



# Hopkins Climate Stories

Community members in Hopkins shared personal climate stories, capturing their lived experiences with environmental change.

**Emma Olson**  
**July 8, 2025**

## The Project

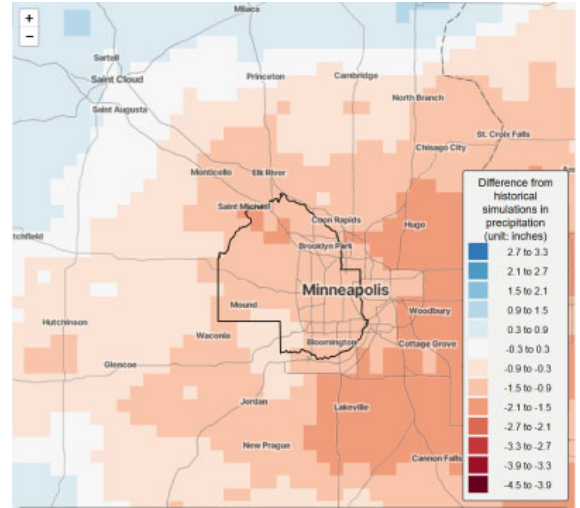
The [Climate Solutions Plan](#), made possible with the support of Abby Finis from [Local Climate Solutions](#), is Hopkins' community-driven roadmap for tackling climate change head-on. From the very beginning, public engagement has been at the heart of this work. The City hosted a dynamic kick-off workshop, several focus group discussions, a community-wide webinar, and an online survey to hear directly from residents, businesses, City staff, and local partners. Together, we're shaping a future

that reflects the values, voices, and vision of the Hopkins community.

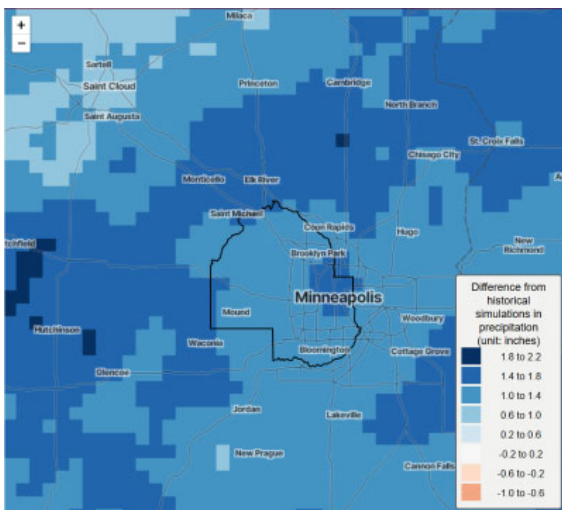


## What is Climate Change

Climate Change is a global problem that requires transformative action in how we use energy and land - across all levels of government, commerce, and lifestyles. In Hopkins, the effects of climate change are already visible: extreme heat, intense storms, and flooding have become more frequent due to rising global temperatures. Many residents, due to age, physical ability, income, and other factors, are more likely to be disproportionately impacted by climate hazards and disruptions.



Drier Summers: Mid-century Summer Precipitation Projection for Hennepin County



Wetter Summers : Mid-century Spring Precipitation Projection for Hennepin County

The challenge of addressing climate change can be daunting. By taking productive action toward reducing emissions and adapting to climate hazards, we can lessen the burden of the challenge and work toward a better future. Everyone in Hopkins has an opportunity to contribute to the success of this Plan. Together, we can achieve our climate goals and improve the overall quality of life for everyone in our community.



