

Mary Williams
Interviewed by Marcel Williams-Sala
September 30, 2017

MWS: I am Marcel Williams-Sala. Today's date is September 30th. The time is 3:45 p.m. What is your name?

MW: Mary Williams.

MWS: Mary, do I have your permission to record you? So Mary, where are you from?

MW: Gregory, Texas.

MWS: How long have you lived in Gregory, Texas?

MW: I lived in Gregory like 30 to 40 years.

MWS: Is your family from Gregory?

MW: We were, were originally out in the area like maybe 12 miles outside of Gregory on the farm. We lived out on the farm. My dad was a farmer.

MWS: Um, did you raise your kids here?

MW: Yes, I raised my children here in town, in Gregory.

MWS: What's your previous experiences with hurricanes?

MW: My previous experience, I experienced Hurricane Celia back in the 1970s and now Harvey this year, August 25th, 2017.

MWS: Where were you when the storm hit this year, Hurricane Harvey?

MW: We were here. We stayed at the house. We decided to stay here and ride the storm.

MWS: Um, so you stayed in Gregory. How far is it from the eye of the storm?

MW: The eye of the storm hit Rockport, Texas, which is about 15 to 20 miles from Gregory.

MWS: Okay. Who is with you during the storm?

MW: My husband, myself, my son, and my grandson.

MWS: Was everyone safe during a hurricane?

MW: Yes, we were. Just scared, but we were safe.

MWS: What was your family's preparations prior to the hurricane?

MW: We have to do a little boarding first. We weren't too concerned 'cause they said it was a Category 2, so we haven't done any preparations until the announcements were coming in strong about the winds being strong, and my husband decided at the last minute to board up the

windows for the house we live in and my dad's house, which is just down the street, which now also belongs to us.

MWS: What was your main reason for staying at your home?

MW: Oh we decided to stay for several reasons. You know, our belongings for one, and you know, my husband has weapons that he just has so much care for, so we decided to stay and ride the storm and pray that nothing happened to us.

MWS: Do you believe that if you would have left your house would have been damaged? Because of your beliefs that God was protecting you and your family while you were here that nothing happened to your house. If y'all were to have left do you believe that it would have been damaged because y'all weren't here being protected by him?

MW: Um, I feel that, you know, that with all the praying that I did you know being that the storm was the Category 3 and then it up to a Category 4, I believe that we were being protected you know by God and by the extent of the damage, you know, that was done around other places, you know, we were really blessed that our house was still standing.

MWS: So I seen there was no damage to your house. Was there any damage to your father's house down the street?

MW: Ah, yeah, there was tree damage, there was for my dad's house. There was a tree uprooted right by the driveway that brought up the part of the driveway and a little bit of hit to the house, not, not major damage but mostly tree damage, and a lot of trees down.

MWS: So you said you were you were involved with Hurricane Celia, that you were there when it hit. Tell me a little bit about your experience during that time. Who you were with, where were you at? And how it was for you at the time?

MW: Well when Hurricane Celia hit back in 1970 I was maybe 14, 14 years old, and I can still remember we lived out in the country. We all decided to go to the main farm, which there was the main houses plus little bitty wooden houses, the houses we stayed in were all par block homes, so behind those houses there was like little bitty houses, wooden houses. Celia was pretty strong and there was a lot of damage out there. There's a cotton gin close by so there was a lot a lot of damage out there by the big farm so they've had big barns, so the barns were being torn down by the storm and flying debris and stuff. I remember, I still remember, you know that part of the wall, the whole front of the side of the house came down, so we were already in danger so my mom put us all in in the in the bathtub, in the shower cause they had shower stalls, so we were all in there, crowded in there in the restroom and stuff and then when the walls started coming down then my mom started taking us out one by one out of the, cause the little chats, the little wooden houses behind we're still standing so when she was throwing us out, my older brothers were out there and cousins and my dad, and they were holding us, crawling us to the little houses, so that we could be protected by the wind, so they were practically making us crawl and holding on to us so the wind wouldn't pick us up. So they took us out to those little houses and that's how we survive Celia and that par block house ended up losing windows and that whole side of the living room kitchen area came down so that house with that storm there was

really pretty devastating and at the time like I said I was younger, you know, so yeah it was a pretty scary hurricane to go through.

