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Climate Stories: South Carolina, Volume 1

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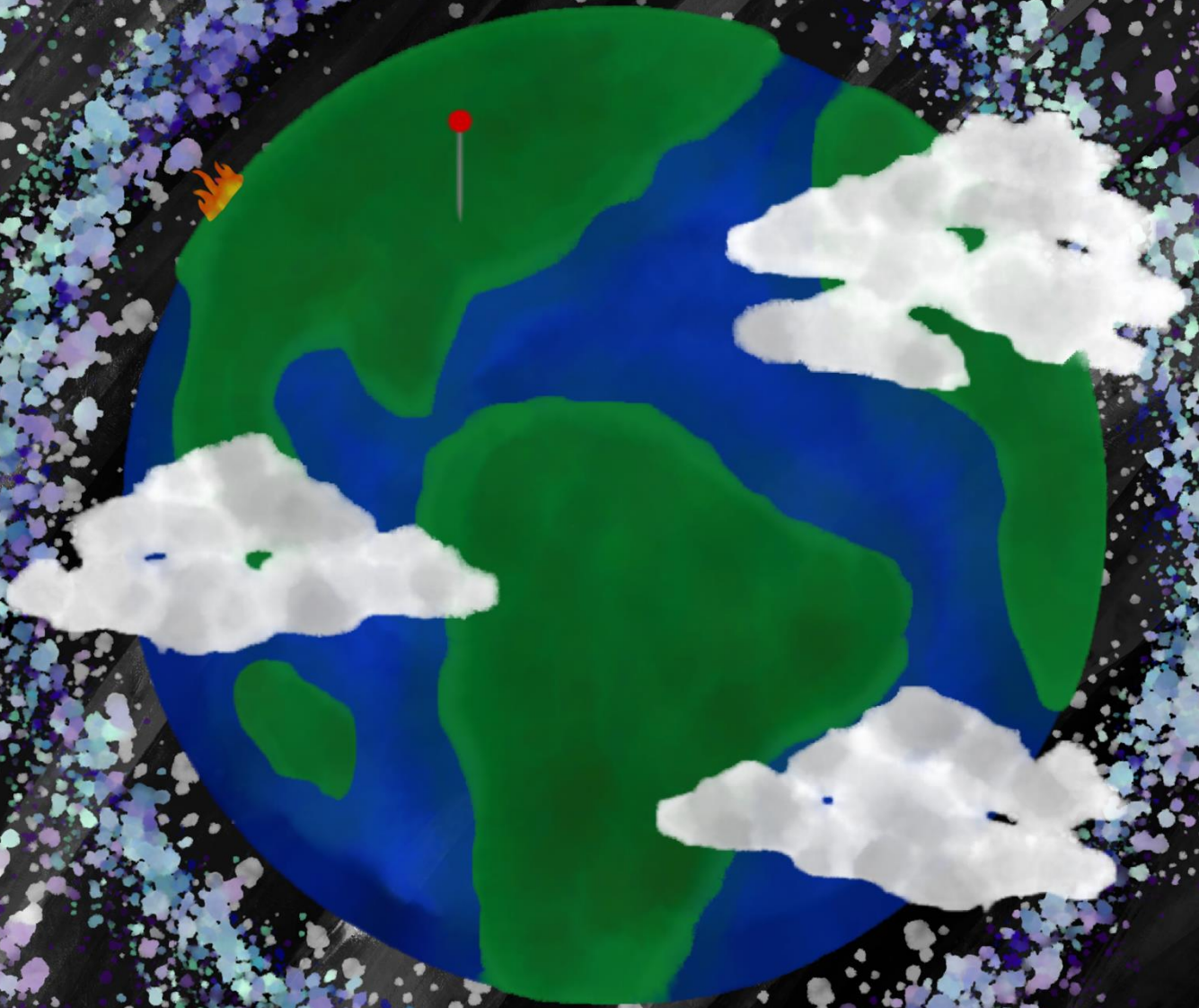


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CLIMATE STORIES



SOUTH CAROLINA

VOL. 1

Climate Stories: South Carolina, Volume 1

In this volume, you will hear from South Carolina residents about how they have been sensing climate change throughout their lifetimes. All stories have been anonymized with the use of pseudonyms, except where participants asked for their story to be associated with their name.

Data for this project was gathered by Wofford College students Emily Arnold, Samantha Carter, Kaelyn Emon, Hayden Jones, Sarah Owens, Noel Tufts, and Tiana White in 2022.
Editing, layout, and original cover art by Kaelyn Emon.

We would like to extend a special thanks to Dr. Laura Barbas Rhoden & Dr. Christine Sorrell Dinkins for their expert faculty mentorship and willingness to learn alongside our research team.

Funding for this project was provided by the
Wofford College Office of Undergraduate Research.

Imagine ...

It's 95 degrees, the sun is blazing, you have only your hat for shade, and you're working outside from 8 to 4. Or you're simply trying to take care of your garden, but the heat is threatening your plants and making it hard for you to tend to them.

Imagine . . .

You're an athlete, and you're eager to begin the fall season. But when it arrives, you find your practice and competition schedules change over and over. High heat and humidity mean wet bulb conditions and delays until it is safe to be active outdoors. The schedule disruptions mean you get home later and have less time for homework and sleep.

Imagine . . .

You have fond memories of holiday sweaters and family gatherings around the fireplace, but it doesn't get very cold anymore, and you can't remember the last time you felt like putting on a cozy sweater or building a fire in December. The fond memories linger, but they now bring sadness as well.

These scenarios are typical of what we heard from the generous people who gave us their time and trust and shared their climate stories with us.

How are *you* sensing climate change? What is *your* climate story?

The scientific and economic data is compelling.

Sea level rise is accelerating, and rising seas mean a worsening of coastal flooding. In South Carolina, billions of dollars of property - including thousands of homes - are situated on land less than 4 feet above the high tide line.¹

Heat, too, is rising. In 2022, Upstate South Carolina experienced 31 more risky heat days than in 1970. Such days, when heat is above the 90th temperature percentile, pose a particular risk to children, adults over 65, pregnant people, people living with illness, outdoor workers, and athletes.²

What you perceive, and how you feel - that matters.

How are *you* sensing climate change? What is *your* climate story?

¹ <https://sealevel.climatecentral.org/uploads/ssrf/SC-Report.pdf>

² <https://www.climatecentral.org/climate-matters/more-risky-heat-days-in-232-us-locations>

How can you have a system that can't provide needs for comfort such as cool air?

| Daniel, Inman, SC

[I've had A/C] most of my life, except for the years that I was locked up when I didn't have A/C in any of the dang dorms that I lived in, except for one, so six years of my life, I went without A/C and had to have a fan on and find ways to get cool. So, at that point in time, it was very uncomfortable, and it makes me appreciate the A/C that I have now that I worked so hard to pay for.



I don't think that climate change was really the issue when I was locked up. I think it was just season change at that point in time. So, the biggest concern would probably be that, you know, how can you have a system that can't provide the needs for comfort, even for folks that are locked up or incarcerated, you know, such as running cool air. You had to do certain things to get to certain dorms, to be able to, to have A/C. Otherwise you'd have to sweat through it and bear with it... So it gives you more of a thought of not taking stuff for granted. I mean, so you realize the environment that you're in, and you're not promised anything. So, you're lucky if you do have certain things, so you find ways to cope and bear with it... I mean, you turn on a fan, you wet down towels to lay on, you take your sheets off your bed, and you get as many clothes off as you possibly can.

