

**Chantal Ortiz  
Narrator**

**Lauren Robinson  
Hurricane Harvey Oral History Project  
Interviewer**

**November 27, 2017  
Phone Interview at the Mary and Jeff Bell Library at Texas A&M University  
Corpus Christi, Texas**

**LR:** My name is Lauren Robinson, and today is Monday, November 27, 2017. I will be interviewing Chantal Ortiz for the Hurricane Harvey Oral History Project over the phone. Have you ever experienced a hurricane before Harvey [August 17, 2017]?

**CO:** No.

**LR:** Do you live here in Corpus Christi?

**CO:** Now I do. I used to live in Rockport, but I was displaced by the hurricane.

**LR:** How long did you live in Rockport?

**CO:** My whole life with the exception of this semester. I went to college here in undergraduate.

**LR:** How old are you?

**CO:** Age 25.

**LR:** How did you first hear about Hurricane Harvey?

**CO:** I'm pretty good about keeping up with the news. I had heard about it coming in, once it was projected to hit the Gulf Coast. They just didn't think it was going to be directly at Rockport.

**LR:** Yes, at first it was looking like it was going to hit Corpus Christi and then it kind of turned.

**CO:** Yes, exactly.

**LR:** I know, keeping up with the news as well and everything, it kind of looked like it was going to turn there the last few hours. Did you end up evacuating?

**CO:** I wasn't going to, but the day before the hurricane broke, they issued a mandatory evacuation, so we ended up evacuating to Corpus Christi.

**LR:** Where were y'all evacuated, when you came to Corpus?

**CO:** With an uncle.

**LR:** With family?

**CO:** Yes.

**LR:** Once y'all knew y'all were going to evacuate, what did you do to prepare your home and everything.

**CO:** Well, we actually have three rental properties, and so as soon as I found out that it was a mandatory evacuation I was still at work. So I asked our [DSO] if I could leave. They didn't want to let anyone leave because we had to move boxes up to get the business ready as well. Mostly everyone was from Corpus where I work, but I think I was actually the only one from Rockport. So I asked if I could leave and they said it was fine. So I rushed home and I started pulling out the plywood to board up the windows for our tenant. Then I went inside, and my parents were being stubborn because they wanted to ride out the hurricane. They kept saying it wasn't their first hurricane, it wasn't their first tropical storm, and I was being dramatic, but my instinct was to just leave. So they all just packed a couple changes of clothes. I packed my computer, my apple watch, my charger, my makeup, and I brought a folder with important documents like my birth certificate, social security card, and stuff. For them, they didn't want to evacuate or take anything so I demanded that they take their important documents.

**LR:** You said your parents were being stubborn. What experience had they had prior to this as far hurricanes and tropical storms?

**CO:** They have had a couple of tropical storms, category one or two. So they thought that they knew what was coming, but obviously they didn't, and neither did I, because even though I went and taped all of the windows and plywood the windows up, the storm was so strong that all of the windows busted out and all the doors knocked out. There was really nothing that you could really do to prepare for a storm that size, like all of our houses are total losses.

**LR:** When were you able to go back to see the damage?

**CO:** So that night at my uncle's house, I remembered it was so loud, I tried to sleep through it. I only had a little bit of power on my phone, but I was checking Facebook and watching the storm chasers from all over the country in little Rockport. I remember checking my social media account watching their live videos of them panning right and left looking at the destruction of Rockport. So I was expecting the worst, to see what they were able to see when they got out of the eye of the storm. So in the morning, we still had power, but I called the Nueces County Police Department and I asked them if they had blocked off the bridge to get into Rockport, and the man said, "as far as I know, no." So I asked my uncle, because he has a truck, and me and my parents have smaller cars, to drive us out there to go assess the damage. We left in the morning, and as we were driving to Rockport, we passed the bridge and then we passed the port. [unclear] We saw other cars the farther we got up to look, but you just saw the damage as we were going

into Portland, and then after we were passing Aransas Pass it got worse. Rockport [unclear] It got worse seeing rv's just basically crumpled. Houses completely demolished. You know, these places that I see every single day, just destroyed. So as we were coming up to our house on the highway, I see the two-story home I grew up in, which is pretty tall and big, and the whole top of it is gone. So we pulled up, I got off and I ran down the driveway past my houses, and it was clear that they were all gone. Then I ran into the house that I was living in and there were piles of debris everywhere, and I'm seeing all my college books and my clothes, and everything is just wet and covered in insulation. It was probably the scariest feeling I've felt in my life.

**LR:** Is there anything to do to fix it or is it a complete loss?

**CO:** One house was insured, the other three were not. Those houses supplemented the mortgage. We've been blessed with a lot of help from house organizations that have come helped clean up. The cleanup part is very expensive [unclear] The [SBA] is offering loans out. We're being told that the government will come through and allow us to rebuild, because we just don't have the finances to do that.