MWS: How many family members did you have the time during Celia like with you? You said y'all were in the restroom together your brothers and sisters.

MW: I had a sister, my mom had my sister, two brothers, my three brothers, two older than me and one younger than me, myself, my mom, and my dad and then my aunt which was the owner of the house, she had herself, her husband, and then one, two, three, about five kids, five other cousins of mine that were in the house and we all were taken out that I remember that in that window I still remember that window. the house is still standing because they rebuilt the house. so I remember you know all of us crawling out of that window and going out to those little wooden houses.

MWS: They said that Harvey was a little more devastating than Celia, but from what I'm hearing from your stories that Celia was pretty bad compared to what you experienced this year from Harvey. Do you believe it's because of the housing and technology that it was easier to you know survive it or go through it?

MW: I don't. I believe more in older homes which is why I trusted my little you know wood structured home. you know the houses of today are built fairly fast I think and not as sturdy as they used to be built back in the days so and then surviving in the little older, surviving Celia in the older little homes, the sheds or whatever storage rooms, whatever those are called versus the park block house that we thought we would have been safe in, you know, this is kind of the same way I feel about today's homes are built a lot faster and not as sturdy as my house was probably built in the 70s so I kind of felt pretty safe in my little house.

MWS: Okay. If another hurricane were to hit this area like say Corpus, Rockport, you know Refugio, somewhere within a 60-mile radius would you stay in your house or leave this time?

MW: I don't believe I would ever stay for another storm. I have, I had left for others and this time around I just kind of felt secure, I just kind of felt that you know that it was going to be okay, but I think if there was another storm coming through here I wouldn't stay regardless of what I have, what I have accomplished in life you know. I would probably do a little bit more preparation as to pack things up for or take as much as I can as far as documents, important documents and things like that you know I know material stuff can be replaced, but I think I don't think I will ever stay for another hurricane.

MWS: If you were to leave where would you go?

MW: I would probably go up as far Northwest as I could.

MWS: Okay. So were you the only one out of your family like your brothers and sisters that were down here to stay and if you weren't which ones stayed and who left and where did the ones that left, where did they go?

MW: Okay, the storm hit in Rockport, Texas, and I had a brother that stayed there, that was going originally supposed to stay there, which is why I kind of felt that I needed to stay behind

because I had that one brother in Rockport that was going to stay. I have a brother in Portland that I knew was going to stay and my youngest brother in Corpus Christi, Texas that I knew for a fact that they were going to stay, so I kind of felt that I needed to stay you know in case something, if I were to have left and something were to have happened to them especially the one in Rockport where the storm hit and I wouldn't get, you know, be able to get back to him to see how he did cause of the communication that we lost. all communication with power outage and stuff like that, but you know, thank God my brother decided to at the last minute. He decided to leave late Friday evening. The night the storm hit he decided to leave, so that left myself and my Port-, my brother in Portland and the one in Corpus behind so and we communicated with each other until we lost power.

MWS: Uh when you guys lost power how did other family members react, you know, the ones that were keeping in touch with you when prior to losing power? How were, you, I know for a fact that my mother was worried about me and you here cause you are my grandmother and prior to that we also had other family members checking up on us to make sure that um we were safe. When we lost power how were you feeling about it? Were you worried or?

MW: Most definitely worried you know because I knew that that they were trying to get a hold of somebody and was impossible, you know to get. I know that next time I'll leave. That way we'll and hopefully we'll all be able to leave and not worry about our belongings here. You know of course our lives are more important than material stuff like I said that can be replaced.

MWS: Um, so during the hurricane, you know, you already told me about the preparations. What did y'all, what did your family get you know eating wise, drinking wise?