You look at young kids, and they're out there dying because it's so hot

| Chance, Charleston, SC

Think most days in this time of year, which is, what is this, July? By 10 o'clock in the morning it is almost dangerous. And it used to be like one or two o'clock because you stay out all day. Take a break, go get lunch, come back. Sit in the same chair the rest of the afternoon, but not anymore.



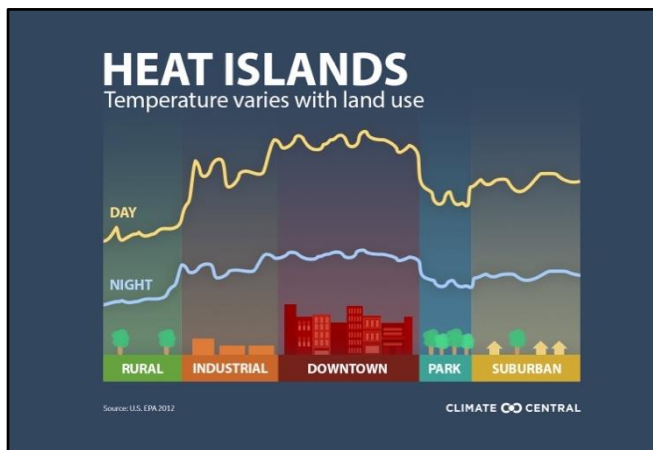
I'm telling you, I'm old school, 1947, you go outside in the morning, you come in for lunch, and you go back outside all day, but you just can't do it anymore. Well, I've worked outside most of my adult life. And until I'd say maybe less than five years ago. Just can't do it now. I'm sure aging enters in there somewhere. But you look at young kids, and they're out there dying because it's so damn hot. I just think it's not good.

How is everything going to be when it's time for me to settle down?

| Sandy, Inman, SC

The amount of houses that have been built in Spartanburg and Inman and even where I live and it's taking away all the land, from like, since I was little, there was so much land. And now when I drive by, there's hardly any land that I can even see. So I mean, that has also made a big impact on me. Because I'm getting to the age now where I'm gonna have to start figuring out where I want to live.

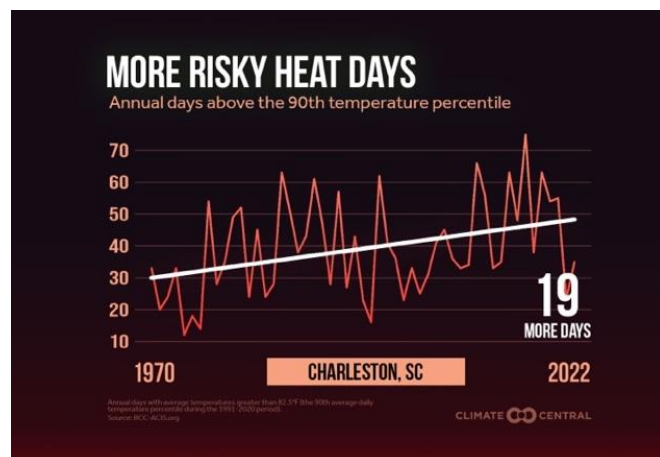
Since I've always lived in the countryside, I've always said that I want to live in the countryside when I get older. And so my dad, he is a land surveyor. And so he sees all this, and he's the one who does all the plans for all these houses and buildings being built on the land. And I keep telling him, Daddy, I need you to save me some land because I still want to try to live on land, because I want my kids to be able to have the opportunities that I did growing up, living in the countryside. And like, that's, that's how I love to live. And that's how I want my kids to live. But it's worrying me a lot. It makes me think about it a lot more because I see everything changing and progressing. And it just makes me think about how everything is going to be when it gets to the point where it's time for me to settle down and start a family and build a house.



Tennis camps, lessons, everything, you definitely have to be careful

| Grant, Charleston, SC

Well, I play a lot of tennis. So that causes, you know, there's always heatstroke warning, that kind of thing. And it always just gets super-hot on the court, especially just going outside and everything. I just, you know, hate being so hot.



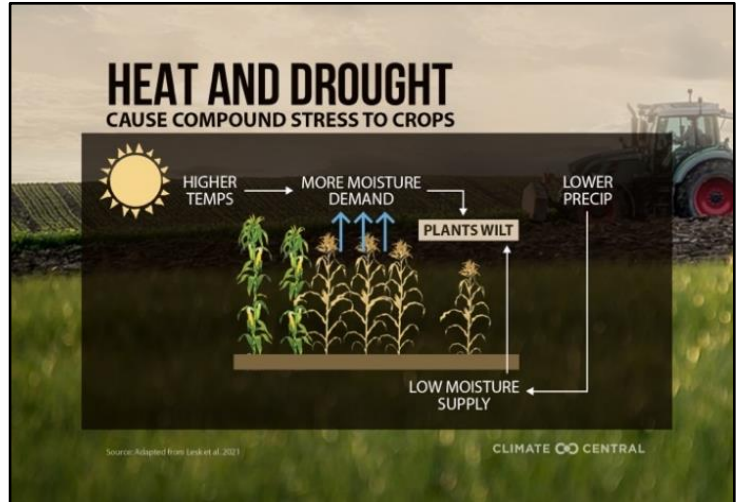
Tennis camps, lessons, everything, you definitely have to be careful, like you have to worry about especially if you have older people, you know, they're more susceptible to heat. So you got to make sure everyone's drinking water and taking breaks whenever they need to. So we try to play in the shade as much as possible, or, you know, go inside, if they're playing for three hours a day. We'll take breaks and all that.

It ruins the gardens that people have
| Lyle, Charleston, SC

Well, I just have to look for the less amount of sun in a certain spot and the shade and things like that and put my plants where there's a hangover that can protect them and things like that. Of course, in the colder months, you have certain ones you have to cover and things like that.

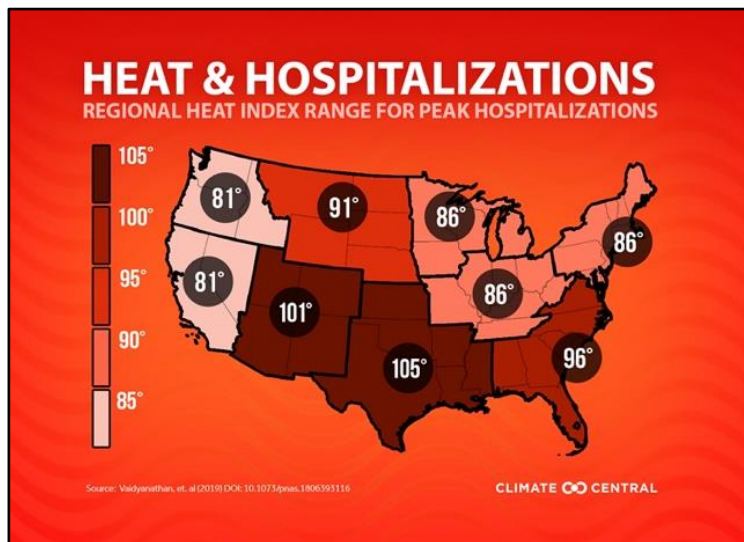
One of the changes I've seen is the trees, there's so, there's just less everywhere you look because of development. And you know that that has to do with heat, everything else.

