborhood.

And our whole thing is: our children are our future. Somehow or other, that's not a catchphrase that catches on with this administration. All around the world, people cherish their next generation because they are our future. And why we don't just boggles my mind, but that's why our community garden and the people of Park Place is so, you know, committed to trying to keep it into a green space.

Right now it's a green space jungle, but the whole point is all these kids. They come from all around, but the elementary school where they spend the majority of their day during the winter and the fall and the spring is just what, three blocks? From, you know, the railroad tracks. So when they're out in the playground, they breathe it in. When they're coming in—even--unless there is a filtration system, which I guarantee you they don't have--they're breathing it in.

And, I wish I had Joe's information because they know that coal dust not only affects, you know, respiratory issues, but it affects your brain, too, because you're having particulates in your body. And so young people, young children-- and we have lots of new, young couples and their children moving into the neighborhood--they do not need to have their babies exposed to all this.

And Joe was just on the verge of having, I think, the coal piers and the railroads acknowledge that maybe they need to do more than just-- I think they were wetting down the coal to go and keep the dust from flying so much. But the only way to do it is to cover it. And they're like, "Oh, it's so expensive," and blah, blah. Well, again. What is the other way of doing that? Yeah. What is the cost of one child in bad health for the rest of its life? What is the point, right?

And, and here our country is so backwards when it comes to healthcare to begin with, the cost of trying to keep that child healthy is-- we're gonna be corporate and say everything boils down to dollars and cents. It's not cost effective to have unhealthy children growing up in your neighborhood. You know, so if that's the

approach they want to take, that that may be one avenue, but to me it's like, yeah.

So now you've affected one child, but from our garden's point of view? **All of our food--and ours** is a visual garden, but it's also a garden full of food that we open up for the neighborhood. The children are allowed to pick whatever they want. It's a--long as their parents say it's okay. The parents are allowed, **the community** is invited to come and pick. So we have figs, we have apples, we have pears, **we have berries like raspberries**, strawberries, blueberries, goji berries. **We have kiwi, we have, you know**, we have pomegranates. **We're trying to grow bananas. You know, you name it.** We're trying to grow it, and particularly fruit. Why? Because kids eat fruits. But if it's covered in coal dust, you know?

Yeah. And they can rinse it. But the whole point is how much can you rinse? And the other aspect **that we from Joe is**, okay, so you're **rinsing** it all up. Guess what? It now goes into the, the water, into the water system. And we're, we're still not doing anything productive. We're just passing **the buck to the next** bucket. You know, it's not a solution, **it's a, a bandaid.** **So, you know, that's...do I sound like an angry old woman?** (laughing)

Imani: What, you? Angry? (laughing)

Atsuko Bernot: Yeah. And the reality is, you may think that because you're not next to railroad tracks like us, because if you're not physically affected by it,

[00:15:00] you're a taxpayer. You have to pay to help people get healthier. So ultimately, by not keeping people healthy to begin with and, and being aware and putting stock, or putting, you know, investing in people and their health and on the environment so that we can have healthy earth, healthy earth, healthy skies, healthy air, healthy everything, then you are actually making a holistic investment that's beneficial for everybody probably. Right?

Band-aiding everything--cause even band-aids cost a lot of money and in the long run they don't do anything! (laughing)

Imani Newsome: **These whole** companies and railroads, they know exactly what they're doing. It's very planned. It's very targeted because when you look at the map, most-- their tracks go through the poorest communities. Where, where, the most people are **unseen and unheard.** **So**, you know, the coal, the railroad tracks run through the neighborhood.

[00:16:18] We're used to it. We time our travel based on when the, when the gates come down, and turn around when, if the train is too long and that kind of thing. But we're not, we're not thinking about the dust. We're just thinking about, "Oh, the train's holding us up."

There are always old, old stories from decades ago about, people having to heat by coal. And, you know, if you couldn't afford to buy it by the bucket, you went to the tracks and you picked it up. That that fell off the cars. And fell on, fell onto the ground, along the tracks.

Atsuko Bernot: And see the big irony of all of this is, I came down from Pennsylvania. And my mom was a businesswoman who had her own company. But coal miners have to--

(Break in the audio here where Adrian switches microphones due to the audio misfunction)

[00:17:11] **Atsuko Bernot:** ... get black lung because they're not exposed to that volume, but it's chipping away at their health just as surely as black lung chips out on a coal miner's lungs. You know? So it, it is kind of ironic that, my mom is no longer with us and hasn't been since 1994, but, uh, I, I think she'd be appalled if she really understood what her industry has done for people.

'Cause it, it made her wealthy and made the people in her industry wealthy and she saw the beginning of the decline of the coal industry. And by right, it should. Because not only, and this isn't just me talking in a holistic manner of what I believe, and that is-- the more we pull out of the earth without acknowledging what we're doing to the earth, the more we're destabilizing the earth and we're paying the price for it.

And whether it's in climate change or, I mean of all the stupid things, but because we want cheap energy, we have started fracking. And fracking is, is when you talk to somebody without any, information about what you're pulling from the ground or anything like that. Fracking by its very nature is kind of stupid, you know, because here sounds true because you're destabilizing the ground and it's because we believe that the earth is permanent. And it's like us believing like this is permanent, but we all know this is particle board. And if we leave it out in the rain, unlike real wood, it won't slowly deteriorate. It'll just fall apart.

And Earth is not earth. It's many, many rocks and minerals. And anybody who's ever gone to the Hoover Dam knows that project may have helped with a Great

Depression, but they built it in a, on a river that is nothing but sandstone. And anybody who's ever gone down into the tunnels to go to the, the dam can see water just gushing down the sides. Why? Because one of the softest stones is sandstone. And you've got, you know, you've got a river with all of its natural forces. And I keep telling people, stop and think, budgetary wise, whether it's local, state, or federal or even global, we have to come up with this budget every so many years.

