

Sunset Park Flooding and Climate Change Stories

English Translation

Participant: Aizhen Shi, female

Interviewer: Jing Zhu (NYU)

Interview conducted in Chinese on 7/15/22

Site: Participant's home

Amy: Today is July 15, 2022. We are here to talk specifically about Superstorm Sandy, which occurred from Oct. 22 to 29, 2012, and your experience, how it affected you, your neighborhood, and its residents. We would like you to share your experience from that time. First, could you tell me where you lived when Sandy came?

Aizhen: I lived here, at [...].

Amy: Okay, and this is the first floor, right?

Aizhen: Yes, it is on the first floor.

Amy: How long have you lived here?

Aizhen: I have lived here since about 1994, almost 20 years. It's been a very long time.

Amy: Oh, so you've always lived here?

Aizhen: Yes, for almost 10 to 20 years.

Amy: So you live on the first floor. Is there a second floor?

Aizhen: Yes.

Amy: Is there anyone living upstairs?

Aizhen: Yes, there's another family.

Amy: Is there a basement below you?

Aizhen: Sometimes there is, sometimes there isn't.

Amy: So, is there a basement in your building?

Aizhen: Yes, there is a basement.

Amy: So, there is a basement below you?

Aizhen: Yes, I live on the first floor. There's one floor above me, and one below me.

Amy: Okay, so there are three floors in total. Are all buildings on your street similar to yours?

Aizhen: Yes, they are all similar.

Amy: Before Sandy arrived, did you know that the storm was coming?

Aizhen: Yes, I knew. People in charge at the Huace Organization informed us.

Amy: Where? How did you know?

Aizhen: I was part of the Chinese-American Planning Council.

Amy: Oh, the Chinese-American Planning Council.

Aizhen: Yes, they informed us about the storm and its expected arrival through WeChat.

Amy: You were using WeChat at that time already?

Aizhen: oh, it was in 2012, over 10 years ago. I don't think I had it then. But there was a notice.

Amy: Okay there was a notice.

Aizhen: Some families got to know from reading the newspaper.

Amy: About how long before Sandy did they notify you?

Aizhen: About 1 or 2 days before the storm. They said, "In about 2 to 3 days, there will be a storm." We talked about it.

Amy: How did you prepare for the storm?

Aizhen: Most people said not to go out, just stay at home. If you go out, trees might fall and pose a danger.

Amy: Okay, so did you prepare anything at home?

Aizhen: We bought water, milk, and food, and stored them at home.

Amy: Okay, food. Anything else?

Aizhen: Other things like candles and flashlights. We were afraid of a power outage.

Amy: Oh, so you prepared all those.

Aizhen: Yes, we bought those.

Amy: Did the Chinese-American Planning Council advise you to buy those?

Aizhen: Other people said these, these are things to prepare.

Amy: Who said these? People from Chinese-American Planning Council?

Aizhen: Just normal people, like our friends.

Amy: Did your neighbor say the same?

Aizhen: Yes, my neighbor also said the same.

Amy: Do you remember if you discussed the storm with other people before it arrived?

Aizhen: Yes, with neighbors. We talked about buying some food, water, etc.

Amy: Okay, so those things were prepared. Oh great. Do you remember the day the storm arrived?

Aizhen: It was so long ago. The first day of the storm was huge. I was at home.

Amy: About what time did the storm start?

Aizhen: I don't remember the exact time. It's been a long time. On the second day, when I went to the park, I saw some really big trees that had fallen.

Amy: On the first day when the storm arrived?

Aizhen: I don't remember. I stayed at home. On the second day, I went out and saw some really big trees that had fallen in the park. There were also fallen trees on the street.

Amy: Oh, okay. Did those trees crush any cars?

Aizhen: Yes, they crushed some cars. There was someone who lived on the opposite side of the street. A tree fell and hit their garage.

Amy: Fell down on the garage?

Aizhen: Yes, there was a garage at the back of their house.

Amy: Oh, okay. How about the street outside your house?

Aizhen: The street, I didn't see any fallen trees when I walked out. There were leaves and small trees. There might be, on the opposite side of my house, my next-door neighbors. There were big trees that had fallen at the back of their house.

Amy: Were they big trees?

Aizhen: Yes, they were big trees.

Amy: So your street only had small fallen trees.

Aizhen: Yes, small trees and leaves, nothing else.

Amy: So, on the day the storm was here, you were staying at home?

Aizhen: Yes, I was at home.

Amy: Do you remember what happened that day?

Aizhen: I don't remember anymore. I only remember that the next day when the storm stopped, I went out and saw big trees that had fallen in the park.

Amy: What did you do at home that day?

Aizhen: Nothing special.

Amy: Did you hear the wind from outside?

Aizhen: Yes, the wind was loud.

Amy: Everything else at home was normal that day?

Aizhen: Yes, nothing special.

Amy: Oh, okay. There was no water leaking?

Aizhen: No.

Amy: There was no water leaking in the basement?

Aizhen: No.

Amy: Oh, okay. The house's quality is pretty good.

Aizhen: Yes, nothing special.

Amy: All the houses on this street were fine?

Aizhen: Yes, I think so. It's just the tree on that side of the street.

Amy: Oh, that's great. So the electricity and water were all fine?

Aizhen: Yes.

Amy: So it was okay to go out on the second day?

Aizhen: I think I went out directly when the storm stopped. It looked fine, so I went out to the park and saw the fallen trees.

Amy: Oh, okay. So on the second day, you went to the park?

Aizhen: Yes, I went to the park and saw the fallen trees.

Amy: Did you observe anything unusual?

Aizhen: It was just the fallen trees on the road.

Amy: Did you go shopping? Were the stores open?