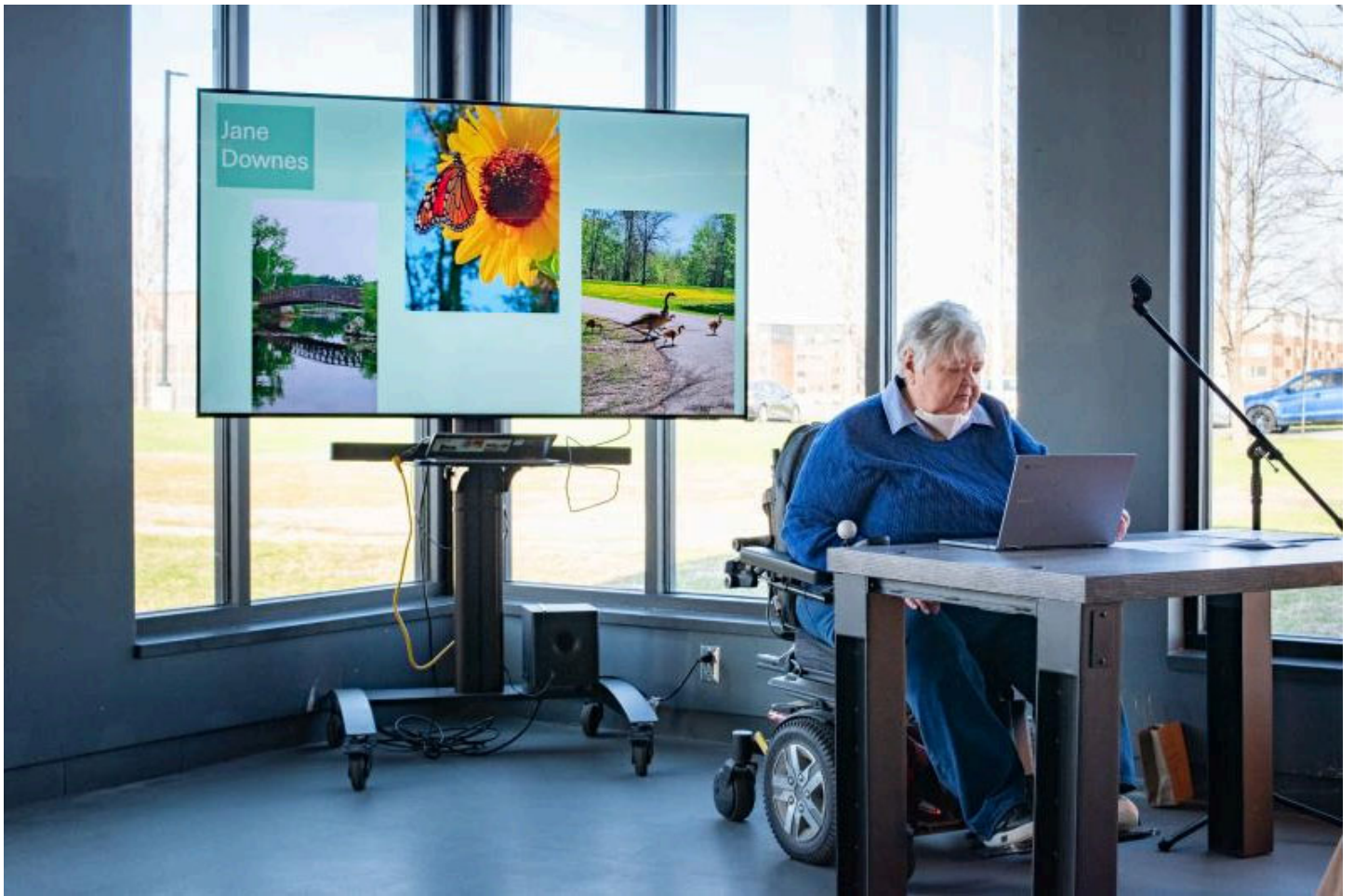
## Why Stories?

To better understand how climate change is affecting our community, the City of Hopkins invited three residents to share their personal climate stories. They were each community members who participated in various local events and got involved with sustainability programs. Between their passion for sustainability, participation in Hopkins initiatives, and their availability and interest, they were selected as storytellers. While data helps us see the big picture, it's these lived experiences that bring local climate challenges into sharper focus, whether it's navigating extreme heat, heavy rain, or shifting seasons. These stories reveal what matters most to our neighbors, highlight community strengths, and help identify shared values that can guide future solutions. Most importantly, they ensure that resident voices are part of the conversation as we work together toward a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable Hopkins.