MW: Well we uh, like I said we uh have, uh got uh gas and stuff for our generator diesel to run a generator so that we could get power in the house for at least the refrigerator and we got non-perishable foods that we could snack on and stuff during the storm, plenty of water.

MWS: I know a lot of people in Texas that endured the hurricane were being very Texan and had alcoholic beverages. Did you guys happen to have any as well?

MW: I didn't. My grandson and my son did, you , but I was pretty scared that I didn't even have time or a thought of drinking any alcoholic beverages at that time.

MWS: Do you have any stories of what mi-, what happened during the hurricane? Like what your family, happened, watching it as it started, as it was going on?

MW: Ah yes we, uh, we at first like my house has a big long front porch so we would walk out there and see the wind as it started blowing in, you know got stronger and stronger and stronger, and then we started, we opened, my husband opened some windows a little bit, so that the wind could start going through the house and so way the pressure wouldn't build up, and then we ended up, open, open up, opening up the windows. The front door has a retractable screen window that opens up so we had that open, full view door open so we could see the, you know at night time we couldn't see anything, but you know, we could hear the wind, how it was blowing.

MWS: I was here with you ,and I know I'm the interviewer but a story we could have told that I found interesting was our dog was outside and during the start of the hurricane walking around town. She's a Basset Hound and her ears are flapping everywhere and to think that humans versus animals you know, this dog's very old in age. She's 12 years old, but as humans we were worried about the storm and the wind and the rain and what it could do to us, and seeing the dog out there walking around just enjoying the breeze was, you know, was kind of sigh of relief to me to see the dog not worried about it because from what I noticed animals if they're worried about the situation, like they can tell if the weather's going to be bad. Everything spooks them, and to see the dog not worried much gave me kind of a sense of security that the storm wasn't going to be as bad as we thought. Did you feel the same way possibly?

MW: Not really. I was panicky every time my husband would go outside, and we would hear a noise or see something flying and he walked outside on the front porch, and I always had that view in my head about Celia when that wall started going out and we were young and daring so during Celia one of my brother's decides to go step out you know and open his arms up and he got lifted by the wind, so I always have that in mind, in my memory, so when my husband stepped outside or my son would step outside I was like "Get back inside the house," you know, 'cause I know that wind can pick up a human, so that dog can be daring all he wants; he's an animal. I was going to take care of family.

MWS: Um so post-hurricane what did y'all do? You know, was it hard to find gas and supply for your family?

MW: Yes, it was. We have to go further south, not too far. We went to Calallen, which is on the other side of Corpus Christi, south of Corpus and got diesel for the generator to continue to run our generators because we didn't get power till a week, exact a week later, seven days later, so we're without power for seven days, and we would go to Calallen to get the necessities until Portland opened up H.E.B. so we could get bread and things like that, non-persishable foods and if we could find a restaurant, well we'd go out and eat as well.

MWS: How long did it take for FEMA or Salvation Army to get here? Um, I don't think, I don't believe FEMA's made it down here.

MW: FEMA hasn't yet made it down here even though the Police Department, the local police department, marked our homes as to how many people were in the house at the time of the storm and so that they could come around and talk to us and they haven't since, they haven't come down here. I guess they don't feel that we need it as bad as Rockport, which is where the eye of the storm hit and Aransas Pass, which is even closer than we are, but Salvation Army, yes they have been in Gregory. As a matter of fact they still are in Gregory and supposed to be here I believe till the second week in October is what we heard. They're still coming down from all over. We have, we have trucks, Salvation Army trucks out of Oklahoma that I know notice their license plates, and they've been very generous passing out food plates, hot plates, hot meals for people that go and use to the Salvation service.

MWS: Um after the storm as well did you see a lot of people from out-of-state coming down to help you?

MW: There was tons of people that were here. Power, light companies that were down here offering to help, you know, with the, the, the electrical part of the damages, but we also had other people come by that were helping cutting trees and people that were just coming through picking up branches because people, like we started cleaning up our properties and neighbors across the street that are widowed ladies, you know, picking up and cleaning up their properties, and there was a lot, a lot of debris on the side of the road, and there was companies coming in from out of town. I don't know if they were coming from south or north; I don't know, but they were coming in to help clean up and help out with the damages and the debris.