Aizhen: During the storm, we were afraid of going out. When the storm stopped, we went out and the stores were open.

Amy: The stores were open.

Aizhen: We were afraid of going out during the storm.

Amy: Okay, okay.

Aizhen: I went out when it was fine.

Amy: So you mentioned that the Chinese-American Planning Council notified you before the storm?

Aizhen: Yes, they said there would be a storm in 2 days.

Amy: And they told you what to prepare?

Aizhen: Yes, they told us what to prepare.

Amy: Did they do anything after the storm was over? For example, did they ask if your home was fine?

Aizhen: Oh, I didn't go to Chinese-American Planning Council at that time. If I had told them that anything happened at my home, they would have helped us for sure.

Amy: Oh, okay, but your home was fine.

Aizhen: Yes.

Amy: Were you scared when the storm came?

Aizhen: What?

Amy: Were you scared?

Aizhen: Of course, I was scared. I didn't know what would happen. If the power went out at home, it would have caused trouble.

Amy: Yes, right. So the storm didn't really affect your home?

Aizhen: No, not really.

Amy: Did you contact your friends that day? Like call them?

Aizhen: Yes, I was talking to my friends, asking them if their places were okay.

Amy: So after the storm, houses in this neighborhood were fine. Only trees fell down.

Aizhen: Yes, that's right. The power didn't go out. I don't know if other people had candles at home. The biggest thing was that the power didn't go out on this street.

Amy: Was the water also fine?

Aizhen: Yes.

Amy: Was it messy outside after the storm?

Aizhen: On the ground, there were branches, yes. Nothing else. There were branches and leaves all over the place on the ground.

Amy: Did this storm change your mind or opinions?

Aizhen: Not really, nothing special.

Amy: If in the future, the Chinese-American Planning Council or any other organization notifies you that there will be a storm, what will you prepare?

Aizhen: Yes, I will buy food and water.

Amy: Okay, I will ask you these questions first. I will replay the recording to you.

Aizhen: It's been a very long time.

Amy: Yes, it's been a long time ago. Do you remember how you felt when the Chinese-American Planning Council informed you about the storm?

Aizhen: I felt the need to be prepared after I heard about it. I bought some food and stored it at home.

Amy: So they informed you one or two days before the storm.

Aizhen: Yes, at least one or two days. Even now, it's the same. They inform us if there will be heavy rains. They will tell us, "There will be heavy rains tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. Don't go out. Stay at home."

Amy: So, do you have enough time to prepare?

Aizhen: Yes.

Amy: Were there still enough things available to buy in stores?

Aizhen: Yes, there were. That was two or three days before the storm. There were still enough supplies.

Amy: Were there still enough things available to buy in stores after the storm?

Aizhen: We went out one or two days after the storm stopped. We didn't directly go out after the storm. At least one or two days.

Amy: There were enough storage in the stores at that time.

Aizhen: Yes.

Amy: Stores were all open?

Aizhen: Yes.

Amy: There was one floor above you and one basement below. Did you talk to them after the storm?

Aizhen: Yes. We all went out, and we met each other every day.

Amy: Did they say that anything happened at their homes?

Aizhen: No, nothing special happened.

Amy: After the storm, did it change the way you lived?

Aizhen: No, I didn't change anything.

Amy: Anything changed in your neighborhood?

Aizhen: No, nothing special.

Amy: Okay. I will ask just some details about that day. How did you realize that the storm came?

Aizhen: It was windy, with heavy rain and wind. We were afraid of going out, so we stayed at home.

Amy: Were the windows all closed?

Aizhen: Yes, they were closed, so nothing happened inside.

Amy: Okay. Did it influence your work at that time?

Aizhen: We were not working at that time.

Amy: How about your children, like school?

Aizhen: He was working, but nothing was affected.

Aizhen's husband: We didn't live together.

Aizhen: Yes, we didn't live together.

Amy: You retired.

Aizhen: Yes, I retired.

Amy: Okay, thank you so much. I understand it's been a long time ago. If you remember anything else, you can call me.

Aizhen: Okay, if I remember anything else to add, I will call you. Your phone number is 515, right?

Amy: Yes. If in the future we have seminars about floods and how to prepare for them, are you interested in going?

Aizhen: Yes, I am interested in going.

Amy: Does Chinese-American Planning Council have these seminars?

Aizhen: No, not that I know of.

Amy: No seminars about storms?

Aizhen: No, but I've been in Chinese-American Planning Council for a long time.

Amy: Okay, thank you!

Amy: So that day the TV didn't work.

Aizhen: No, it didn't work.

Amy: It didn't work before the storm, or on the storm day?

Aizhen: It worked before the storm. On the storm day, it didn't work.

Amy: So you were not able to watch TV that day?

Aizhen: No.

Amy: What time did it start working again?

Aizhen's husband: There was a TV tower nearby that wasn't working.

Amy: What time did they fix it?

Aizhen's husband: We didn't pay attention to it.

Amy: Oh, okay. How about phones? Were you able to make calls?

Aizhen: The phone was fine. It was just the TV.

Amy: How about the internet?

Aizhen: We were not using the internet at that time.

Amy: Did the TV in this neighborhood all not work?

Aizhen's husband: Yes, that's right. The TV signal was down in this whole area. When there's wind in brooklyn the TV signal went down in brooklyn.

Amy: Was it only during Sandy that the TV didn't work, or does it happen every time it's windy?

Aizhen's husband: When it's really windy, the TV signal can go down. There's a TV cable in Staten Island, and if something goes wrong with it, the TV stops working.

Aizhen: Yes, we can't receive the signal.

Amy: I see. Thank you for sharing that. How about the internet and phone? Did they work well when it was really windy and rainy?

Aizhen's husband: Yes, they were fine.

Amy: Okay, thank you so much!