Oh, yeah, and just less plants. It's, you know, I think back probably several years ago, we had more trees, and we had more shade. And now the plants really take it rough. It ruins gardens that people have because of the heat. Because there's no protection with the trees and things.



The temperature is just too hot to play in
| Tyler, Upstate, SC

It's definitely an adjustment. Sometimes it gets too hot where we can't go on the field because the temperature is just too hot to play in, so it's definitely an adjustment for us. The coaches never put us in harm's way, though, they take precautions and protocols to keep us out of harm's way.



But we definitely are aware of the weather when it comes to those situations. I mean they highly recommend us to hydrate a lot before we go out in the heat because the heat definitely plays a part when doing a workout. They tell us to hydrate, and they tell us to eat a lot of food when doing these workouts because the heat definitely takes a big toll on weight loss and takes a big toll on your health out there. If you don't come out there with the right resources, you could end up injuring yourself. You got to stay hydrated and keep going.

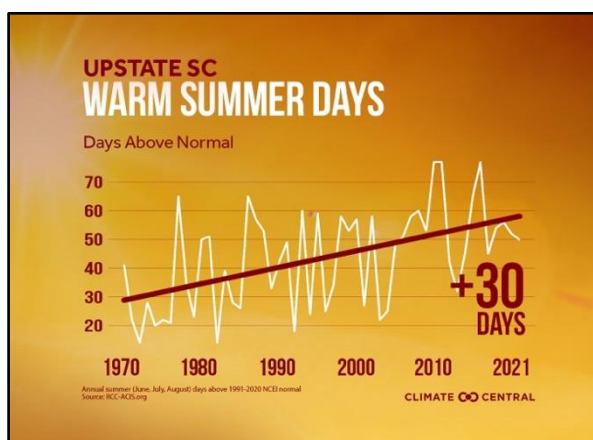
Maybe you can help me know what my part is
| Keeley, Upstate, SC

Day to day, I just walk outside and feel like I am not prepared because I love spending time outside, so when I go outside, and it feels like Texas when I'm in South Carolina I'm like, why does it feel like this? ... I don't know if this is climate change but like with weather patterns, it'll be sunny one day and cold the next. That was more so in high school, like 2 years ago the weather would just drastically change. I'm pretty sure one day a tornado was thrown in there, then it would go back to sunny, then back to raining, then back to freezing within one week.



I was a bit younger, so I didn't really understand what was happening, I was just like hmm, the weather is changing, but now that I look back, I'm like this was the early signs of climate change and I didn't even know it because I was a young child. I was only in my teens, but now that I have come to Wofford and been educated on the environment it makes me feel like I should be doing more on my part. I don't even know what my part is, so maybe you can help me know what my part is.

We typically go outside a lot and run in the heat and it's super draining
| Matthew, Upstate, SC

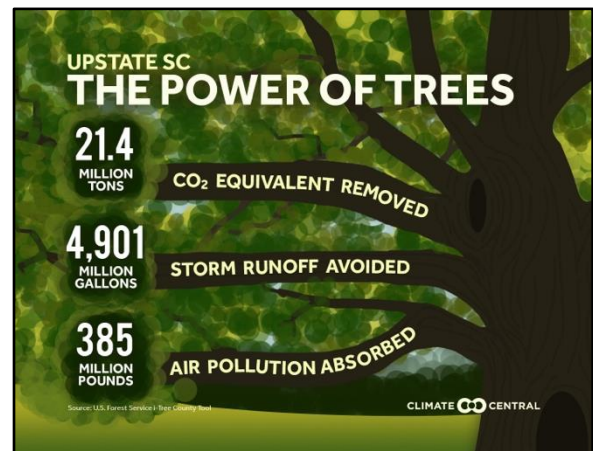


Well, I'm an athlete here at Wofford College so we typically go outside a lot and run in the heat and it's super draining, you know, it takes a lot of energy away from me. Most of the time, I'm pretty dehydrated when I'm running out in the sun, and I work outside as well.

I do landscape work, and I'm outside from like 9-3 every day and that's pretty draining. It takes so much energy away so by the time I'm done with work, I'm like, super tired and super dehydrated to the point where it really irritates me.

There needs to be some positivity and hope
| Reverend Ron Robinson, Upstate, SC

I grew up close to what we would call the Cherokee Indian Reservation, they call it the Qualla Boundary. So, there was influence of that culture around me, oriented toward the outdoors, and a sense of wanting to preserve that. That's one side of my story, the other side is, my grandfather ran a sawmill and he was involved in clear-cutting a lot of the forests near here and looking back on that history, the people were poor, they were trying to make it, but they also did some harm to the forest too, and I learned about that as a young adult. All those things impact greatly who I am, and that became integrated with my faith journey. I think now it's my generation's responsibility to say, let's look at this and learn from the mistakes and help make things better. That has caused me to become an environmental activist, the sawmill, and the place I grew up impacted my view of the Creation and the care I want to offer for that.



I've gotten invested in the environmental movement in South Carolina and ended up starting South Carolina Interfaith Power and Light, part of a national movement for the environment... I started it at Wofford, and I realized this organization is not going to be effective, because it's really white right now and this isn't reaching marginalized and underserved communities who get highly impacted by a lot of these things. And so, I changed the leadership part we hired African American leadership. If you look at the board, Queen Quet, the head of the Gullah Geechee nation, she's become really active, and we've moved it from the Upstate to the lower part of South Carolina, because that's where the impacts of climate change are seen most readily in South Carolina and it's become a much stronger organization once we diversified. Really a great way of seeing how that's critical to making things happen. Whenever we reduce energy consumption, it lessens the amount of carbon that goes into the air but for them, it's an economic issue, so there's trying to be strategic and tell the story that's backed up with data and do some things that are meaningful to the society at large, but to a household, also make a difference.

And when I went to Antarctica with a geologist and learned a lot about what you can see with ice cores in Antarctica, these cores are telling a story. And if we don't alter our behavior, and we have the capacity to do that, we're going to mess up this wonderful planet that we have, and we're going to hasten its demise, and that's going to have impact on all species, including us as one of the species. My commitment to the environment is, it's rooted in local, but it's global in its scope and impact.

And I think there needs to be some positivity and hope, to motivate us to want to be, you know, to do better. I do think this is about our individual actions, but it's also very much about our actions as communities, as a nation. So, it's about individual responsibility, but it's also about public policy and public action. And a response as part of all that, my wanting to be part of that has to do with awe and love.

