

Justin Clifton Holt

Interviewed by Garrett Reese Peschke-Brundage
October 6th, 2017
Corpus Christi, Texas

Garrett Brundage: Test. Test. This is Garrett Brundage. I am in Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi Library with Justin. We are going to conduct a phone interview on October 6th, 2017 at 3:45pm. [smacks lips] Justin do I have your permission to record?

Justin Holt: Yes.

GB: Thank you for that. Can you state your full name?

JH: Uh Justin Clifton Holt.

GB: And where do you live right now?

JH: Uhh right now I live in Rockport, Texas.

GB: (smacks lips) Where have you lived previously?

JH: Um I've lived in Houston. I grew up in Houston. Uh I lived in uh California, Huntington Beach, and Newport Beach, and uh I lived a little bit in New Jersey, and uh then here in Rockport.

GB: Have you ever experienced a hurricane before?

JH: When I was real young, uh when I was three years old, living in Houston, hurricane Alisha, 1983.

GB: What was that like for you?

JH: I just have one memory of my parents uh putting me and my brother in the closet during the storm to keep us safe.

GB: Why did you move to Rockport?

JH: I moved to Rockport uhh with my wife. Uh we were, we were dating while we were in Houston, and we would vacation here in Rockport, and we just really liked being next to the water and uh, uh her family has lived here, and vacationed here for generations, and you know, we thought we could set some roots down here.

GB: When did you first move to Rockport?

JH: Uhh, Summer of 2014.

GB: And what's the one thing that you love most about Rockport?

JH: I love how it's uh not as populated and busy as Houston or New York or LA, and a life of fishing.

GB: Prior to the Harvey hurricane, what, what did you think about hurricanes in general?

JH: Uhh, I just, I don't really have a view on hurricanes as much as, you know I just thought they were really big storms. If one was heading your way, the best thing to do is just to leave.

GB: Did you ever think about the possible consequences of a hurricane hitting Rockport?

JH: Uhh no I did not. I, I heard that there was a big one back in 1919 but other than that, you know, one of these one hundred year things. I didn't think it would happen.

GB: Did you ever perhaps prepare for a hurricane in the past?

JH: Ah no.

GB: Who do you live with right now in Rockport?

JH: I live with my wife, Katie, and my son, Ben.

GB: And how do they like Rockport?

JH: My son is turning two in a couple weeks and uh well he likes everything, and uh my wife likes it a lot. She works as a kindergarten teacher at Little Big Primary here in town.

GB: What were their favorite places to visit in Rockport?

JH: Um, in Rockport, favorite place to visit would probably be uh, let see, going to eat at the Yacht Club uhh, and then heading over to uh Lamar, which is a little town next to here. There's a what they call the Big Tree, and it's an old tree that's been around for a million years. We just really love the nature of, and the connection to nature here.

GB: Was nature the one thing that really connected you and your family to Rockport?

JH: I'd say that was the major thing, yes.

GB: Okay.

GB: So moving into Harvey advancing on Rockport, uh did you leave?

JH: Yes, we uh, I decided to leave ah Thursday. I think the storm hit Friday. When they said it was going to be a tropical storm I made the decision to leave because I just didn't want to be with without power with the toddler, and I had no idea it was going to turn into a big storm like that.

GB: What was it like to make that decision to leave your house?

JH: I mean, it's kind of a give it to God situation. Like I said, I probably would of, you know, boarded up some windows, and things like that if I had known how big the storm was going to get but, uh. It's, I just didn't know it was going to be like this. I didn't know we'd be displaced.

GB: How did your wife or others feel about you leaving your house?

JH: Well they felt good about it. They thought it was the right decision.

GB: Why?

JH: Because uh even though it wasn't a hurricane it had the potential to be one and there is no sense in getting stuck here.

GB: Where did you leave to?

JH: We drove to San Antonio.

GB: And how did the journey fare?

JH: It was good. Uh we uh didn't go through Corpus Christi, we went through Refugio, and Sinton, so we went around all the traffic, so it was a nice drive, it wasn't too much traffic. It was a little ominous. You could look in the rear view mirror and you could see how dark it was.

GB: So when exactly was the point that you knew that it was time to leave?

JH: Um I knew it was time to leave when they were saying on the news, on Thursday, um. I knew it was time to leave when my wife's school, because of the news was letting the students out early, so everyone could make plans, so I decided we don't have anything going on on Friday, no work or school, so lets just leave today.

GB: What was the biggest factor that made you leave?

JH: The biggest factor of making me leave was that I didn't want to have my son, my one-year old toddler, have to go through a hurricane.