Mother Nature doesn't have a budget. She really doesn't care. So if it takes a billion years to go and, uh, rot out the sandstone, or whether through natural forces, the sandstone gets whooshed away in two years time doesn't care. Okay. But we'd care because we're stuck with it and we don't teach that our, our, uh, to our children.

And this administration's taking us to the dark ages. And I'm a historian. We stopped calling it the Dark Ages, but now I'm thinking maybe we should go back to that because we're definitely putting ourselves deliberately, and this is the part I don't understand, we're deliberately putting ourselves under the bushel.

We're deliberately taking away the light of education and learning and research and trying to reinvent the wheel is like a, again, another stupid endeavor. If you have a wheel, use it. Don't have a whole bunch of people sitting around thinking, you know, "What would be useful is something round that would help us get around," and they're staring at a wheel and they're still trying to come up with a new wheel. You know?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

What can I say? Angry old woman speaks again.

But, I, I, I believe that despite what we do to ourselves right now, the earth, as years ago when I was in ninth grade, I wrote a short story, and the whole point was the last person on earth ended up killing himself. However, it didn't matter because the sun still [00:22:11] rose. You know? And that's the whole point, is that. We think that we're, you know, the big know-it-all and the top of the pyramid of mm-hmm Biological things, right? And for this area being so vastly, and I don't mean to be so religious oriented, but this area being so Christian, one of the first things in the book of Genesis is we're supposed to be good caretakers of the earth and we're not. And so I challenge all these Christians and say, "Oh, uh, you do know that a rich man has as much chance of going through the eye of a needle. You know, and here you guys, with your mega churches and

everything, you will not invest in your own future. Instead, you think that you, it's better to keep them, uh, you know, subjected under a bushel barrel so that you don't have to explain the difficult things, because that's what adults do, is they're supposed to explain things to their children. And when they don't know the answer, it's, it's part of our makeup to be humble enough to say, we don't know, but we won't do that. You know?

And that's, uh, why the listening project is, or your listening party is a good thing because, we don't have, here in the US we don't have a, a, the extended family and the storytelling abilities. And our young people find it difficult to tell stories and tell, you know, my grandson, if something he finds out is not what we would call accurate or correct, he thinks you're lying. And it's like, no, no. It's not a lie if somebody said it in all earnest, because that's the limit of their understanding. But if they know better and they still say something that is not correct, then that's lying. And it's those subtle uses of words and the need to explain to our young people and the need to tell them.

It's important to know the history. Imani's lived here all her life. There are many people here that have lived there all here all their life. I just feel like I've lived here all my life, but, but the reality is I have not suffered from the coal dust. And so, but I have heard the stories and it's important that it be told because new people are coming in here, buying up property. And let me tell you, the real estate agents aren't saying, oh, by the way, you might want to go and put up a filtration system in your house. Mm-hmm. Because I see you've got three little kids. And guess what, if you don't put down a filtration system, your kids may end up being mentally challenged after a while.

I mean, you know, you don't hear the corporations and the businesses saying that because it's easier for each individual to have to deal with the magnitude of the concern and have them waddle through it and either ignore it or be overwhelmed by it and, and, and then ignore it. Or, or as a community, do something. Because our strength is the community. I mean, it goes back to the constitution. "We, the people."

[00:26:02] **Imani Newsome:** Okay, the what now?

[00:26:05] **Atsuko Bernot:** What, what? Yeah. I'm, I'm putting a zip on my public. My PSA is done.

[00:26:15] **Adrian:** Keep going. I mean, it's, yeah. What you're saying is true.

[00:26:21] **Atsuko Bernot:** Yeah. Well, and you, you see what is being built on the Elizabeth River, and this is, this is the funny, okay. I love irony and living in Hampton Roads is nothing but irony. Hampton Yacht Club, right. They had, they used to have a beautiful view of the Elizabeth.

Yes Now they've got two sets of, uh, what is it?

Uh, cranes.

Yeah. Cranes To look at all of that industry. Plus the coal. And if you've ever gone to what we used to call VECO, right? Yep. Virginia Electric Power Company.

[00:26:59] **Imani Newsome:** ...power Company, now called Dominion Union

[00:27:02] **Atsuko Bernot:** Dominion Energy. Right. If you had ever gone past their, uh, power plant, near the, uh, James [00:27:11] River, right?

In Newport News, what you would see, what the, coal hoppers used to dump. Mm Piles and piles of coal. I mean, huge piles, I mean, mountains, literally of coal. And every time a hopper is emptying things- great! -to catch some of the coal maybe, but it's-- you, you've got coal dust everywhere. And so, yeah, we can talk about the coal dust here, but coal is coming through much of Virginia. You know, I mean the, uh, the coal mines are in West Virginia and in Kentucky. And it used to be in Pennsylvania. Now they're fracking. Yeah. So, you know, this is like a corridor of dust. It's, and, and the fact that there are so many things to handle that our city council people, our state delegates, and everybody, and our, our federal representatives, you know, our Senators and the House Reps, they, some of them feel overwhelmed as far as prioritizing.

I mean, I mean, you see how polluted the, the waters are now. Do you handle the waters? Do you handle the air? Do you handle this? You do. And. Uh, then you have an administration that it, it, it, I remember in the 1980s when Chesapeake Bay Foundation came about, it took a long time. It took a long time for Virginia to sign onto that.

We are the watershed of all of these rivers from the Northeast. All of the other states were already signed on. We were like the last state to sign on and it's like, oh my god. We're the recipients of all of their junk and we're the last ones to sign off for clean water in this area.