**LR:** You said the [SBA]?

**CO:** SBA. Small Business Association.

**LR:** Is that the only government organization that y'all are getting help from as of right now?

**CO:** Yes. We applied for [FEMA], but we didn't apply for it because the house we were living in was insured. So it automatically defaults to the [SBA] for the [unclear] but it's up to them if they'll be able to finance us to get our house fixed. It's just a waiting game, and I know the rest of my community are all kind of having issues hearing back from them on whether or not they'll be able to help us. I think there's [unclear] statistics online, but there's a small percentage have actually been helped by the [SBA]. So it's kind of scary, but we have to be hopeful.

**LR:** I'm so sorry. I can't even imagine what you, your family, and community are going through, but you sound optimistic, and I really hope that help comes through for you!

**CO:** Thank you! When I first saw the house that I was living in destroyed, I remember... my mom is a polio survivor and my dad is blind, so my sister and I have kind of assumed a parenting role in helping them and stuff. We've been able to be there for them. We work hard to be able to help them. I'm very young, but I try to be there for them as much as I can. But when I ran to the house that all of our stuff was in, that we were living in, I remember it was so quiet. I mean the hurricane had literally just hit, so you could hear alarms going off and it was so eerie and so quiet. I remember just falling to my knees and crying and screaming so loud that I was echoing, and I think I had felt so much fear initially not knowing. I just honestly feeling like, "where do I start? What do I do?" I think the outpouring love from our community, especially organizations made me feel like I wasn't alone. We have the [A&M] men's basketball team there the Saturday afterwards and there were like thirty of them and they were huge and tall. They gutted, cleaned up, and helped throw away so much rotted wood and stuff. It probably took them about three hours. Then we saw samaritans park come out, families come out, and give of themselves. It

really is true when people say the most horrible experiences bring out experiences that you are humbled by, and you feel real love. I've never felt such love from strangers, and it helps me decide and realize what kind of neighbor I need to be in my community. Since then, I try to volunteer more, and I try to be there for people that I don't know and people that I do know, because in trials, I think you find out who you are and who the people you surround yourself with are.

**LR:** So you had the [TAMU-CC] men's basketball come out, that's correct?

**CO:** Kingsville. Javelinas. Funny story behind that is, I went to [TAMU-CC] with a girl, we were friends, but we weren't close, and she had gotten word about my houses. She's an athletic coordinator at Kingsville. So after the hurricane, she was sitting with her coach, and the coach said, "we have to do something! We have to help!" and she told her, "I have a friend that was affected by hurricane Harvey," and they came. I think Kingsville came out a total of three times, but that first Saturday after it happened, they were there. I think that Saturday was two or three days after the storm hit. They were there, and I didn't know them but felt like I knew them afterward. The amount of heart they put into cleaning everything up, I was just overwhelmed.

**LR:** That's amazing they would come together, and it's like you said, it's a beautiful thing when times like this is when you see that outpouring of community love and support. Under the circumstances it's a tragedy, but to see that kind of support is incredible!

**CO:** Yes. The Coastal bend is truly resilient, because I'm not sure, and I would hate to speculate about other areas that have experienced natural disasters maybe didn't experience the same resiliency, but from what I heard, there are other organization that were quick to help out with natural disasters in my town. One thing they were all saying is that the South Texas hospitality and the way people were helping people was truly unique and evident. We weren't the same organizations in my town, in Texas, from the gulf coast. We saw them from out of state; from Louisiana, Alabama, Arkansas, all over the country. South Dakota. It was just insane, and I was also very amazed at how quickly our local state and federal government was acting. I'm not too sure if I can still say that now because there's still a lot of work to be done. I know Governor Abbot is still working very hard but we still have a lot of work to do. I know also it's an appropriation of funds, but there's Rockport still, and in really terrible shape. I'm hoping that they continue to provide resources for people to rebuild their homes and their small businesses

**LR:** Wow. So you had mentioned right now you're staying in Corpus. Are you and your family staying with your uncle right now?

**CO:** No, and it's what I was talking about the outpouring of love. I have a really big family and it makes me so sad, because it sucks and these things help you realize... I have a cousin and he's my immediate cousin not a distant relative, but haven't kept in touch with him because you get into the routine of life and don't really keep in touch with certain family members. He actually had a beautiful vacant two-story home in Corpus, and so without hesitation, he offered it up to my family and I. So that's where we are now. I think that during these experiences you have to remember what kind of family you are, and in the end, that's your family and they're going to be there for you and you should be there for them too, you know?

**LR:** Yes. You're currently a graduate student here at [TAMUCC] correct?

**CO:** Yes.

**LR:** What has the support been like, I mean obviously out of Kingsville with the basketball team, that was amazing. What has your experience been like coming back to school? Are you finding, it's got to be so overwhelming with everything else you have going on in your life, and I know firsthand grad courses are no joke, so has it been challenging for you coming back or is it kind of release maybe?

**CO:** I was worried because I really want to finish. I mean, I know it would be a huge accomplishment if I did finish, given the circumstances. I've had a pretty turbulent year to say the least.

**LR:** Yes.

**CO:** But you have to think, before the hurricane hit, school was about to start. I think I was two weeks late to my first class, and not only because the internet, the thing was, literally I think it was the most distinct feeling after something like this you can't even remember what day it is, or what day of the week it is, or what date it is. I remember [unclear] I was just like we saw something on Facebook and it was like "we just assessed the damage and the university looks great. We'll see everyone there." Something along the lines of just saying the university was in ok condition.