## Climate Stories

Stories crafted by Jane Hufford Downes, Brooke Roper, and Julie Marie Muskat, with support from Jothsna Harris of [Change Narrative LLC](#), in partnership with City of Hopkins. The following three stories were shared live during an Earth Day community event on April 22, 2025.





Jane Downes

Originally from Ohio and has lived in Hopkins with her husband, David, for six years. She is a semi-retired writer and poet, an avid bird watcher, and the grandmother of five red-haired grandchildren.

### **The Trail to Change : Jane Downes**

The Regional Cedar Lake Trail starts just a block from my apartment, connecting to the four other trails in Hopkins. I'm grateful that they're accessible to everyone who lives here, including me. The trail system has become my primary mode of transportation. I can be in downtown Hopkins within five minutes, and it takes just 15 minutes to reach the nearest shopping center. I often use the trails

to run errands, which allows me to be mobile in my community and rely much less on a car.

Hopkins is one of the few places I know that has a trail system so well planned and maintained. On snowy winter days, the paths are plowed better than the side streets. While people don't always shovel their sidewalks and curb cuts, the trail is usually clear.

The trail system is more to me than a way to get places. I often find 'community' along its paths, meeting neighbors and their dogs. Many days, my husband David, an avid walker, will join me, and it's a place where we can have important conversations. I use the trails year-round, which allows me to witness the changing intricacies of the seasons. I noticed crows all winter, and the robins are starting to return. Soon, I'll be looking for Warblers and Baltimore Orioles. As a birdwatcher I look for those passing through on their seasonal migrations.

Often, I go to Shady Oak Lake to meditate by the water and to soak in the serenity of nature. Not too long ago, I watched the lake's ice melt. In the last few weeks, I've been glad to observe the early signs of spring peering through.

As a poet, my work is often inspired by such observations. I'd like to share a poem written about my observations of a tree just outside my bedroom window. Seeing Robins visit this tree all winter to eat the shriveled crabapples made me realize that, due to climate change, some birds are able to winter in place as the temperatures warm. This shift could have a huge impact on whole ecosystems. Moving forward, we will need to adjust our assumptions about things we've always taken for granted.

## **PROPHECY**

**Jane Hufford Downes**

The crabapple tree sings to the robins in winter,  
while ice glazed branches click together like  
pearls tossed on a hardwood floor. Rust and gray  
shagbark scant armor  
for the onslaught of 27 below.

The flock of robins stayed through winter,  
returning each day to the crabtree, intoxicated  
by the fermented tang of the last few shriveled apples,  
surviving another day, smelling the warmth of August  
under the snow.

Hopkins, Minnesota seems an unlikely place for robins to  
overwinter,

yet here they are, fluffing their feathers and chatting  
amongst themselves

as if survival isn't risky, as if their name isn't *Turdus  
migratorius*,

as if they've never heard of Florida, the Promised Land  
where earthworms are plentiful and sunlight golden.

Today the sky is the soft gray of an approaching  
snowstorm,

14 inches predicted. Yet the eagles are rearranging sticks

in their nest by the river; eggtime is coming.

The confused robins of prophecy, predicting spring  
every day through 5 months of blizzard and record low  
temperatures  
will finally, eventually, be right. They will endure  
until the crabapple tree bursts into pink, its branches  
sheltering sky-colored eggs in a nest of mud and grass.

**© Jane Hufford Downes, "Prophecy" Birds of the  
Midwest, Finishing Line Press, 2022.**

David and I moved from Ohio to Hopkins six years ago. Sensible people might go South seeking warmth when they retire, yet we moved North. It was an easy decision—to be closer to family and our five grandchildren who live nearby.