[00:29:24] **Imani Newsome:** The, yeah. The level of denial is unbelievable. Unbelievable. And I remember when, when our, our neighborhood committee, um. were working as closely as possible with, the political organization on the coal dust issue. They, uh, they would, find creative ways to watch the hoppers and, and the dumpers, uh, at the coal pier and try to get pictures and video of the dust shooting up in the air. And, uh, once they realized what, uh, what, what some brave souls were doing out there, uh, in the evening when it was most, and, and early morning, they put, they purposely put up barriers. they put up things like sharp rocks so that you couldn't walk out to the edge to get those pictures. They, then they, they made it kind of, I guess they, they, they made it illegal.

like you're trespassing to even go out there and try to get video. Um. they just took away access That had been, you know, just a given before, once they realized, oh, they're, they're trying to get evidence of, uh, of coal dust in the air of coal dust coming off the cars of coal dust coming out of those, uh, those hoppers and those dumpers.

Whereas before you could just see it, where the coal pier is now at the end of 38th Street, used to be able to go there. There's a, uh, there's a, the Lambert's Point Pond is across the street and, so, you know, you could stand on the pond side and, and again, try to get visual evidence of what's going on.

They lined up a bunch of coal cars to block the view from anybody trying to, trying to get any kind of, uh, any kind of pictures or any kind of video of what was going on. And they're still there. And they're still there. I mean, that it's been 10 years and those cars are still there blocking the way, but there's so much more activity going on.

You know, car, uh, trucks going in and trucks coming out. Nobody knows what's going on. Nobody knows what's going on. We, we hear, we hear, sounds of something being built, something something's going on down at the coal pier. We just don't know what it is because we can't see what's going on. Unless you have a helicopter or something, you might be able to get some pictures.

[00:31:53] **Atsuko Bernot:** We need to invest in some drones.

[00:31:55] **Imani Newsome:** There you go. Yes. Drones.

[00:31:58] **Adrian:** So there, I, um. This is my job. So I'm obsessed with it and I know a lot about it through that obsession. But, I was looking on YouTube and there's just [00:32:11] some, like, you know how some people are obsessed with

trains? There's like this train guy who has these videos. He has drone footage of the coal terminal. It's like a three hour unbroken shot of like trains coming in and out and you see them dump and you see the dust. You know, he's just into it 'cause he's like, "I love trains," or whatever. Yeah. But like, I'm like, this is gold, you know? Yeah. I downloaded it.

but,

[00:32:38] **Imani Newsome:** I bet I have seen that guy. I, you know, because, you know, you, you see, you see someone in a truck and they're watching the, watching the tracks and you just, you're just going by and you're like, what's that guy doing? You have no idea. He could, he could have been getting, using, getting drone footage.

Yeah. Who knows. Yeah.

[00:32:58] **Adrian:** The, I think I learned like two years ago that, Dominion Power actually has a lease on the terminal to build windmills.

[00:33:06] **Imani Newsome:** I wouldn't be surprised

[00:33:08] **Atsuko Bernot:** that, that wouldn't surprise me.

[00:33:09] **Imani Newsome:** I wouldn't be surprised.

[00:33:10] **Adrian:** I think they may have started, that may be what they're doing,

[00:33:13] **Atsuko Bernot:** What they're building, yeah.

[00:33:13] **Imani Newsome:** That's probably what they're building.

[00:33:15] **Atsuko Bernot:** I think they were also trying to watch what this administration's going to do as far as penalizing. You know, Trump has this weird idea, and he has, he, he's like a reverse Don Quixote, right? He's like tilting at windmills, not because he thinks they're dragons, but because he thinks he's the center of the universe when it comes to cultural appreciation of beauty, and in his mind, windmills equals non beauty.

Huh I mean, the man had the audacity to go to Scotland last week, right? To tell the Scots you, you should see what America has done to its beautiful land.

Nevermind that coal mining and strip mining just literally takes the tops off of mountains. You know, the man is so unaware. It's amazing. And I know the world is like looking at the Americans and say, you do read your Constitution, right?

And it does say "We the People," right? And you, the people put him as your leader.

[00:34:31] **Imani Newsome:** You know that was the electoral college.

[00:34:34] **Atsuko Bernot:** Yes, the electoral college too. But you know, this round he won by popular vote. But the popular vote is, uh, is a, it's a slight misnomer because it's a popular vote amongst those who bothered to vote.

Because, and this is why he never got a mandate, and that is 90 million people, I think it was estimated, did not vote.

[00:35:00] **Imani Newsome:** I didn't know it was that high.

[00:35:02] **Atsuko Bernot:** Yeah. The last numbers I heard a couple of years ago was 40, 50. I was like 40 or 50 million stayed home.

[00:35:09] **Imani Newsome:** I'm like, after all the word we got out.

[00:35:12] **Atsuko Bernot:** Yeah, yeah. But this time around it was almost 90 million. And it's like, well, then, almost half-- over half of the people who could have voted did not vote. And you have to ask yourself, "Did we not make it scary enough to say, if you don't vote, this guy will go into office and this guy has no clue what he, he needs to do and he doesn't care. Everything revolves around what his wishes are." As we're seeing.

[00:35:46] **Imani Newsome:** That's why I always say I don't believe that he's unaware. I, I, I believe that he is following a particular agenda. And anything that is not on that agenda does not get his attention. He's intentionally, uh, uh, ignoring. Not, not unaware.

[00:36:04] **Atsuko Bernot:** Oh, I, I agree. Ignoring agree. I agree with you to a point, but I truly believe, I mean, this is the man. He came, he graduated from University of Pennsylvania, which is my, my adoptive brother's alma mater. They have a lot to answer for. But, you know, and the reality is he believes he's the center of the universe.

He truly believes he's like Louis the 14th. And now, because between the whatever golden orb or whatever it was that he touched over there in Arabia, plus all the evangelicals telling him he was God's given to us. It's like, oh yeah, well, you know, God also brought the plague. So, I mean, it's like, okay! We've learned our lesson now. Can you, can you kind of move along and get to the next chapter so we can we clean up our act and do something worthwhile?