MWS: Looking back at Rockport's destruction and comparing it to Houston, you know, the media never put Rockport out there. You know it was one of those because it was small town compared to Houston it didn't get a lot of media attention. Do you believe that Rockport's damage should still be getting help because from what I see, you know, Houston is already recovering from its flooding, but Houston got all the national attention for money and help and aid, but none of that went to Rockport. Do you believe that people should be helping Rockport more than Houston?

MW: I believe so. I believe flooding, flooding was because of the rivers that were you know, flowing over, and people should have gotten out that were around in close to those riverbanks versus Rockport was hit horribly, Rockport and Aransas Pass and Port Aransas, and I think they should have focused more on Rockport, Port Aransas, and Aransas Pass instead of worrying about Houston. You know, yeah they did have a lot of damage cause they stayed, the houses of course got flooded because there was a lot of rain, rivers overflowing in their area, you know but I feel that they did not put Rockport and Aransas Pass and Port Aransas, you know, on the media as much as they should have, and they still should. I feel that Salvation Army should be helping them versus us you know here locally because you know like I feel thankful that we don't need you know as much help as those three cities right there in general that they had a lot a lot of damage that was in a 50 mile radius around the storm, which wasn't just Rockport and Aransas Pass. Bayside and probably Port Lavaca, you know, we've never gone down the coast to see how far up, how much damage was done, but we did around the area like Bayside which is were originally my husband is from and we went to check that town out, and they too got a lot of a lot of damage that I think uh Salvation Army Red Cross or whomever should be over there helping them as well.

MWS: Despite political views and how you may feel, how do you feel about President Donald Trump coming down to this area and giving his support to the area itself- you know Rockport, you know Corpus, all these small towns, and you know I understand people are very upset. They don't like his views on what he's done, but any president comes down here to show support to your community, do you believe that it was a good thing for him to do that?

MW: I do believe so. I was kind of glad that he was despite all the negativity going on because of the president regardless, you know, people need to understand that he was voted in, and he is the president of the United States and that was really nice of him to come down here and especially like I said target Rockport, which is where the eye of the storm hit, and then the help, that people including the small town of Gregory where we live, qualifying us you know for food

stamps or SNAP program that allows us people that never qualify for this kind of aid, you know, moving the guidelines up, so that we could qualify for a little bit of help you know to help offset the cost of, the cost we have to pay out, out-of-pocket due to the storm.

MWS: Do you think because of the storm that the community has come together? Is it as a whole for the better?

MW: I believe so. I think surrounding like we're small communities where the storm hit; we're all small communities. I think people were helping each other out. Like I said you know my son, yourself, and my husband helped ladies across the street that are widowed ladies and, and help them clean out and until they're there their sons were finally able to be allowed to come into because of all the electrical powers being down, lines being down people were not allowed to be coming in, so you know, I think that this, you know, help, helped us realize, you know, that we're a small community. We need to be helping each other and keeping an eye out for each other. I know I had a lot of calls from neighbors that left in this small community and asking me "How's my house Mary? Can you see down the street?" You know, cross the street, down the street, people would call me and ask me "Is my house okay?" "Well, it's still there. May have tree damage or shingles, a few roof shingles gone, but the house, everything was fine." You know, so yeah, I think, I think that this was an eye-opener for everybody.

MWS: Was there any damage in the neighborhood that was significantly, significantly worse than others?

MW: Ah yes there was, there was quite a bit of- our only, one and only major store here in the small community of Gregory, which was Stripes, Valero that was totally, totally still out and probably won't be in working order until another three to, three to four months probably. New businesses that come in, had just come in is totally gone. In fact they're tearing down, taking it aand moving it elsewhere, which was a biker bar, bar and grill it was totally, totally gone.

MWS: Um well thank you for your time, Mary. I hope that everything that you have going on here in Gregory gets fixed soon, and once again thank you for taking the time out of your life to let me interview you, and have a gr-