GB: Was there a voluntarily or involuntary evacuation?

JH: When I left it was a voluntary evacuation. By the time we got to San Antonio they were, it was mandatory.

GB: And how did that play a part in your decision to leave?

JH: It made me feel good about leaving before it was mandatory. I'm glad we got out of there without having to bite the traffic or you know, the craziness.

GB: As the hurricane kept growing in size, what did that do to your confidence about the effects of the storm on your house?

JH: Uh it didn't do good. I just got more and more stressed and worried about it. I didn't think there was going to be left much of anything here, you know. A lot of the buildings here are built thirty years ago, including where we were living, so I wasn't expecting much, as far as structure.

GB: What did the hurricane's growth and size, how did that affect you with your confidence about the city of Rockport?

JH: I thought that uh enough people were smart enough to get out. You know, it's such a small town and everybody knows everybody; I think that there's confidence in the fact that whatever happens, whoever's left and whatever's left will be taken care of.

GB: Moving on to the landfall of Harvey, when Harvey hit, what were you thinking?

JH: Well I was watching the weather channel. Uh pretty non-stop and you know, I was sad. I was sad about my town. I was sad about places that might not be here anymore.

GB: How closely did you pay attention to the weather and news when Harvey hit Rockport?

JH: Well probably a little too close. I got a little obsessed with social media; there was a lot of that on the Rockport-Fulton Facebook page, was something I would look at a lot of, and the Weather Channel, and I paid a lot of attention to it.

GB: How was this hurricane different to the one you experienced as a kid?

JH: Well there's several things, one I was really young and I don't really much about it other than kinda being scared. This one is different in the fact that I'm a father, and a husband, and there's two people that are you know wanting answers. A totally different situation when you're the adult and it's happening to your son and your family. That's the biggest difference. The other one is this one here in Rockport was a little bit stronger because were right on the water, and the one in Houston in '83 at the time, we were you know, Houston is pretty far- it's like forty miles from the coast. This one we're on the coast; it's a lot stronger.

GB: Did any emotions rise from the past with this hurricane for you?

JH: None that I know of, no.

GB: What about your family, what were the emotions they experienced when Harvey hit?

JH: Well my wife was stressed out. She just started teaching kindergarten. She's a first year teacher, so she's worried about her kids that she teaches, and worried about her job. My son stressed about his daycare and where he goes. Is there going to be damage? How are we going to explain this to him, with emotions like that it's kind of like your confused and you don't have any answers because there's not really an answer to it. Stuff is just happening to you.

GB: So being in charge and being the husband did you feel like there was a lot of weight or responsibility on your shoulders from Harvey hitting?

JH: Yes, I did, but fortunately I have a wonderful father-in-law and mother-in-law that took us in and helped us out in San Antonio, and I have my parents and they've been great this whole time and they live in Houston and are dealing with flooding themselves from Harvey. My Aunt's house got flooded and got four and half feet, so I've just got a lot of support, through family and that's really what pulled us up, through family and faith.

GB: As Harvey hit what was your worst fear?

JH: Well my worst fear was that someone would stay behind and be killed. It's senseless. Why would you even stay? And then, other than that, everything can be rebuilt. It's not really a fear; its more of, you know, you have insurance, you have FEMA, the government there to help you out, and you put all those things into account, but what can't be replaced is a human life, and that was my fear- I hope it doesn't take too many lives, and fortunately I don't think it took any more than just one. It's unfortunate for that one. It could have been a lot worse.

GB: So as Harvey hit were there any best case ideas that were happening like how could this change Harvey for the better or what were you thinking for best case idea?

JH: Change, what could this change, would you just repeat the question?

GB: Like what was the best-case scenario of...

JH: For Harvey?

GB: Harvey hitting?

JH: Uh, well the best-case scenario would be our house would still be livable and that nobody died.

GB: Did you call or talk to anybody in Rockport when Harvey hit?

JH: I called and talked to an ex-coworker of mine the day after it hit, and he was in Rockport, not of the storm, but he was in the day after trying to get a sense of what it looked like.

GB: Did you think about all the people that stayed in Rockport?

JH: Oh yeah, I did.

GB: And how did you feel for them?

JH: Uh, I felt sorry for whatever reason they decided not to get out. I don't know if financially they weren't able to leave or if they were able to leave it was pretty foolish to not go. But I felt scared, and worried for anybody that was there. It's not good, a category, you know, four.

GB: Did you start to second guess anything you did before Harvey hit?

JH: Uhh yeah, I could've, I second-guessed myself on I should've uh done more as far as get the house ready for a hurricane, but the way the house looked after the hurricane, it wouldn't of helped. I can't, you know, keep the roof on.