Because this man is just [00:37:11] like what he did with, uh, the Kennedy Center. Just a simple case and point. Fires all of the board members, puts in all of his sycophants and now somebody and somebody thinks that it will be a great idea to change the name to the Trump, you know, the Trump Center. And I'm like, oh great.

Well we always needed a non literate man with no taste except painting everything gold. I mean, what he's done to the Oval Office alone should eliminate him as any kind of a fashion maven. Much less, much less, you know, any kind of a cultural elite.

God. I, when I saw the last picture, 'cause every single time I, I think it was almost two months ago when somebody said, you know, have you noticed, every time we see the Oval Office, it seems to be getting another gold something or other? Well, I saw his, his, his interview with the, I think it was, the guy from, oh gosh, I can't, oh, it was one of the South American countries. No, it was, I think it was from the Philippines. The guy from the Philippines. And I'm like, oh my God, everything is gold. He gold eagles, gold frames, gold, everything. It's like, oh my God.

[00:38:54] **Imani Newsome:** You're, you're, you're making me. I, I purposely, uh, avoid watching the news. I get all my information from my children because they pay attention to it. Because, uh, for, for decades, my husband and I, we would watch the news and blood pressures would go up because we are sitting there yelling and cussing at the television screen. And so to improve our health, physical and mental, we backed away from some of the, the news. And so now I am like completely, unaware of what's going on in the news. Yeah. Unless I just happened to see a thumbnail and click on it, and then I'm, I regret it.

[00:39:34] **Atsuko Bernot:** Yeah. But say that's why, going back to what we were talking in the garden about, the fact that PBS is, is, has already announced that by January they're going to be gone. And so to me, you listening, you know, your listening party, oral history is going to be so important. And that's why if we don't talk to each other and have collections of storytelling, and, and I'll tell you.

Uh, our young people are finding ways to tell the stories and when they start talking and hearing about, "Oh, in my day when we used to hear the train rumbling by, and we saw that it was a, a coal train, you know, our actions were a certain way because we knew that in the next couple of days, a couple of my, you know, fellow classmates may be out of school because they, they're getting asthma attacks or something like that." It, it has a major impact. If you let the children understand that this is not normal, they will deal with it because people are resilient, but they shouldn't have to deal with it. To think that having your fellows, classmates. Being outta school because they can't breathe. That's not normal. That, and it shouldn't be accepted as normal.

And, it shouldn't be a class or a financial or a racial divide. It should be a concern to everybody. And the fact that, people get tired, I understand that. I think Imani understands that. Everybody understands, yeah, you get tired when and, and going back over and over and over again to this administration.

That's their whole, uh, game plan is to wear you down. To, to flood us like a tsunami and overwhelm us with so much. And every, every wave is a very important wave. The loss of US aid. uh, Tim Kaine telling us. Two weeks ago when he was questioning that Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security, [00:42:11] what are you gonna do with all those biscuits in the warehouse?

[00:42:14] **Imani Newsome:** Oh God.

[00:42:15] **Atsuko Bernot:** Yeah. I don't know. Your eyeballs just popped up. We had enough biscuits in the warehouse because of the previous budget that had been, uh, bi partisanly passed. USAID had all these biscuits to feed approximately 27,000 kids starving in Gaza, in Africa, in the, in the Ukraine, 27,000 kids. And they didn't have to do anything to procure, to store nothing.

All they needed to do was take them out of the warehouse and distribute them. Mm-hmm. And Congress found out, like two months ago that, because of protocol, if it gets stale dated, if the expiration date comes, they have one of two choices. They can incinerate it or they can feed it to the animals. And Tim Kaine gave this guy two days notice and he told him, "I'm going to be asking you this thing in the hearing, so you let me know what your response is. You've got two days to go and figure this out, that we got biscuits. You don't have to bother buying them 'cause they're already bought. They're just in storage. We need to disperse 'em. You dismantled US Aid that had the network to disperse them. So what are you gonna do as an alternative?"

Two days later, they have the hearing, he asks them. "Okay, well we have this warehouse full of biscuits that could feed 27,000 children. And I think it was 27,000 children for almost a month. What are you gonna do? How are you going to disperse them and feed these kids?" And the guy's response was, "I need to look into that." And Kaine just let him have it and said, "That's not acceptable."

And he, he let it be known. "I gave you two days to figure out what to do." And it was by the end of July and we're now into August. So it's either been incinerated or it's been given to animals. 27,000 kids. Again, we, you know, we hear so much about, oh, the fetus, the fetus, the fetus. It's like, you know what? I'm so tired of hearing about you and your fetus.

I, and the reason is because, because the whole point is you care more about a potential child that you will not take care of the children that are here in existence. I'm like, you have no Christian ideals of life at all. You want to go and accumulate gold because you want material, you want buildings.

There's been more buildings in this area since the pandemic. And why? Because the churches are exempt from taxes. And, and again, it goes back to why are the churches not involved in trying to go and stop the coal, coal, dust and, and the coal trains? Why are the churches not saying, "Hey, you know what? I'll get Kenneth Copeland! He needs to go and give up one of his, one of his jumbo jets so that we might be able to cover a unit train's worth of a coal dust."

How's that for a, you know, thinking outside the box? If every one of those evangelicals, mega millionaires would give up because they tithe their people, if they would give up the tithing for one month. I'm willing to bet you here in Hampton Roads we could cover all these trains. I challenged them, and you can put my name on it. And yes, I am not a Christian.

[00:46:44] **Imani Newsome:** they, they would rather listen to the, uh, doubletalk and the straight out lies by the city and, uh, other, uh, alphabet agencies that, that say that, you know, uh, that we are, uh, blowing things outta proportion that we, we got, our committee got accused of, uh, trying to, uh, get a check through a lawsuit.