My grandchildren are curious, and we have the best conversations together. Sometimes, we talk about big things—like the world. I hear the enthusiasm in their voices as they imagine the possibilities. Sometimes, when we are out, they pick up litter. I see their eyes full of pride for doing their part to take care of the planet, and I try to encourage that. They're still too young to understand the bigger picture—but I know they'll soon start asking more difficult questions.

I remember being a freshman in high school on the very first Earth Day in 1970. That day, I joined a protest march—excited to be part of a movement fighting for a healthier world. It was a moment of collective celebration and resolve. We vowed to make things better. Yet all my life, I

have seen things get worse. It is scary to think about my grandchildren and their future realizations of our broken promises. What I want my grandchildren to know most is that I have not given up hope—because I still see so many people who care. I'm especially glad to see that caring spirit alive in the Hopkins community.

Perhaps one of the most important actions I can do is introduce my grandkids to the woods, so they can look for and cherish the wonders of the natural world around them. We try to take them to local parks to observe turtles, examine leaves and get hands-on experience with nature. I am confident that if they know how wonderful our Earth is, they will be more apt to try to preserve it.

I grew up surrounded by woods, and as a child, I spent much of my free time exploring them. Hiking together was a family tradition. I've always been an active person, but things changed ten years ago when I started using a wheelchair. The change forced me to slow down and, in doing so, I became more attuned to the natural world around me. Now, I go out almost every day, eagerly anticipating those moments. I realized that something I had always been so close to—something I had taken for granted—had become infinitely more significant to me. Being in the woods, surrounded by trees, the sounds of nature, and the sheer beauty of the world, is a spiritual experience for me. I found a new sense of purpose—a deep commitment to protect it.

It seems so simple to dream of a world where everyone has access to nature, clean air, and clean water. When I was young, I saw simple solutions; thinking we only needed to become aware of the problem, to be motivated to fix it. About twenty years ago, I became more active in environmental work in Ohio. I started reading about sustainability and environmental issues, learning about

greenhouse gas emissions, and I realized we were not headed in the right direction. I got involved in a project looking at the ecology and quality of water of our local watershed and the degradation occurring in the area. I gathered data and worked to raise awareness to the community. I was surprised to see resistance to making change—and my eyes were opened.

All of our voices have power—not mine more than others. The times I have seen great change for good is when people realize that power and speak up. I would like to see more people talking to each other about climate change and the things that matter to all of us. I think once people start talking to each other—and truly listening—we often discover that we're not so different, and that we share many of the same hopes and goals.

Jane's experience reflects many of the core themes in the City of Hopkins Climate Action and Resilience Plan. With decades of environmental change behind her, she carries a deep sense of generational concern for her grandchildren's future. Her early climate activism has grown into a quiet resilience shaped by both climate anxiety and hope. Over the years, she has recognized that awareness alone is not enough. She has seen changes in the local ecosystem, like robins staying through the winter, and understands how a warming climate is affecting wildlife and natural patterns. For Jane, walking the trail system is more than a daily habit. It is a way to stay connected to nature and to remember what is at stake. She values shared green spaces that offer connection and a sense of community responsibility.

The Hopkins Climate Action and Resilience Plan responds to these themes by prioritizing climate justice, ecological health, and local resilience. It supports efforts that reduce emissions while also helping residents stay engaged and supported. Through both practical

solutions and opportunities for reflection and connection, the plan turns concern into meaningful, collective action.





Brooke Roper

Roper's leadership is rooted in a deep sense of purpose and love for her community, Brooke currently serves on the Hopkins School Board and bridges people and policy with heart and vision. As a proud mother of two amazing kids, her journey has taken her through classrooms, boardrooms and neighborhoods - always guided by intention, always working toward the greater good

### **The Courage to Speak for our Collective Future: Brooke Roper**

Growing up in North Minneapolis, St. Louis, MO, and Oxford, Mississippi, I experienced severe weather in each of these places. As a young child, this led to a phobia of thunderstorms that controlled my life. I would obsessively watch the Weather Channel, driven by a need to understand everything I could about thunderstorms, tornadoes, and severe weather. Over time, my fear gradually shifted into fascination, and the more I learned, the less afraid I became. When I reflect on why I care

about climate change, I often think back to those early memories—how I transformed my fear into a catalyst for action.