GB: What items or valuables would you have wished to take?

JH: If I could have taken anything it would have been my wife's grandmother's cookbook that she had written notes in and things like that. I would have liked to have done that for my wife.

GB: What was the worst thing about Harvey hitting, the rain, the wind. What was it that was the worst thing in your eyes?

JH: The wind. There was somewhere around thirty tornadoes that came with the storm.

GB: And how did that affect Rockport?

JH: It tore it apart. You know were connected to another small town, Rockport-Fulton and Rockport's a little bigger but Fulton's still here too, and Fulton got it pretty bad. I'd say just about everything, most of the water got the hurricane in, and there's some places as inland, not too far inland like two or three miles inland that got the tornadoes, and this town had, it had a bunch of beautiful old oak trees- they're called wind swept oaks, because the wind coming off the gulf for hundred and hundreds of years has developed these trees where they sweep upward-, and those tornadoes just kind of pulled them outta the ground, and it's just sad to see oak trees that have been there for hundred of years, you know, gone.

GB: So how has this hurricane impacted your thoughts on the hurricanes to come?

JH: Um, I would think that next year, um or even I guess there's another one coming now towards Alabama, their scarier than I thought they were. As far as everything that comes after it, it's scary not knowing if you have a home or if you can live in it. Are your clothes there? Just stuff like that, stuff you take for granted, water, electricity, there's been times we've been hearing the power still goes out. We don't have internet yet in town there. I know those are first world problems- you get used to stuff like that, but we we're all right.

GB: How has hurricane Harvey impacted or changed your relationship with the city of Rockport?

JH: It has gotten me closer to where I want to stay, to where I want to be more part of the community. I can tell you that. I think I'm changing from someone how just lives here, to someone who actually just wants to help out when they can. Because the community effort in town is amazing with the people giving out their homes, giving out, you know, food on their tables to help out their neighbors. It's really what you think there is in a small town, and it's fantastic.

GB: So tell me about the damage that you took to your house?

JH: Well we live in a condo, and in that condo we face kind of a field, a large field, our Condo faces the north, and the wind came out of the north when it was twisting, and the damage it did was it blew out three windows or two windows. We think that the windows weren't actually blown out by the hurricane but there was a tornado that was near and the pressure popped them out because there's glass embedded into the sheetrock, inside the home. The eggs inside of our fridge all popped because of the pressure inside of the fridge. We lost our windows, two of them, and the glass was everywhere, that allowed the rain to come in. The roof, and our ceiling came down actually above the bathroom. The ceiling just came into the bathroom. The ceiling came in over our TV, over all of our books, and our cookbooks, the sheet rock and sheet rock everywhere, the other hole was, where was the other hole? Over my sons crib, the ceiling came in on top of my sons crib. That was kind of hard to see. I have pictures of that, for insurance and so there was rain pretty much in every room. Mold, so what they're going to do is, the condo association, our whole unit, is actually today we were there moving everything out because next week their going to demolish the unit. It's unlivable; you can't live there.

GB: So what was it like when you came back and saw this damage; how did you feel?

JH: I was in shock, I remember kind of in shock because I came back with my father-in-law. We weren't able to get back to the condos because the road was blocked off, but we live next to a golf course, so I got out of the car and walked through the golf course. We were here the Monday after the storm, so like three days afterwards. The town smelled like gas. We had headaches and things like that. I was walking towards the house through the golf course. When I got to the front of the house, which is basically the southside, I was like ah there's no damage this is great, but then I go upstairs and open it and the wind hits your face in some openings, you smell the mold, the funk, and the glass crushing under your feet. And you know it's bad. And I remember there was water inside the house, and I didn't really know what to do, so I went to the bathroom to grab a towel and I started mopping up the water and I thought to myself, it's just still here. I can't clean all this up. There's water everywhere. So it's kind of a shock, to bring myself back, to take a few pictures and leave.

GB: How has the house damage impacted your life?

JH: Um it's stressful. It's not easy at times; we're living at my wife's aunts and uncles condo right now, which is in Fulton. So it's difficult because there's stuff that were going to have to get rid and, there's stuff, you know, we're going to have to get a new place to live.

GB: How has that impacted your jobs, your wife's job, and your job?

JH: Well fortunately my job is school, I go to school full time. I don't have a job right now. But my wife though, her school is closed. I think, she's back until maybe November and she's actually just now going to be going back to work to just try to go there and try and get some plans together, and see what they're going to do next week. So the teachers aren't even back here yet until next week. It's been a long time, the kids are all displaced, they're all in one different school district. So they're being home schooled or their just not going to school at all. There's a lot of kids, you go out and about in the day and there's a lot of kids running around in the middle of day, and its kind of like, shouldn't they be in school? But you realize there's not really a school to go to.