We didn't, [00:47:11] we didn't have any lawsuit. We didn't know anything about a lawsuit. We just wanted the coal, the coal to be covered.

[00:47:16] **Atsuko Bernot:** Right.

[00:47:16] **Imani Newsome:** the, the EPA even started coming to our meetings, just to be able to monitor what we were saying to people and to deny it. at one time, a a, Virginia Department of Health, uh, study came out and it showed, it broke down by, uh, different demographics, health conditions and how, how things were, uh, improving and how things were worsening.

And some of that, information showed that neighborhoods and, and, and communities, uh, closer to the tracks, were had, you know, disparate, uh, health issues. Of course, uh, those of us that were on the Cover the Coal, uh, uh, train, we, we blamed, uh, coal dust and we blamed, you know, environmental factors of with the water and, and air and everything.

And of course, the, the, the health department study didn't, didn't conclude that, but we, we tried to use that information to, you know, draw a logical conclusion. And, we asked the, the woman that, that published the study to come to, uh, a meeting on one of our civic league meetings and explain it to us.

She couldn't come to the meeting without an EPA representative in tow to monitor what she said and to monitor what we asked and to monitor what we said.

[00:48:44] **Adrian:** Wow. And that was in like 2015?

[00:48:47] **Imani Newsome:** Yeah. Yeah. That was, that was about 10 years ago. And so when you have people that, people in authority saying that it ain't so, and then you've got people that are on the ground saying, but look at this and look at this and look at this.

Nobody's listening to us. And so that's why our campaign fizzled out. the political agency that, that we were connected with, they even brought in, suits and lawyers. to, they wanted to, measure the amount of, of, of particulate in, and the size of the, even the size of the coal chunks that were falling off the cars along the tracks.

And evidently we didn't make the cut. Uh, you know, the, the chunks weren't big enough. The, uh, the, the, whatever testing they did, it wasn't strong enough to, for them to, to support us. And so they moved on to another location where I guess their, their stats were worse. And so, you know, it just, things just broke down and fizzled out, and fizzled out and fizzled out until, you know.

Unless you were in the neighborhood and you're looking at the dust on the houses and looking at the dust on the windows and, and, uh, and looking at

people, uh, you know, with the oxygen masks that weren't wearing oxygen masks before, you would think that, we were lying.

You know, so many people that, that were, were listening to us, they, you know, they either moved outta the neighborhood or they transitioned. And, I think that, a couple of years ago, there was something in the news. It was, it was so fleeting that I didn't really get to pay close attention to it, that there was some kind of acknowledgement of what we have been saying 10, 15 years ago.

"Oh, now you want to, you wanna pay attention to what we said back then." So we weren't lying then.

[00:51:12] **Atsuko Bernot:** Yeah. I vaguely remember them saying something. And that's, I think Joe Cook was still alive then. Yeah.

[00:51:19] **Imani Newsome:** Probably then.

[00:51:20] **Atsuko Bernot:** And see his wife, Anna, uh, Anna Jang, she teaches at a Old Dominion, and I believe she's known as an environmental, environmental scientist. And, she, she talks a lot about, you know, uh, climate change and things like that.

And, very fascinating couple, you know, but unfortunately, Joe passed away about, what, four or five years ago? And he was dedicated to that. And it really requires somebody who, it, it's such an enormous thing. And talking from a federal, a state, and a local level. And you have to, [00:52:11] you have to have the ability to have the diplomacy to navigate around that.

You have to have the retention of all this data that is available for you. Plus somehow or other, you have to convince them of a plan on, on what, what can be done. Mm-hmm. far the major plan that would be beneficial that has come back is really cover the trains. But, and, and I can only surmise what the coal companies and the railroads would say, and that is, between the, the covering, I mean filling of each coal hopper and the ability to cover it, because it would probably take manpower. That it's not cost effective. Which, if I remember correctly, was one of the, uh, citations they had said as to why it was not, you know, in their horizon to go and, and look into further. But, possibly there are other ways.

[00:53:34] **Adrian:** There are, you know. Yeah. And just off of what you just said, there's just a couple things that came to mind that I wanted to make sure that you knew about. You should open that. Okay. Um. that our group has

worked on But is like open-ended, like, you know, we are. So one really, I think, really important thing that we're doing is putting together an archive of all of the data that we've collected to be publicly available long term.

Like we unfortunately won't always be here. You know, uh, and what tends to happen a lot is like people come do something. It seems good for a year or two. They like build up a lot of data information, then they leave and all that information, data they collected is gone and nobody has it anymore.

We really wanna make sure that doesn't happen. Right We recognize like the impermanent nature of like what we are able to do, but we wanna make sure that that like has longevity so that other people can like, continue to use the resources that we've generated. So a lot of that stuff is already online and we're continuing to build it.

it's called VoicesInTheDust.org.. I can show it to you guys if you want to see it. It's just Wikipedia style. Like all of the research, all of the data, everything that we know, to be just publicly available and like we are hosting it through UVA, so. it'll last prob- probably as long as UVA will, is the idea. Knock on wood. Yeah.

[00:55:21] **Atsuko Bernot:** And the reason why I say that is because even though technology has passed me by, one of the things, believe it or not, I, I used to work with Mitsubishi, which is a global company. When I started working over there, believe it or not, I'm the one who introduced Windows to them in Chesapeake.

Yeah. I started working there in 1993. And I had come from Household International, which then became Household Credit Services, which was the credit card. And finance is what they had initially done all of this software programming for was because it's all, it's all numbers and it's easy to go and manipulate numbers and do something, you know, but data actually storing a database and things like that was a whole lot different.

And that's why the worldwide web, believe it or not, as I said, I remember when my, my mentor went to, uh, a consortium in, VMI and, oh, what was the other, the other company, the other university that's, uh, up there in VMI, it'll come to me. But they sponsored, believe it or not, back in 1982, if I remember correctly, they sponsored a, a gathering called Historians and the Computer, and I was a grad student then, and my mentor was one of those people trying to introduce computers [00:57:11] to Old Dominion.