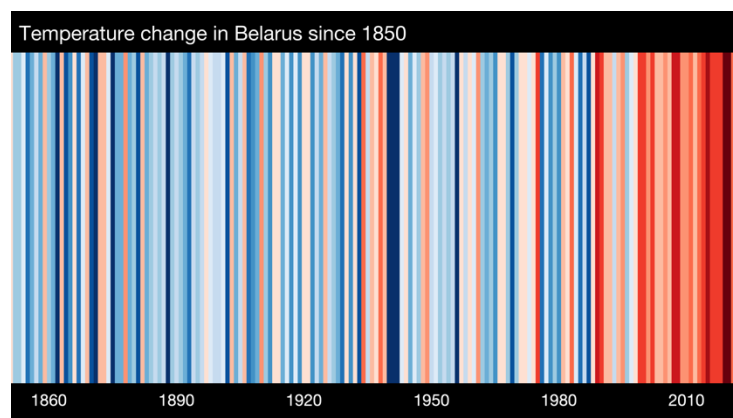
I try to do the little things that I think make a difference
| Wendy, Upstate, SC

I think part of the issue with climate change, it's hard for the vast majority of us to see, we don't really see that certain species of plants may be budding two months earlier than they used to. And we don't really see that, you know, because we kind of are separated from nature in a lot of ways. And so most of us don't really think about it.



I mean, for me, I try to do the little things that I think make a difference towards lowering my own footprint, and then of course, trying to teach kids to lower their footprint and, and to have less, just less emissions and less in general, less carbon out there in the environment. So for me, I just bought a new car, and I was really thoughtful about what kind of car I bought, and I bought a hybrid, just to try to lower my own carbon footprint. And so I think those are the things, I turn off all the lights in my house, I think it's the individual things, it makes me feel a little bit like, I'm trying to do my part, you know, so I think that's, at this point, for most of us, I think that's what you can do.

Now they don't have snow... it's getting warmer and warmer
| Anna, Belarus and Upstate, SC



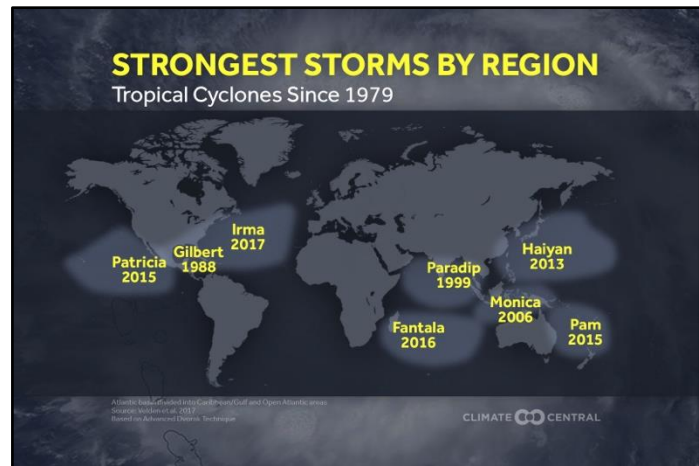
I wouldn't say that the climate here [in Spartanburg County] has changed a lot but it's basically some kind of strange changes from warm to cold, getting more cold spring and fall, but not drastic. Just probably mild.

In Belarus, there's more drastic changes. It's getting warmer, much warmer. Even I remember when we were kids, in the winters there would be snow up to the waistline, but now they don't have snow at all. Very much has changed even in my lifetime.

The rain was so hard it broke roads
| Kenzie, India and Upstate, SC

I feel climate change most at home in India. Summers are hotter now when I go back home than they ever were when I was a child, or even in the span of my four years here in college, the weather is so erratic. Growing up, you didn't hear a lot about the sheer number of natural disasters that happen today, and it is like every other day you see record-breaking heat. And tornados and cyclones and hurricanes.

I strongly detest being hot, and I am from the mountains. So even though I grew up in India, a lot of people have this misconception that all of India is just hot, but no, I grew up in the Northeast, so we're very temperate, it was always very cool with mountain winds, and it was just nice, and now - in many parts of India, we don't have A/C, and growing up it was never an issue but when I went home last summer, I was, like, I am so hot and I don't know what to do.



The other thing we have really bad back home are cyclones. So, like really bad storms and really bad wind and that has definitely increased, in fact last week we broke the record for the most amount of rainfall in one day. We're the rainiest place on earth, so we average about 400 inches of rain per year. And that's a lot, but in a day we did 39 inches or something which is insane. It broke some roads, like the rain was so hard it broke roads, so even though we're the rainiest place on earth, clearly there is a change in the rainfall and how much is falling, and we're hydroelectric powered, so there's a very visible change when there's too much rain or too little rain.

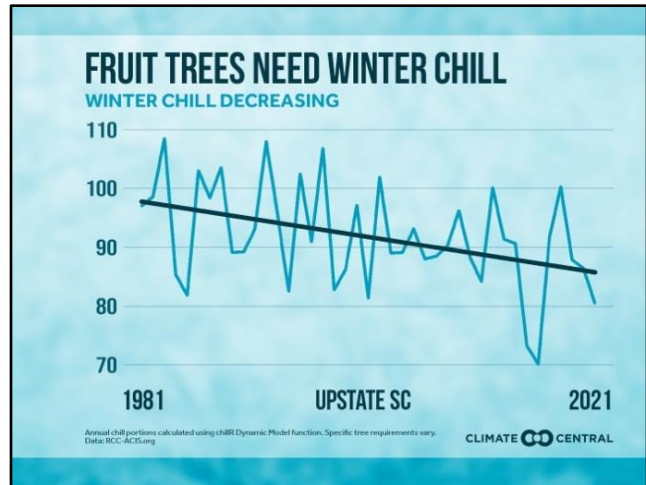
It makes me feel worried because I know that we don't, like as an everyday person, we don't fully know all the implications of climate change and, you know butterfly effect, like too much rain one day can, who knows, cause a flood somewhere else down the line in the world. It causes me worry because I don't think there's enough people who want to take action for it. I don't think the conversation is targeting the right people. While everyone can do their part, and do little things, the real culprits are the big corporations who are really doing the most damage and I think there needs to be more accountability there and I think there needs to be more legal action taken. We have all this data, and the accountability needs to be placed with the people who are doing the most damage and are ruining communities, like not everyone [near the coast] has the ability to raise their house, so this thing disproportionately effects people depending on economic status, and on race, and all of this needs to be more widely acknowledged.

I feel worried and angry, especially since our generation and our future generations, like our kids, are the ones who are going to have to clean up the mess.

The frost is getting pushed back later and spring is more unpredictable
| Carol, Upstate, SC

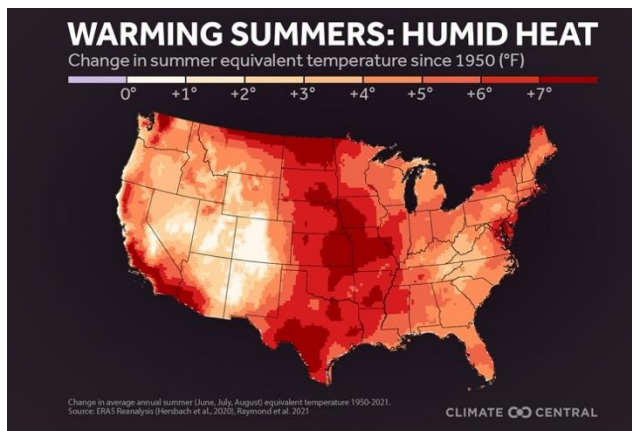
I would say that I think that as far as the seasons go, the frost is getting pushed back later. And spring is more unpredictable. You don't know, like, we can get so late frost, but sometimes, it's all over the place, where it used to be I think a little more consistent. I know that as far as a grower, our climate or zone is changing, slowly from a seven to an eight on the hardiness scale. So that does, you know, it impacts what I can grow.