GB: So is your kid in school now?

JH: He's in daycare. He'll be turning two in two weeks. He's in daycare; his day care opened back up probably about a week in a half after the storm. He did have to go to a different daycare in San Antonio and that was kind of tough on him because it's never easy for a little toddler to leave his parents, especially with people he doesn't really know.

GB: So since you had a lot of valuables in your house, how did the hurricane impact your kid with taking away any toys or objects that he liked? How did that impact him?

JH: Not that much, he's not very wicked on what toys he has and what toys he doesn't. Right now we got all his stuffed animals and were going to go to the laundry mat and have them washed just to make sure there's no mold and stuff in them. Other than that, you give him a couple trucks and he's real happy. And he's got a birthday coming up so he's going to be replenished. He's got some doting grandparents.

GB: So since the hurricane pretty much took away your house, how has that impacted the transportation from your wife's living arrangements to her job and you to school?

JH: Fortunately it only impacted me going to school the first two days of school; I drove from San Antonio to Corpus Christi because I go to school at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. That was kind of tough, but like I said it was only two days or so and her aunt and uncle let me stayed at their place while she stayed in San Antonio. So, it hasn't affected us that much because we're still in the town; we're still in Rockport. There's not much of a commute here.

GB: What kind of damage did you see to the city of Rockport?

JH: It was catastrophic. It was the worst kind of damage I'd ever seen. Monday we got back here is it was shocking. It made you sick to your stomach. It was almost too much to even bear; I don't know how people even like during that time stayed here overnight because just a few hours me and my father-in-law had to leave because the smell would make you sick. The smell of gas, gas lines busted everywhere. Just the sights. The surveying to see if people's homes, walls ripped off, and then their cabinets opened and all the dishes are right where they were, like untouched. It was just weird. There was stuff like that all over town. Places would be nothing but foundation,

and other places would be fine. It was a hurricane and a bunch of tornadoes is what happened here, and it tore it up.

GB: How did the city's damage impact your life?

JH: Well, uhh, infrastructure wise, you know as far as getting power back on and things like that that happened two weeks ago; that affects your life a little bit with no power. We didn't have a generator, and ah you know just uh I think a couple of gas stations open. HEB's open again. Things are starting to get back to normal now. At first there was nothing. There was nothing at all.

GB: How has your relationship changed with the environment after hurricane Harvey hit Rockport?

JH: That hasn't changed much. It's still Rockport, nature. Just fewer trees, and not as many birds.

GB: Were your favorite places in Rockport still standing?

JH: The Fulton Mansion is still there. The Lighthouse Inn where my wife and I had all of our family stay when we got married. The Yacht Club where we had our reception, we loved that place, it's probably going to be open another six months, if, it's on the water so it lost it's front, the front of it, it's still there. There's things that aren't here and there's things that are going to get rebuilt; there's a few things like JJ's By The Bay, which is a great restaurant, and they aren't going to rebuild anymore. The movie theater here in town, were not going to have a movie theater anymore. Panjo's Pizza, no more. There's things that aren't coming back and there's things that are going to come back and we hope that come back better, I mean, you can only hope.

GB: How has the community responded to the hurricane's destruction of the city of Rockport?

JH: They've really gotten together and everyone is helping everyone out. It's exactly that. It's a community, a small community where people know each other. Everybody is in the same boat. Everybody is doing what they can to help out. Once you pull tree limbs out of your yard, you go over to your neighbor's and help him pull limbs out of his yard.

GB: So from the photographs that you said that you took of the damage, when you go back and you look through those photographs, how do those photographs make you feel about the damage that occurred?

JH: Now, I don't really feel much at all about it. It's just the past. I'm sorry that it happened; you know, it's mother nature. It's not for me to question. It's just for me to deal with it. As far as like the photographs, looking at the things I took of my things, it makes me sad to see my son's crib underneath a bunch of ceiling, and sheetrock, and ruins. I can remember putting the crib together with my dad, and that makes me sad.

GB: How has FEMA impacted or helped you?

JH: Um, FEMA's helped. They helped out. We were lucky. I know I've heard some stories about FEMA, but I don't have that kind of story. They came out. They saw me. They talked to me. Walked around my place, and they helped out.

GB: Do you know exactly what FEMA is?

JH: Yeah, it's the Federal Emergency Management Authority, I believe.

GB: All right.

GB: What other kind of relief efforts have been going on near you?