And his colleagues, my, my mentors and my professors are like, "Can you believe he wants to, what do historians need? What to calculate how many wives Henry VIII had? You know, I mean, that's how backwards they were. And I went there to this, this, two day meeting.

There were two women, everybody else were men in black. Literally they were all dressed in black, suits. You know, two women, one older than me. And she probably was like in like the Bletchley Circle, you know, very, very hush hush, probably CIA-- and me. I was one of the younger people and I was the only other woman. And when I came back and we were talking, I audited his class because I was interested in the computer.

And again, as I said, his colleagues are like, "So what about these computers? I mean, what do we need to use computers for?" And then I ended up working at a, a financial institution and I got to see IBM and how they, you know, were dealing with software and everything and how they were already starting to talk about going paperless.

Wow. And I said, "As a historian, that scares me to death." I said, "Because you have no way of tracking who is cleaning up the data." And I, and I show them to my boss, I said, "Look," 'cause you had an image. You can take your cursor and you can erase things. And unlike a typewriter where you have to line things up, you don't have to line things up.

And I said, "All of a sudden your original document looks like this." And then oddly enough, I start working at Mitsubishi's imaging processing, division. So I gotta learn a lot about information and data and all this. And I saw the iteration, the software voices.org, voices in the Dust Voices in the dust.org org.

Mm-hmm. It's, it reminds me, you may be too young for Y 2K, but if you, if you remember Y 2K.

[00:59:51] **Adrian:** Yeah. I think I get, I think I hear what you're saying, which is that 'I'm worried about data.' I say that's a really reasonable fear about like, how long can something that is like hosted, you know, in some data center somewhere like last, now that we know, like what it takes to run a data center and like, you know, all the water and electricity and stuff.

And, we do have a long term plan, plan of also having a physical archive. Okay. Where things are all the audios on CDs. Oh, good. you know, and things are like printed in volumes. We have a long term strategy for that. Okay. Yeah.

[01:00:31] **Atsuko Bernot:** Because y'all are gonna need a bunker.

[01:00:34] **Adrian:** Yeah. Well we actually, so a lot of our work until now, a lot of what I, and like some of my colleagues have been focused on for the past year or two has been really, based in East End Newport News.

because as I'm sure you know, they have a major coal terminal there as well, and also deal with a lot of coal dust. Yeah. That's what you see when you come over the bridge, those huge piles of coal, you know. And so, something that we have been talking about there is like, like a municipal ordinance that would require the coal terminal to either build like a dome or some sort of like wind fence.

To cut the wind to prevent the dust. you know, and so like there's talk about like a feasibility study around that, but it would, you know, it takes some legal strategizing that we don't, we haven't done yet. that would be the next step would be to like. Get lawyers to look at, we have a draft of an ordinance.

Like get some lawyers to look at it and be like, "This is the plan that you have to come in with." Because what will happen if the city council passes that is that the terminal will sue the city council. That doesn't mean that like city council can't win, but it just will happen. You know? So then it's like you have to have a strategy for when that happens.

[01:01:58] **Atsuko Bernot:** Yeah. It's the weapon, uh, weaponization of any kind of, uh, ordinances or any kind of laws to go and help the better, larger people. [01:02:11] Larger good. You always had the smaller person or the smaller entity. Be able to fight it back because. It can happen to us and we may need that too, but it does slow things up.

[01:02:25] **Adrian:** Right. And so some of the people we've been working with there, we do potentially have like a brick and mortar like home where we could put this archive. Where it could be housed.

[01:02:36] **Atsuko Bernot:** 'cause that's my big, there, there is so many databases everywhere.

[01:02:42] **Adrian:** It's like a historic, like community space, that has been through several generations of just like community leaders' stewardship.

so this was safe as anywhere else. Yeah. You know, we're also talking to special collections at U UVA about like hosting a, um . Physical version of the,

of the thing. Yeah. You know, but as of right now, it's like the digital version. It's, it's very still in progress. Like we're adding stuff to it. I put stuff on there yesterday, like we're putting stuff on it right now. To try to make sure that it's up and available. yeah, and we have some long-term goals for that too.

[01:03:21] **Atsuko Bernot:** And, and the accessibility to it, is it open to everybody? Or-- Okay.

[01:03:27] **Adrian:** Yeah. Anybody can see it. So the coal terminal can see it. You know, but so can city council. Anybody can see it, you know. and it also, like what we're trying to do is like create a editorial review board that will have like several different residents and like neighborhood leaders on it. so that, you know, long-term, like the people most affected have the ability to maintain and do what they want with the data and all the information accumulated on the website.

So it is a long term, no longer a project of UVA. It's something that we built and we are givin' to y'all. So you can do whatever you want with it you know? Right. And so you can add to it or you can say, actually this isn't accurate. I need to change it. And, you know, you should be able to do that with relative ease. that's, that's also part of the long term strategy,

[01:04:27] **Atsuko Bernot:** But there's still a, like a head archivist or,

[01:04:30] **Adrian:** we have talked about that. That's, we don't know yet. Is the short answer. The long answer is things that we've thought about is like trying to make some kind of funding for a position like that, because that's like significant work, right. for somebody to do, you know? And, it takes like some knowledge and some skills.

[01:04:53] **Atsuko Bernot:** See, 'cause if you had said this to me even a year ago, Uhhuh, I'd say, oh, this sounds great, Uhhuh. But after what had happened yesterday. The BLS. You know, the, uh, bureau of Labor Statistics came, oh, came out with--

[01:05:12] **Adrian:** What are you talking about?

[01:05:13] **Atsuko Bernot:** Trump had, uh, the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Data just data gathered upon the various points that we always use. Trump didn't like the, the report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, because it went tanked. It finally probably reflected the actual loss of jobs. So he fired the commissioner.