Seven years ago, my family moved to Hopkins. My husband and I made a very intentional decision about where we wanted to raise our children. Hopkins, with its strong school district, diverse community, and quiet, welcoming atmosphere, felt like the perfect place for us to invest in and become a part of. I became actively involved in the community, volunteering in the district, which eventually led me to serve on the Hopkins School Board. I feel the weight of my presence and the power of my voice as I advocate for our students.

I am a fierce champion for health equity and ensuring everyone has access to clean air, water, and food. Fighting for a healthy climate and for students is at the heart of this mission. It became even more personal when my son, at just four years old, had his first asthma attack. As a child, I confronted my fear of thunderstorms by seeking to understand them better. I wondered how I could apply that same approach to the fear I felt around my son's asthma.

This curiosity led me to research asthma, where I learned about the crucial role that air quality plays and how pollution worsens it and other health conditions, all while recognizing the connections to climate change. I became intrigued by potential solutions. Through my research, I discovered the benefits of electric school buses and began advocating for their adoption across Minnesota school districts. I collaborated with local organizations like MN 350 and Healthy Professionals for a Healthy Climate, where I found collective support for asthma solutions and became a steering committee member for Minnesota Advocates for Electric School Buses. Together, we testified

at the State Capitol, along with my son, who was just five years old at the time. This effort led to \$13 million being awarded to support the adoption of electric school buses across the state of Minnesota.

While we have made some notable achievements, there is still work to be done to combat the hesitancy around the adoption of electric school buses. According to MN 350, "Diesel exposure on school buses lowers academic scores and increases school absenteeism," and "asthma-inducing particulate matter levels are up to 15 times higher inside a diesel school bus than an electric school bus." Hopkins currently does not have electric school buses, but my coalition and I are working hard to get the school district to adopt them. I often provide examples of how this technology is already being implemented in Minnesota, including in districts like Bloomington and Red Lake, serving as proof that it can be done. We need more people to join these efforts. My mantra has become "every body, every sector"—meaning that solutions to climate change must take an "all hands on deck" approach.

One of the biggest challenges lies in the small, everyday conversations about climate change. In the Black community, there are countless daily stressors, and many people are already exhausted from fighting for basic needs and human rights—equity, affordable housing, and adequate resources. Climate change often feels like a conversation reserved for the privileged, centered on fighting for future generations. The concept of "resilience" can feel loaded, especially when Black people have a long history in this country of fighting just to survive, let alone thrive. However, the reality of climate change's present-day implications is that marginalized communities are often hit the hardest and are less resourced, which intensifies the burdens we face in terms of our lives,

health, and justice. These are hard, but vital, conversations.

As a Black woman working in the climate space, I'm aware that there aren't many of us. But I also know that my voice matters. I am seen by young people as a role model, and I feel their support — they believe in me and draw inspiration from my leadership, even when I don't always feel inspired myself.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, we witnessed the stark gaps in equitable disaster recovery — a reminder of the role privilege plays in determining who can escape climate disasters and who is left behind, most often Black, Indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities. My family was living in North Minneapolis when the 2011 tornado struck, devastating our neighborhoods. To this day, some areas remain unrecognizable, with revitalization still desperately needed. In that regard, some may feel they have been forgotten. Even then, it planted a seed in my spirit to be more proactive than reactive to my childhood fears.

I've recently learned about emerging efforts to establish climate resilience hubs — places where communities can seek refuge during extreme weather and advance environmental justice. These hubs provide backup energy powered by renewable sources, along with mutual aid, food, childcare, and other essential resources during the most dire times. As climate change intensifies, we will see many innovative solutions. Electric school buses are just the beginning of what's possible to promote climate resilience in Hopkins.

