



Phantom Fungus

Mary Murphy was alarmed by her grandson Zachary's deteriorating health 4 months after Hurricane Floyd blew through their Hubert, NC, manufactured home in September 1999. Born with asthma, Zachary, age 5, had always suffered from common effects of the disease, so Mary and her husband, Garland, had always been careful as they raised him and his three siblings. But, in January 2000, following a series of doctors' visits and stays in the local hospital, they found themselves rushing Zachary, now in serious condition with a collapsed lung, to Duke Hospital in Durham, NC. As the Murphys stood by Zachary's hospital bed, they began mentally walking through their home searching for an explanation of his ongoing health issues. Mary and her husband returned home and began to look for the source of the problem.

Hurricane Floyd had ushered in a tornado that entered via their chimney and burst through the roof of their home, seemingly leaving behind little more than roof and carpet damage. Private insurance took care of the expense of restoring their home, but it was now apparent there was additional (undetected) damage. Upon deeper inspection, the Murphys discovered that water had pooled underneath the unelevated manufactured home, apparently the consequence of runoff from a widened roadway that added to an already flooded neighboring creek. The water had been permeating the walls, causing mold to grow and infect Zachary with air contaminants, particularly dangerous to his sensitive lungs.

Mary contacted the local Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) and, within 3 days, a FEMA Individual Assistance (IA) agent came to their property with an environmental expert who, following an inspection, condemned the property. FEMA further determined the family qualified for temporary housing in a FEMA trailer while their manufactured home was demolished and a new one installed.

In July 2001, with a manufactured home model selected, the family moved from the FEMA trailer to combine housekeeping locally with their adult daughter in order to allow contractors to begin setting up the new home. Eight truckloads of sand were spread and an elevated foundation built before placing the new manufactured home into place. On August 3, 2001, the family was able to finally return to their new home, now elevated and safe from environmental hazards.

"They saved my grandson's life," said Mary, speaking of FEMA, "because, if they had not stepped in, I don't know what I would have done." Mary went on to say, "It (the mold) probably would have ended up killing all of us." It was found that the family's church had mold growing as well, requiring the congregation to move to a new building as many were sickened from breathing airborne contaminants. "I can't believe how that mold does hurt people so bad."

Not only is Zachary, now age 16, fully recovered, but the Murphys' home has not flooded since being re-established on an elevated foundation. "I really appreciate FEMA," Mary said. "They were really nice, the people that came out. They were great."