I will say that, like, I'm definitely a believer about the warming of the planet and I understand how that's happening. And it does concern me for globally, the global impacts are pretty scary. So as far as you know, growing and farming, I think in the future, it's going to be a real concern for the entire planet, the oceans, and just how everything ties together. And I think a lot of the way these things grow need change. You know, some places in the country where all the farming takes place, may in the future, not be as viable for agriculture, and that may be shifting somewhere else. Or we may have to find some way to grow indoors and do a lot of high tunnels and greenhouse production. I'm not sure. But it's definitely a concern. It's scary to think.



So as far as you know, growing and farming, I think in the future, it's going to be a real concern for the entire planet, the oceans, and just how everything ties together. And I think a lot of the way these things grow need change. You know, some places in the country where all the farming takes place, may in the future, not be as viable for agriculture, and that may be shifting somewhere else. Or we may have to find some way to grow indoors and do a lot of high tunnels and greenhouse production. I'm not sure. But it's definitely a concern. It's scary to think.

You start breathing in the humidity and you can't breathe
| Jordan, Upstate, SC



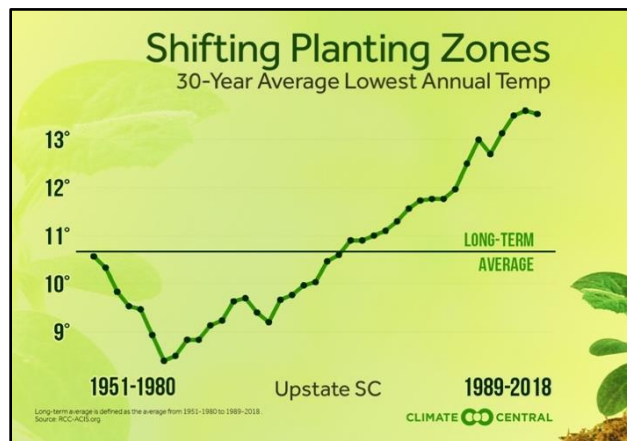
You go outside at like, 11-12am, it is just moist. Like I'm talking, like, not even. You know like when you take a shower for too long, and you start breathing in the humidity and you can't breathe. It's like that, but every second that you're outside. Like right now we're good. But the second it hits like what? Give it 30 minutes, and it's gonna be unbearable.

I'm saying like, it's just gonna get worse. I would not be surprised if it reached the one hundreds next month, if not later this month. And if it's gonna be 100, imagine how bad the humidity's

gonna be. It's gonna be like 100% humidity at some point. You're gonna walk out and just be wet. You're gonna open the door and it's gonna feel like it's raining sideways, but it's not. You're just gonna be wet, like I don't even live near a body of water and it's humid. So if this is bad, imagine how people in Florida feel. It is wet all the time. Like you can pop out with the freshest fit ever, and it's just gonna be wet. You won't even make it to your car.

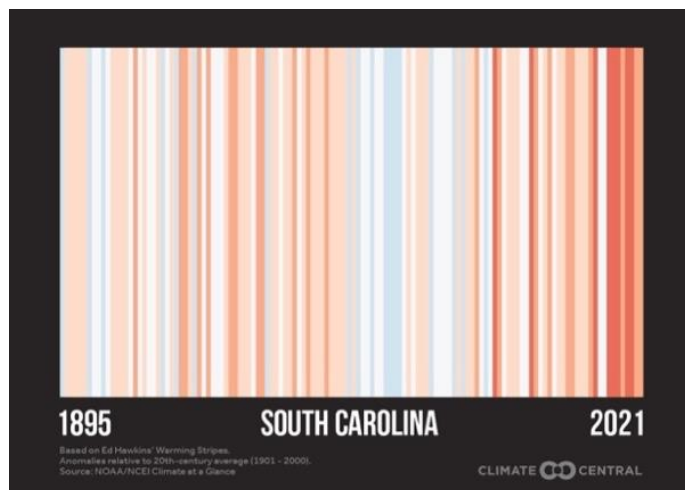
It certainly does change my gardening practice
| Sam, Upstate, SC

It did seem in the 1980s, that conservative, it didn't necessarily mean careful with resources, so much as it began to mean resistant to change and that was really disheartening to me. I was pretty sad to see the direction that our society was going in. Back five or six years ago, I saw scientific evidence and an explanation of the global warming phenomenon and how people had come to believe that was a valid explanation of what was going on. And it made a lot of sense to me. So I wish that people had paid attention to resource conservation more.



[Climate change] certainly does change my garden practice. It has made it very difficult to grow a few crops that I enjoy, squashes and all of the cucurbits do well in hot weather, but the insects that are coming with that are intensifying, and the disease problems that come with the hot humid weather are making it very hard to grow those things. At the same time, it's opening up a world of possibilities. There are so many things that we can grow here now, which could only be grown in the coastal plain. Plants are pretty amazing. They are very, very, very well-tuned to their environment. And if we were able to tune our own senses, to those kinds of changes and to how we cultivate and use plants - climate change is simply change. It's not a crisis for mankind. However, we're not willing to change, so it will be.

It seems like you can't really tell the seasons apart
| Andy, Upstate, SC



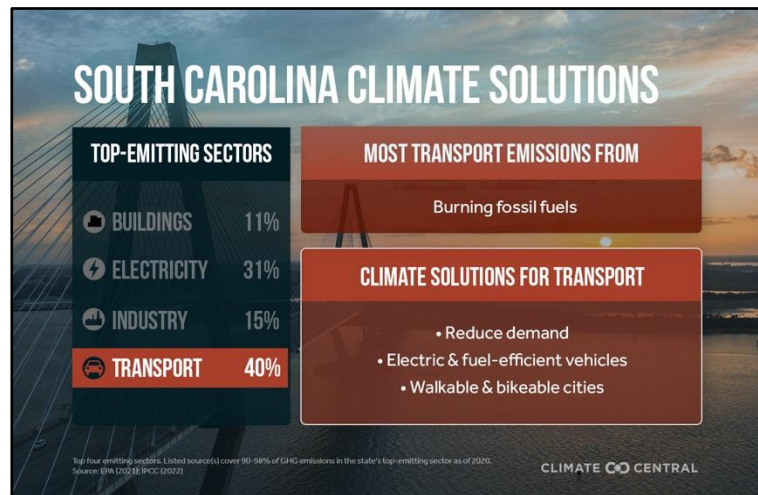
You know, pretty soon, you're not going to be able to tell a winter from summer, or spring and fall, you know, you're not going to be able to tell the difference pretty soon. And then we have to get used to all of that, so our bodies will have to get adjusted to all this different change.

Whole different Philadelphia weather than weather down here. I've been out here 12 years. And it seems like you can't really tell the seasons because it could be summer, then it gets cold, or it can be winter and then it's hot. You know at the

time, it's hard to tell the seasons between each other. I guess because of the global warming, the ice melting, this stuff is affecting the ozone. And I think sending people up in space is messing with the ozone layer. So, it's messing with the climate, it's messing with everything. You know, this a real big change from where we used to be. That's how I feel.