When I envision the future, I see a healthier generation of children, where asthma is no longer a disruptive disease. I see climate action being normalized, with all school

buildings remodeled sustainably and equipped with mandated air quality monitors. Together, we work to ensure the air is clean. I would see electric school buses lined up at parent pick-up, with expanded electric charging infrastructure to support electric vehicles in general. I envision aligned conversations about climate change among school staff and administration, where everyone understands the urgency and is motivated to lead the way in finding solutions. We would share our stories and knowledge, exploring the intersectionality of our experiences respectfully and thoughtfully. This would ensure we are creating an environment that supports the needs of everyone. Above all, we would see and care for one another, especially the wellbeing of our children.

Every summer, my husband, two children, and I spend hours at Valley Park, reading books and playing for hours. It's a place where our imaginations run wild, and nostalgia pulls us into daydreams of a better world. My favorite time to visit is late summer, just before the season shifts to fall. The hills of Valley Park are where I witness the true authenticity of my children and experience their full personalities. My daughter cartwheels around me while my son jogs up the hill with his basketball. It is a ritual for us to create moments of lying in the grass, talking to God, and gazing at nature, appreciating the beauty around us. We witness dragonflies and butterflies as we look up at the blue skies. Mesmerized, these memories fill me up and bring me all the joy in the world; they make me feel more hopeful.

Brooke's story shows how fear can evolve into purpose. As a child, her fear of severe weather led to curiosity. Later, as a mother, her concern for her son's asthma diagnosis motivated her to take action. Learning how air pollution worsened his condition helped her see the strong connection between environmental health, justice, and

advocacy. She began supporting electric school buses, healthier school buildings, and equitable climate solutions. These efforts aim not only to lower emissions but also to create a safer and more resilient Hopkins for all families.

Her lived experience reflects many of the core themes in the City of Hopkins Climate Action and Resilience Plan. These include the unequal impacts of climate change on marginalized communities, the importance of youth voices, and the need to make climate conversations more inclusive and culturally relevant. As a Black woman advocating for climate justice, Brooke's leadership helps close systemic gaps and inspire others. She also highlights the value of mental health, access to green spaces like Valley Park, and a spiritual connection to nature. These are all essential tools for building resilience and healing. Her story reminds us that real climate action must be both structural and deeply personal.





Julie Marie

Julie Marie Muskat has lived in Hopkins, Minnesota with her husband, Zach, since moving to the state in 2013. She is a freelance dancer, choreographer, teacher, and stage manager. Julie Marie is also the founder of [Deeper Water Arts & Mind/Body Center](#), an independent consulting practice that uses movement-based approaches to support health, wellness, and resilience for individuals and communities.

## Deeper Water: Julie Maire

I knew from a young age that I wanted to be a dancer. I was always moving—dancing around the house—and after many high-energy kitchen performances, my mom enrolled me in ballet at age seven.

I've moved sixteen times in my life, but my most formative memories are rooted in a small, one-room dance studio tucked in a San Antonio strip mall, where Ms. Judith taught.

In a dance world often defined by rigid ideals and harsh critiques, Ms. Judith's quiet lessons in kindness and perseverance continue to stay with me. She reminded us that dance is a beautiful art form—not a measure of our worth. She was always realistic, often saying, "We're going to try, and it may or may not happen—and that's okay." Her steady encouragement helped me believe that a career in dance was not only possible, but worth pursuing.

Now, I've launched my own arts education business, Deeper Water Arts, and I carry Ms. Judith's influence with. I strive to create an inclusive, body-positive space where students are encouraged to ask questions, understand context, and engage as co-creators—not just followers of tradition. Thanks to Ms. Judith, I found not only a lifelong love for dance, but also a vision for how to teach it—with care, equity, and intention.