[01:05:43] **Adrian:** Okay.

[01:05:44] **Atsuko Bernot:** And had it been, as I said a year ago, I would say the integrity of a database, of a database of any database would be fine. But in this day and age, and as much as he is against the ugliness of windmills and, and the solar farms and, you know, and, and, and the fact that he thinks that beautiful coal and digging for oil is, is, is the way for us to go.

He just had his own personal, uh, attorney go and talk to Ghislaine Ma Maxwell, this week, and she had expunged or redacted, as they say, redacted Trump's name from all of the Epstein files. So data being data. That's where it's like --I always relish. I, I'm, I'm, as I said, I'm a historian. I always relish the collection of data and I think it's really important and that's why we need to make sure that the children know about it.

If nothing else, the database is within us. Within us to pass to the next generation. And that's [01:07:11] why oral history is so important. Because that's where data from all of our mythologies, all of our histories, everything before people learn how to read and write. That's where all of our information came from.

But it is important to accumulate the data that you're talking about. But then again, as I said, had it not been for who we have right now, and he thinks that he, the data is for him to go and come out with.

[01:07:42] **Adrian:** Do you have a, I mean this, what you're saying makes a lot of sense. and I would love to make sure that I get your contact information.

Sure. if you're cool with that. just 'cause, I mean, um. Yeah. Like, I, like I am here, so I'm a face and I talk to a lot of people and like, that's beautiful and I love this part about my job, but ultimately I'm not like the decision maker. I like work with a team of people. Right. And, they're often like, just 'cause of the nature of like working in an academic institution, I guess.

Like not everybody comes here. So they're always like, "What does the community think?" And I'm like, "I don't know. Like, I, I'm not them. Like, you can't ask me. You know, you have to just talk to people." Do--

[01:08:31] **Atsuko Bernot:** also, I mean, no offense, but I mean, you see Imani an' me, but we're we're--

[01:08:35] **Adrian:** No, you're two people.

[01:08:36] **Atsuko Bernot:** We're just two people.

[01:08:37] **Adrian:** Mm-hmm. You know. Absolutely. Yeah. You know, but I think that, like, as a historian, you have a really great lens on this.

Mm-hmm. and I would just like, I, I would like to make sure that like, this is, like, the issues that you're bringing up are things that like we're thinking about and trying to address as we're like trying to strategize a long term structure for this project.

[01:08:58] **Atsuko Bernot:** Because I, I believe one of the best ways for you to not just store it, but make it useful and aware for people is if you're targeting the people that are younger and also older people who may not have access the wherewithal to get to you.

We have, we have in our community a guy who started his own graphic novel group. And he's a c-- he's a Christian. He, and he, he believes in non bullying. And he started writing graphic, uh, graphic novels, anti-bullying campaign. People in the younger group need to have like stories. Mm-hmm. And, and again, not just listening to us talking, but you guys synthesizing it and putting it into, uh--

I have a friend in Pennsylvania and, and believe me, he had, he made an acquaintance with a guy who got shot twice and he, the guy managed to get through it all by writing a, a graphic novel autobiography.

So Ken decided-- 'cause he used to be a media director at the, at the UN, that's what he retired as-- he, he said, "you know, I need to make this into a documentary." So he took that and he made it into an AI generated, uh, green screen documentary using only three people. And, and because he knew he had contacts and everything, he sent it out.

He said, I, I've got a list of 10 people, uh, 10 uh, festivals. I'm gonna go and scatter shoot them and say, "Hey, I've got this documentary." Lo and behold, at least four of them have answered back and he's already won an honorable mention. Nice. And, and some unknown festival in Spain told him, "We'll go and ship you and everybody affiliated with your documentary over to Spain, and we'll go and, and show it at our festival."

And, but the, if there's any way that you guys can make it into, oh, like these little snippets and either post it on Instagram or YouTube or whatever, and, and, get it out there.

[01:11:33] **Adrian:** you know, so

[01:11:35] **Atsuko Bernot:** because see, my problem is I don't have that much confidence in this area, having lived here so long. This area has a ca- has a, has a cash register mentality. So it's like, how much is it going to cost? these people can't generate that much money, but these people can, you know, and so then what happens is they're very focused on profit. Everything is like about, it's all about the money. And it, which is so sad.

[01:12:11] Because there's some things, you know, like case an' point, governmental budgets. People, many people don't realize that they're only good for a year. So if you don't spend your money in your budget by the end of the year, by next year, you won't get that much. And what's worse: It's, it's made in such a way that you have to ask for more if you're planning something bigger for the year after.

[01:12:45] **Imani Newsome:** And you better spend every penny of what you, what you use that first year. 'Cause if you don't, you'll get less the next year.

[01:12:55] **Atsuko Bernot:** Yeah. When I was in the history department and before I became, part of their, uh, when I became a history president, you know, history department president for the club, my pre- predecessor had wanted to go and, and invite a really good, uh, speaker, but that speaker wasn't going to be available for a year.

So she saved all that money, didn't spend it, and in a sense, people donated their time and talents and stuff, but we didn't spend the allocated amount following year cut in half. Yes, we got the minimum amount that what any organization gets,

[01:13:44] **Imani Newsome:** That's what they do.

[01:13:45] **Atsuko Bernot:** And so my problem with relying on the community, the powers that be will not do anything with it unless it has the pressure of a larger community. And that's why your podcast, (note: this is a reference to a tangent trimmed from this recording -- an earlier mention of the podcast "Crosswinds" and its listing as a finalist in the Press Gazette's 2024 Future of Media Award, based in the UK.) I am so happy and as you say, you got it in Scotland. And the, and the reason is because with that technology, you get to, you get to, interact with a larger world that can tell this smaller community,

"Hey, you can, you too can be in a brighter light if you worked with these other people who share the same problem that you have. And look, look what they're doing." Everybody wants a guarantee. Like we came up with this budget. We wanna be able to follow this budget, tell me that next year this budget is going to come true.