We can either rise to the occasion or be rolled over by the circumstances
| Martha, Upstate, SC

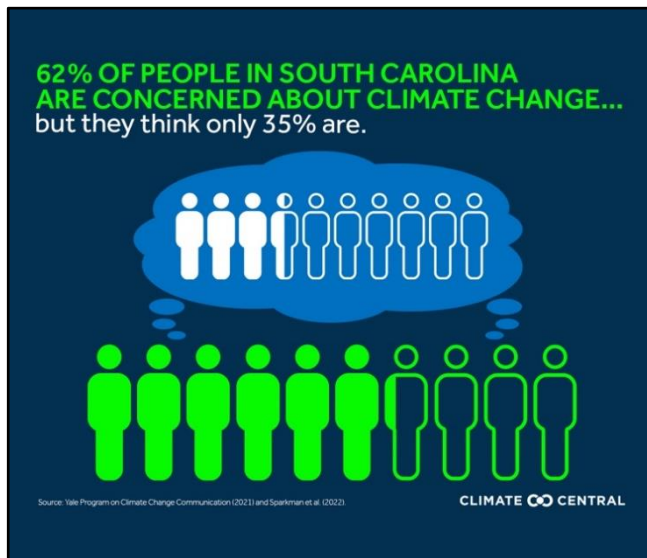
I see it is a challenge, but I feel like one of the things that's going to happen, we're going to rise to this challenge, and we're going to learn out of necessity how to become innovative. and that's not even on innovators, really just kind of going back to things that we forgot, but if you've forgotten it, it seems like it's new, and it's not new. But I feel like if we continue on this trajectory, we can either rise to the occasion or we can be rolled over by the circumstances.



And for me, I see myself being one of those people who will, as much as I'm able to, because I see what's off the horizon, there's not going to be a scale-back and get back to where people think, oh, it's gonna get back to normal, it's really not you know. And you've just got to learn, why don't we use the resources that are right here at our disposal, learn how to individually or collectively use these power sources that are right here in our midst, instead of being so dependent, but that requires a paradigm shift. And with that paradigm shift that's going to require a whole people, but I feel like this generation is much more poised to meet that challenge than anyone in my generation and beyond. I think it will happen with this generation because survival is a strong instinct. And so when the ways that we've known how to survive no longer are viable, you have the optimism, the innovation, and just the perspective of, you have to carry it through. But not everybody's gonna buy into that, but whatever changes are gonna happen, is coming out of this generation, you guys are studying climate. Like, maybe people did for years, but, you know, it was an outlier. And it's a real thing that I feel like a lot of young people that I'm talking to are like, "Yeah, I want to get into this," a lot of young people are more content to live off the earth, than to live in a skyscraper, which the big high-rise condo overlooking whatever was everybody's dream in my generation. You've made it to the top floor overlooking this huge metropolis. Now people like going out into secluded nature areas and learning how to cultivate and becoming homesteaders.

Overall, I'm finding that temperatures are way more extreme, and fluctuating. Whereas we used to have more of a gradual build-up into seasons, you know, and they stayed consistent for a while, you had an aberration here and there, but seasons were more consistent and predictable. Whereas now, you'll have more atypical weather and temperature, and climates and seasons that usually are generally not that. So how that applies here is, certain things that would normally flourish, have not been able to flourish, because we've had these intense heat waves before the nature cycle got a chance to really acclimate. So even when you see nature acclimate to the seasons, how they gradually do, but then you have something that's, you know, kind of putting an oven on it all the time, all the time, all the time. For instance, I had these blackberries that were just coming into season, and then when we got like, this really intense, long spell of high, high, high temperatures, the blackberries dried up.

There is a movement but we're not part of it, nobody comes and talks to us
| Bonnie, Upstate, SC



I remember as a child growing up during the summer, it was so hot and of course, we didn't have air conditioning and I grew up in one of the housing projects in Spartanburg right behind the old Carver High School. We had the boxes on the outside of the brick apartments that kept coal in so we had burning coal to keep warm. We could keep warm during the winter because the brick kept the heat in but during the summer it was very, very hot. And I remember a lot of the mothers would take the water hose and hose down bricks to cool off the house. And during the summer we all in the apartment was upstairs, but we all wouldn't sleep upstairs during the summer, we'd sneak downstairs and make a pallet. We called it going camping.

There's a different kind of heat nowadays. Back in the day you had more plum trees. The kids loved that you would go during the summer and pick the plums and blueberries, blackberries. To me that's a difference. And climate change I think has a lot to do with that. The periods of growing season is so short and I think those of us growing up, the one thing you wanted to have once you're grown and successful, you want a long fur coat, that's what your mamas have, that's what they want. That's what you want. But women of my generation, now you can't wear it because now it's never that cold. Where in the past it was very cold. So I sense part of it that way.

The parents in the projects I remember would catch the snow that fell and make snow ice cream. And the kids were really excited. The snow was so pretty and white. And they would catch the snow, they used a vanilla milk. That was a treat for us that parents didn't go to the grocery store or have ice cream sticks, you'd be paying the rent with that, but I've never heard people lately making snow ice cream. I don't think snow lasts that long to make anything like that nowadays.

I think we need to do something with all the reports that are coming out, we ought to have a plan. We need to pay more attention. I can tell a difference in the creeks, the creek that runs through the city used to be a lot of water, you'd get in the creek and slide up on the frogs and that was the best fun when you'd finish school in the summer you know you're gonna walk the creek but now that water has dried up, doesn't flow as heavily as it used to flow and I'm sorry.

They don't see it as a Black issue. But we do have concerns, majority voices are what you hear, not our voices, because they don't think we have concern about it or care about our environment that our kids are growing up in. I am noticing the effect of climate change. But there isn't a big enough megaphone for me to push that, that's not my passion... [With urban renewal and communities displaced and lead in homes,] as we continue to develop, we continue to think that we know what's best for poor Black people. And I think we have to be at the table and ensure that our whole environmental piece is a part of it as well.

I do have hope for the future. I do. I do have faith that that next generation will continue to build upon what we're trying to maintain and to remind. Oftentimes, I've been seen as a nuisance, because I talk about [racial justice] all the time. But I'm determined that we're not going to forget. So we won't repeat the past. I don't make a lot of people happy, but I'm not here to do that. I don't think that's what the Lord intended for me to do.

And I believe in the next generation - young people like yourself, there would be no reason to bring this issue to the table if you weren't there to talk about it, because we're busy trying to survive, but we continue to knock at the door and add to the conversation. And that's what your generation brings, the conversation.

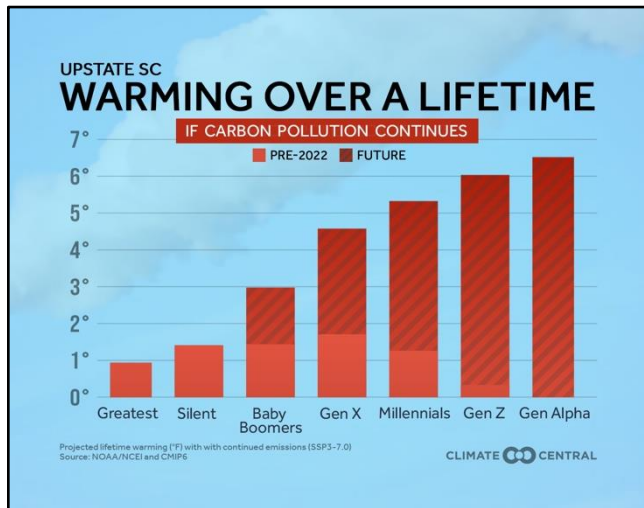
That's why organizing and community is so important. You start getting a topic like this, somebody will start elevating the discussion. And hopefully, you know, find a way to have some input and to have a voice. It must be a major concern of ours in the community, I would think one of the elements in the questions that we ask politicians, when they start running for public office. What are they gonna do about climate change, or at least tell us how they feel about it.