**LR:** Yes.

**CO:** And I had replied, "that's great, what about your students and surrounding communities what are you going to do for them? And immediately Kelly Quintanilla reached out through her office and said that teachers would be working closely with students to help make sure that school isn't something that would be difficult to achieve. I was like ok, she can say that, but how, how are you going to do that? Well I had those student engagement people calling me once or twice a week to check and see how I was doing, if I needed anything. I think during that time I was very proud to be an Islander, just because it's easy to say you're going to do something but to actually do it. All of my professors knew that I had been a victim before I had even gotten there. They talked to me and let me know, "whatever we can do to help you get through the semester let us know and just keep us updated." I did have to drop one class just because the other one wasn't required, extensive reading, and I have so much going on and I work full time too, but the class I stayed in, my professor, Toby Futrell. She's one of those professors, like you have to have respect for and put a hundred percent in, but she also comes from a great place of understanding, and she's helped me stay motivated through the semester. As far as extra-curricular, I'm not sure what Corpus is doing proactively out in the community to help rebuild. I haven't really seen much but it would be nice to see them out there lending a helping hand.

**LR:** Yes, definitely. I like how you said it made you proud to be an Islander, as far as Dr. Quintanilla and the student engagement reaching out. I think that's pretty incredible.

**CO:** Yes, absolutely.

**LR:** Wow. Well, I think we just about covered everything. Is there anything else you can remember about this experience or anything else that you would want to be known in this interview?

**CO:** Just not to take natural disasters lightly and to always be well-versed in preparation; and preparation doesn't necessarily mean what do or have at your house for a hurricane, or how to tape a window, or what would you take if you were to evacuate. I think people need to be well-versed even if they're not homeowners, but their parents, just knowing your insurance documents and what the laws and regulations are, and just understanding that. I think it's something we overlook but a lot of us, people I know, got burned because they weren't attentive to those types of things. Also to be a good neighbor in the community and to always be a good family member because you never know when something like this could happen.

**LR:** Yes. Ok. I did have one more question for you.

**CO:** Yes?

**LR:** I Mimi Beard is the one who put us into contact, she...

**CO:** Yes.

**LR:** She had mentioned that you've done a national interview and I was wondering how and why you agreed to do that and who it was for.

**CO:** I've actually done quite a bit. My undergrad is in communications so I have a lot of friends I made in college that are successful now, and one of them is a [CNN] correspondent, my former classmate, her name is Amanda Jackson. She heard about my houses and reached out, and initially I didn't want to do it because [unclear] friend and I was nervous, but I wanted to shine a light on my community. We're so tiny that my worst fear was that we were going to get forgotten. Of course you heard about hurricane Katrina and how that was handled, and my biggest fear was that little Rockport, little Port Aransas, and little Aransas Pass would get overlooked. So I did the [CNN] interview, [unclear] and so that aired and I also went to school with the brand development director at the [CVB]. So she did a documentary that aired for the United Chamber of Commerce [unclear] I think the reason why I agreed to do this is because it's important that we don't lose momentum with so much work to do, and if there's people that may have the connections and resources to shine a light onto the current issue, we should. I feel like as a resident of Rockport, former resident, somebody that's very passionate about the town and preserving its culture and its beauty, that's the least I can do, is tell my story so that maybe we can continue to get aid rendered over there. I think that this project was important to me too, that you're doing, because it's to not forget about this, and the funniest thing is before this hurricane hit I was reading about Hurricane Celia [July 31, 1970] probably for about an hour or two hours. I think that what you're doing is helping because you never know, in thirty years somebody

might need to some reading or research on it, and before the storm hits and they can understand a little bit about what people might have been feeling at that time.

**LR:** Yes, definitely. Just to backtrack a minute. You said the interview, your friend worked for CVD?

**CO:** Corpus Christi Convention Visitors Bureau.

**LR:** Ok Chantal, I think I have everything we were looking for.

**CO:** Awesome! And I'm sorry it took so long!

**LR:** Oh no!

**CO:** As you can hear, my voice is still gone but it's a lot better than what it was.

**LR:** I'm just so incredibly grateful and I'm sure you're tired of hearing people say how sorry they are, but I mean it's just...

**CO:** No [laughs] never. I'm just appreciative and I'm so grateful that I get to be a part of the university and this great program that's proactively taking the time to get these interviews and file them. It's so important. History is so important because if we don't have it, we can't learn.

**LR:** Exactly.

**CO:** I just applaud you guys for what you're doing!

**LR:** Thank you so much Chantal! I really hope everything comes through for you, and I hope you and your family come out of this stronger...

**CO:** Oh, for sure!

**LR:** Yes...

**CO:** And if you need anything else or have any more questions feel free to call me.

**LR:** Ok, thank you, Chantal. I really appreciate it.

**CO:** Of course, Lauren! I'll talk to you soon, ok?

**LR:** Ok, thank you and be safe.

**CO:** You too, bye.

**LR:** Bye.