It is like, "What do I have, a crystal ball?" It's like, no, a budget is just a guideline. But some, some corporations believe that it is, you're making them a promise, like it's a contract. And so to me, the more people you can, you can affect. And the more upcoming people that you can affect-- because they may not be able to vote on things this year or even next year, but in two years time or three years time, when they go and think back, "you know, my sickly older brother," or, "oh, you know, when I lost my mom early because of blah, blah, blah. It might have been because of this, and now I'm old enough to sit on the city council," or whatever.

Mm-hmm The ripple effect of what you're doing is, is so promising. It's, you're like, we're from the garden. You're like a little important, a seed of a very important and rare plant that we want to nurture to make sure that your ideal grows and grows positively and doesn't fizzle out. That's where we are coming from.

There's no offense, but I am old experience. I'm old. I'm not gonna be affected one way or the other with the coal dust. Even if they dump the whole thing on me and I pass out tomorrow, I've got my kids. I, you know, it's the kids'. Kids. We've gotta worry about 'em. Because, I hate to say it, but the way our public educational system is going to go, most of them aren't gonna be asking questions about, "Well, what do you mean coal? 'Cause I gotta go and worry about a job now." And as I said, we're in for a very rude awakening shortly.

So, you know, I, I want you guys to succeed and I am so happy that [01:17:11] you're, you're putting it all and, and thinking ahead into an archive. Mm-hmm You know, because that's important. Why reinvent the wheel over and over and over? Why recollect the same data over and over and over again, so, you know, but.

I keep saying I won't. Uh, I talk a lot. Imani will tell you. Yeah. She's always talking in the garden, but yeah. But you know, you're doing very important work and thank you.

[01:17:49] **Adrian:** Well, thank you guys for like coming by today. I mean, it's, it's really great to meet you and it's really cool to, to have this conversation and hear for you.

[01:17:56] **Imani Newsome:** I, I am just so glad that, that y'all have picked up the gauntlet that, that was taken out of our hands and, and, uh, and we never thought that anybody would ever pick it back up. Yeah. you know, unfortunately, the, Mr. Charles Corbett that, that, uh, lived at, uh, Village Par-- Village Point, the, retirement community that's in Lambert's Point, he was a very, he was a very tireless, uh, driving force for our neighborhood committee. And he, he had been, he had, he had lived in California and had been an urban planner. So he knew how to organize, he knew how to research, and we were basically, he would, he would bring the stuff to us and we were like the, uh, the hands. We were like the, the grunts that tried to put what he had discovered out into the neighborhood.

And we would sit there and we'd strategize on, "Hey, how you doing, doing, doing, how, how, you know, how are we gonna get this information out? You know, what can we do about it? You know, what can we logically, realistically do about it? how can we get it, get people to understand that this is affecting them right now."

It's not just, you know, something that we have thought up. And, and when he, uh, when he transitioned, uh, oh man, maybe. Four years ago. that's why I thought that you were, you were speaking about him because he, he rode his bike a lot and he got hit by a, a vehicle and he, he never really recovered.

He, his health just started to decline and, and then he passed and, and then we were just left floundering because our neighborhood committee had already been disbanded. the political, organization had already moved on to the next pressing issue. And so there, there basically were like two people, me and my husband, that were left.

And we did not, we did not know where, where to go from there. You know, it was almost like we had been, we had been abandoned and we felt like we had abandoned the cause and abandoned our community.

So the only thing, because of, of the city shutting down, five years ago, the only thing that, that we could think to do to, to try to, up keep uplifting the community was to get into, uh, urban gardening and, and, and trying to express to people that it was, it was accessible and it was attainable. You didn't have to go somewhere, you could start writing your own, in your own yard.

And so that's, and then we started vol-- we, we returned to volunteering at the Peace Garden because we had, we had volunteered at the Peace Garden years and years before. But when my husband's health started to decline, we couldn't keep, going every week like we had been doing. And, uh, and he transitioned, uh, last summer. So now it's just me and, uh, and my children have listened to us rant and rave for decades, their entire lives, and they basically don't listen to us anymore.

My daughter was surprised that it was, us fighting and fussing and ranting and raving is the reason why there's a crosswalk across 38th Street. Now, the city, they found a way to not pay for it. They got the, uh, the Elizabeth River Trail, people to pay for that crosswalk.

But the, the fact that there is a crosswalk is because we wouldn't let it go.

And then I told my daughter, I said, "This crosswalk is here because of the work that your dad and Mr. Charles and our committee did." And she said, she said, "I saw y'all going to the, going to the, uh, the meetings every week and going to the civic league meetings every month and coming back, fussing and cussing. But we didn't know that's what y'all were doing. We had no idea."

And [01:22:11] then one, you know, one day when, when we saw that the city was, was beautifying the, the median in the middle of 38th Street, I actually stopped and I, uh, and I talked to one of the workers and I thanked them for what they were doing. He said, and he said to me, he said, "You are one of the few ones that is glad that we are here."

He said, "Most of the rest of the neighbors, they're complaining about the trucks and the equipment, you know. And them having to, uh, traffic slowing down because they have to go around us. "

And I was like, "You don't understand. We, we've worked for three years for this. "

[01:22:51] **Atsuko Bernot:** Right. Yeah. Activism isn't easy.

Not, it's never easy.

[01:22:57] **Adrian:** It's not, it's not. Yeah.

[01:22:59] **Imani Newsome:** It's years and years of being treated like, uh, you're doing something wrong. Yeah. Because you said that the status quo is not normal!

[01:23:08] **Adrian:** People, you know, people don't like change. I'm gonna pause the recording.