And to continue to educate ourselves, I think it's important that we educate us. I think young children, they're taught it in school. But I think once they get home, I don't know if they can share the information and concern with their mom and dad. That's the connection I'd like to see happen. Like to see us have a big day where we all talk about it. Let the kids write and put their thoughts on it. And the community comes together. I think that should be - I mean, we discuss voter registration, I think that should be one of the key topics we talk about in community as well. But you don't hear that much about it. And I don't know if it's because, I think people are just trying to live, but then we've gotta realize if we don't correct this stuff, there's not going to be anything to live for.

And I think it's just simple stuff we can do as individuals in a community. You know, you don't have to be a scientist to be a part of this whole movement. We start a movement. I think there is a movement but we're not part of it. Nobody comes and talks to us about it.

We have to be committed to helping our neighbors
| Mark, Upstate, SC

The older you get the harder it is not to be frustrated because you see going back how easy it could have been. It would have been difficult to have these conversations in the 80s, it's a whole lot harder to have now we've got to, 40 additional years of bad will, false starts... we have lost our path as a nation... and so we are addicted to simplistic solutions to complex problems and now we've got a complex problem and nobody really has the patience to try and build something to respond to this with the depth and intelligence that's required.



First, you're sensing it in one major way, and I've lived in this part of the country all my life. And so physically, I can tell that the weather is different than it was when I was a child. So, I can tell that things are changing. And it makes it harder to live in this area. And I think that's the second thing that I really sense is that as you start thinking about how the climate is changing, you realize just how environmental factors are going to adversely affect minority populations, increasing food costs, environmental racism, people live in areas that are more subject to flooding, are subject to drought. And so, I just think that as we think about climate change, we're going to see lots of

costs increase that people don't anticipate. And you're starting to see some of that now with the shortages that we're seeing.

Americans have this fixation on hero narratives. We like superheroes; someone with a power comes in, and someone, usually a man, rights the wrong. And that's the end of the story, right? Good triumphs over evil definitively. And because we are addicted to that type of story, that's why we have short attention spans. So, we say, well, so-and-so did this, that the matter is done.

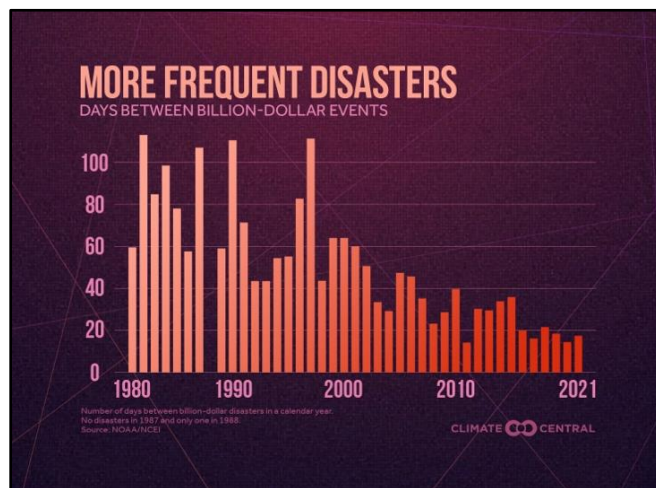
So, the first thing that we have to do is we have to find a way to get Americans to realize that problems are far more complicated than good versus evil, good triumphs over evil in one simple battle. And so that's why I say it's easy to say, but it's hard to do, because our whole nation is constructed on a Hollywood myth about how we engage with the world.

The second thing that we have to do is something that's little complicated in the American imagination. We actually have to be willing to be a commonwealth, we actually have to be committed to helping our neighbors...going to have to get past this idea that the government is trying to take money out of my pocket and give it to you or to give it to them usually. And that's going to be a real challenge, because especially in this political environment, where everything's become so politicized, I don't know how we convince the American people to invest in themselves, because it's seen as us versus them, "I'm willing to invest in myself, and I'm not willing to invest in you." And that's the real reason why this has been such a persistent problem.

I think we have to educate people so they can connect these dots
| Rev. Dr. M. Keith McDaniel, Upstate, SC

For me, social issues are theological issues. As a pastor, I feel and believe that God cares about how we live, that our relationship with God is not just simply to die and go to heaven. If that was the point, then why put us here to begin with?

I have seen the impacts of climate change personally in the severity of the storms. When I was a little boy, you might hear of one hurricane here, a tornado there. I grew up in Winston-Salem, three hours up the road. And they were not as severe as they are now. Think about the number of tornadoes and major storms we've had just in the upstate of South Carolina in the last three years. And the sheer damage that has occurred, you can ride around Spartanburg right now and still see big trees that are laying across the ground from a tornado three years ago. And now we've got these earthquakes, you never thought of South Carolina having earthquakes, you hear about that in California or out west somewhere, not in South Carolina, but now it's a common occurrence... I remember sitting in a theological class, in seminary, and one of the professors spoke to humanity being like a cancer to the planet, that the planet would be grateful of the day it ridded itself from us. So almost like the planet is trying to kill us. Yeah, before we kill it.



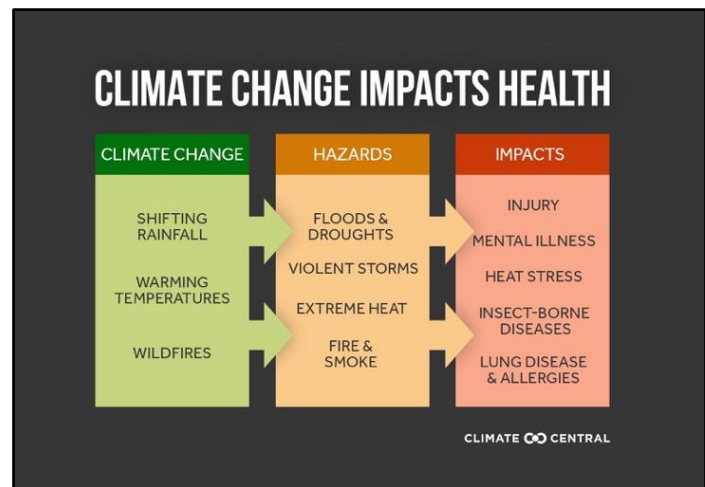
I think one of the major hurdles is to find a way to communicate and engage with people that doesn't get bogged down in the politics of it all... They're not making connections to their own personal health, to the health of human beings and the lived experience of persons. They're making a connection along political party lines and political narratives. And so they immediately begin to jump in those waters instead of the waters of, you know, let's really talk about the health of the land. Let's talk about the health of individuals... I think we have to educate people so that they can connect these dots.