The environment has always been another deep passion of mine, rooted in childhood memories with my grandparents. My grandfather—a former Air Force pilot and devoted gardener—had the greenest thumb around. His California garden overflowed with flowers and fruit. He

would hand me a basket, and together we'd pick lemons, oranges, and strawberries until it was full.

My other grandparents lived on 20 wild acres in Vermont—fields, forests, and the first snow I ever touched. I'd spend entire days outside, pausing only for cheese toasties at lunch. Those early experiences instilled in me a deep and lasting love of nature.

Also early on, in elementary school, I began blending my love for nature with dance. My mom helped build an outdoor classroom at my school—a magical space where each class learned about native plants and tasted food we had grown ourselves. She also led an outdoor program at a local children's shelter, where she taught gardening, and I taught dance to the children. Even as a child, I experienced how combining a love of nature and art could cultivate beauty and connection in the world.

Recently, I worked with a choreographer on a dance solo exploring all the places I've lived, searching for a sense of home. Those reflections always lead me to climate change. In my own lifetime, I've seen warming winters, extreme weather, and natural disasters reshape beloved landscapes. Some places have been so impacted that climate change has deepened conflict. The U.S. military calls it a "threat multiplier"—a force that intensifies existing crises like food insecurity, migration, and war.

There are so many places I feel a connection to, seeing bits of home in each. I carry both love and grief for them—the love for what can still be saved, and the grief for what's being lost.

I know I am not alone in feeling climate grief and overwhelm about our changing environment. The heaviness of the knowledge of what is happening in our

world and my circle of influence sometimes feels so small. I question what I can do as one person, and as an artist. I remember Ms. Judith's words: "Try, because despite all the challenges, some things are beautiful possibilities worth pursuing." She taught me not to fear the feeling of not being "big enough" to make a difference.

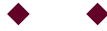
I named my business "Deeper Water Arts" to signify moving past our comfort zones and stepping into the unknown—broadening our sense of comfort. For me, it's a metaphor for the ripple effect. I don't expect one dance piece to change the world, but I believe art has a role. I ask myself: How do I seek and create beauty as a necessity for survival in this world?

My husband Zach and I have lived in Hopkins for the past eleven years. As I've shifted into this new phase of my career, I've recommitted to spending more time outdoors—walking, hiking, and following the rhythm of Minnesota's seasons. This spring, I'm especially looking forward to tending the garden—hands in the soil, growing what I love, and nurturing this place I now call home.

Julie Marie's connection to climate action grew from early lessons about believing in herself and a deep love of nature. Her dance teacher, Ms. Judith, taught her to recognize her power even when feeling small. Time spent in outdoor classrooms and visits to her grandparents' diverse landscapes strengthened her bond with the natural world. These experiences inspired her to start Deeper Water Arts, where she uses dance as a way to tell stories, reflect, and inspire change.

Her work highlights important climate themes like grief, uncertainty about personal impact, and the loss of natural places. Julie Marie explores how warming winters, extreme weather, and global conflicts affect our connection to place and future generations. She believes

that childhood experiences in nature and creative expression are vital for building hope and resilience in the face of climate challenges.



## Where Do We Go From Here

These personal climate stories are just the beginning. By listening to the lived experiences of residents who are already engaged in sustainability efforts, we're gaining valuable insights into the real-world impacts of climate change in Hopkins. Their stories help highlight what matters most to our community and guide future planning that is rooted in shared values. Moving forward, we'll continue to seek out resident voices, build on these connections, and collaborate on solutions that make our neighborhoods more resilient, inclusive, and prepared for a changing climate.

As part of this effort, the City of Hopkins has created a take-home worksheet to help you build your own five year climate action plan, and discover your own climate story. You can download the worksheet, reflect on your goals and unique story, and share with friends, neighbors, community members, or even City officials. Your experiences and ideas matter, and they help shape a stronger, more connected Hopkins for everyone.

**Take Home Your Own Worksheet!**



City of Hopkins Mural, 11th Ave S

## Contributors

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**City of Hopkins**

Climate Stories