And I think there's an awful lot of opportunity to do that. Many of us don't think that we have the ability to connect what might be happening in our personal lives, and our personal health, to what we might all be immersed in as a community. So we tend to think about these sicknesses in random terms, whether it's cancer or asthma, we don't necessarily think about the environment in which we live and how much that plays a part... And that awareness has to be rooted in some data and lived experience. And when you talk about data, numbers have names. Spartanburg is a data-driven community. We like numbers, we like reports, and people will spend a lot of money to get those numbers in those reports... And then that connects back to understanding the community needs and thinking about people. And all too often not enough of that takes place. Thinking about the number of industries that come to town, and what is the motivator to bring them to town, it's to increase the tax base and to create jobs, but at what expense? I think those are places where there can be hope, and places where the work needs to be focused.

We as the earth's caretakers, we 'bout to get fired
| Reverend Dallas Conyers, Upstate, SC

In my experience working with the community of Spartanburg and environment and climate justice, one of the biggest issues in speaking about this with people and communities is that they don't understand that they are already experiencing the impacts of climate change and environmental injustice. They speak about things that have been happening for several generations, such as certain types of cancers being prevalent in their community, or respiratory illness when they live in particular neighborhoods. Frequent flooding, mold, inability to get insurance. These things are so normal that they just think of it as a fact of life and they're not associating it with the root cause, which is often climate change.

Personally, I grew up in a community built over a garbage dump. So I was diagnosed with multiple autoimmune issues and diseases by my early 20s. And then I had asthma that started when I moved to a neighborhood that is in the top five of poor air quality. It also happens to be a neighborhood in Flatbush, Brooklyn, New York, which is heavily populated by Black and Brown people. And that's something else you will find across the country, that the places with the worst air quality just happen to be filled with people who look like me.



Spartanburg is very industrialized... And without strict enforcement of regulations, what you have is a lot of pollution, which is a lot of harm not only to human bodies, but to an ecosystem that helps protect and maintain balance within the system of our climate that gets disrupted. And as this ecosystem balance is disturbed to the point where all of our storms are stronger, longer and more frequent... Most people don't realize that most storms, rain, thunder, is the cleansing cycle of the Earth's atmosphere. So as we pollute, the storms are getting bigger. It's a direct connection. We pollute, and we kill off the little bugs that are responsible for eating things like mosquitoes, which we also now have high population of. We have worsening cycles of epidemics because mosquitoes are airborne carriers of disease.

For many individuals in our community, because they don't have personal financial resources, and personal social resources to count upon, this is a matter of survival. And God didn't create this Earth and spend six days creating, he didn't create the oceans and the waters and the land and call it good, he didn't create the animals and plants and call them good, and then create man and say this is your responsibility, man - to the point where, "I want you to name these animals, this is your responsibility." He didn't do all of that for us to destroy it. He did it for us to be caretakers. It says when a human builds a beautiful estate, and puts houses and grounds and grass, and then hires somebody to come along and take care of it for them, the caretaker doesn't take precedence in the owner's eyes. It's the grounds and the house and the grass, and the shrubs and the trees and the plants that take precedence. We as caretakers, we 'bout to get fired.

Politics is a big hindrance, I don't understand because either the grass is dead, or the grass is not dead. People are getting cancer, or people are not getting cancer. It's so silly that this has become political. It's just facts, either it's hot, or it's not. And communicating with people without the doomsday scenario perspective of it is another issue for me, because we are looking at a doomsday scenario. And we are a consumerist, convenience, comfort-based society. I am a consumerist, convenience, comfort-based person, right? I love my soft things. I love my little gadgets that help me save time. So I'm not saying that these people are bad. I'm saying that there's a level of practicality that needs to be understood. And if we keep catering to people and saying, we need you to pay attention to this, but it's not as bad as people are making it seem, they're not going to listen because we're asking them to change their lives and their lifestyles, which is actually what is necessary, more than any legislation, more than any miracle technology that could come out to save us. We need people to consume less energy, we need people to buy less things. And we need people to produce less trash, and to actually make cultural changes.



Reverends McDaniel & Conyers

Nothing about climate change is sexy. But you know what else is not sexy? 15 years from now, when we're living in a situation we're trying to talk about preventing, that's even less sexy. I'd rather be not sexy now, than be bedraggled in 15 years. I'd rather have people say I don't like what you're talking about now, than not even able to have communication, and food supply, and clean water, and safe housing restored in 10 to 15 years, because that's what we're talking about. We're not talking about 100 years from now. We're talking about 10 to 15 years.

I'm frustrated, but I'm also hopeful. I live in this dichotomy of mindset, where I'm just like, I'm gonna work as hard as I can to help as many people as I can. To help people understand that we can stop poisoning ourselves, we have the means to do it. So many of the things that we're poisoning ourselves with are almost brand new in the timeline of human history. We lived for 1000s of years without plastic, we can do it again, we can stop producing plastic and survive, right? We can stop using oil and gas and switch over to electric energy and survive, because guess what, those sciences have been developed for decades now. It's just been held up because it's not profitable for certain people to let them go. But we will survive, and we will thrive. There's hope. It's just a matter of changing people's understanding... that's why I keep fighting. But at the end of the day, I know that I know how to grow food, store food, preserve food. And if I need to, I will find myself a piece of land and make it work. But I prefer not to do that by myself. I prefer to do it with a community, which is why I do this work.

And one more thing, we need God. God has already promised us that if we look to Him, and we change our wicked ways, He'll step in, right? At the end of the day, God is willing to help us make this change. If we just start the work, if we commit by not just saying "oh, we need this" but commit by actually doing the right things, He's already promised that He's gonna come in and clean it up. And a lot of people don't realize that He actually said, "I will heal your land." To me, He was speaking directly to this, in the promises already made.

Methodology and Acknowledgments

Our climate storytelling team gathered these climate stories during June, July, and August 2022, supported by funding from the Wofford College Office of Undergraduate Research.

Students were trained in the basics of climate communication and in qualitative research ethics and methods. Socratic-hermeneutic interviewing was the means of elicitation of all the narratives here. We began each conversation with a general question such as, “How are you sensing climate change?” Then we asked follow-up questions based on the research participant’s responses and allowed the conversation to take its own shape, guided by the participant. We interviewed individuals encountered serendipitously in our area as well as individuals to whom we were directed. With their consent, our research participants’ stories were elicited, recorded, transcribed, and curated into this collection. We then paired each story with a graphic from Climate Central or Warming Stripes, or with a photograph by team member Tiana.

Many places, voices, lives, and experiences have inspired our work. Thank you to organizers, caregivers, analysts, public servants, communicators, educators, friends, family, and neighbors who seek every day to make our communities stronger and more thriving places. For the places, beings, and labors that give us life, and make that life special and unique, we are also grateful.

Our sincere thanks to the Penn Program in Environmental Humanities and founding director Dr. Bethany Wiggin for the inspiration for gathering climate stories in our own community and for models and materials for doing so.

Our thanks also to Wilson Peden for conversing with our team about climate communication, to Rev. Dallas Conyers for thinking with us about dissemination and amplifying these stories, and to Gia Quiñones and Kendall Shelton for their generous, invaluable feedback on earlier drafts.

And our special thanks to all who shared their stories with us and trusted us, in turn, to share their stories with everyone reading this collection. We are grateful for the gift of their voices.