JH: Near me, well there is a relief camp that's right down the road from my son's daycare that's basically just a property. A field that some woman owns. I don't even know who, but she set up temporary showers, temporary housing, and there's- every day- there's dinners, lunches, and breakfasts. People are volunteering there, and just helping out people that are just throwing up tents and kind of living there. It's like a little camp, a little refugee camp. Several families and people don't have anywhere. Where homes are just gone. People are donating clothes there. I think even last weekend they had a wedding there. I think that's pretty cool. Kind of like a little commune.

GB: Have you met any of those volunteers or have they helped you at all?

JH: Um, my wife was volunteering over there. She spent a couple hours over there sorting donated clothes. I haven't met with any volunteers. We've been lucky enough to where we've got so much help from our family in San Antonio and Houston that we don't need to take anybody's time away from them and helping out someone that really does need it, that's struggling. We're not struggling; we're doing good. Were just uh a little displaced, just a little frustrated.

GB: Yeah, so how are you doing right now?

JH: I'm okay. This storm has actually gotten me closer to my faith and wanting to go back to church. It's brought me closer to my wife and son. It's amazing how much uh you can talk about when there is no TV [Television], no phone, and it's just you, your wife, and your kid, and be like a real family. I feel good. I feel as though that I want to do a lot every weekend, so I can get closer and closer to like, I guess a normal that I'm looking for, but there is no real normal. It's just going to be, you know, I guess I'll know when it's here, but I don't know if anything will be normal again.

GB: How has all this impacted your schooling?

JH: School is stressful. I'm taking fifteen hours. When I, I don't have internet, so any work I do has to be done at the school, and that being said, when I'm at the school, I go to school; I can't

really stay afterwards or come early because I have a son and a wife. I have things I need to take care of here in Rockport. It's kind of like, I might not have a job, but my job is to take care of the family, and that's what I'm going to do. School comes second to them. I can do it. You know, I just have to prioritize. It threw a wrench in the whole system. This is my last semester of college, so I guess I'll do it on top of a hurricane.

GB: How has this event impacted you financially?

JH: Um, it's hurt a little bit but not as much as I thought it would. Again, we've a lot of support from family. We are not having to pay rent right now, which is amazing because we were staying with family, at our family's place, so we're doing better than most. We really have no room to complain as far as a lot of these poor people have gone through here.

GB: So if you wouldn't of had the support you have now from your family, how would you be dealing with this if you didn't had their support?

JH: I would probably have to drop out of school, and find two jobs and to help support my family and give them a place to stay. It would be a lot harder. Extremely.

GB: What about the people around you? Your neighbors, friends, and local businesses. What kind of support or help have they been getting that you've seen?

JH: I think a lot of people have been getting help and support from their insurance, which is Texas Wind, and FEMA. I know the American Red Cross is here. We've got a local celebrity that lives here in town or has a house here, George Strait. He's kind of donated a lot of money. So it's people who, I guess what's surreal about everything is watching the news while I was in San Antonio and seeing Lester Holt from NBC nightly news in downtown Rockport. I was like, golly, he's doing it in our small little town.

GB: So of those friends, neighbors, and local businesses, what's the worst thing that you've seen from them?

JH: The worst thing I've seen from them?

GB: Yeah, as in how the hurricane hurt them, what's the worst thing that the hurricane did to those people?

JH: It's just waste them, I know the neighbor below us, she's an elderly lady. Her sister lives in Canada. We're given, basically forty-eight hours of this weekend to move all our stuff out of our place. Some people were upset about that. People more upset about it then me and my family. Of course, we have a place to stay, thank God, but this woman doesn't. She's having to move out on her own. When there hasn't been all that much damage to her home its just she's connected to places that have over fifty percent damage so that means they want to tear the whole place down. So, I think that's pretty bad.

GB: What's the next step for you in this recovery effort?

JH: The next step for me is to this weekend get all our stuff out of the condo. Put it in storage. Hopefully, I'm going to work on getting things back to normal, or I keep saying normal, but uh keep things moving at the place were staying at now and hopefully get into a new place by November. That's the best case scenario.

GB: Are there any other steps that you're taking to fix the problems that are impacting your life right now?

JH: Um, prayer and meditation. Exercise. I am just realizing that everybody in this town has been affected. My wife has been affected, and she realized that we both can get short-tempered. Just trying to be present and realize that I'm not the only one going through this.

GB: If there's anything that you could have done different with this hurricane, is there anything that you would have done?

JH: Ah no. There's nothing you can do about it. The storm, you know, you can't hold back the tide.

GB: Is there anything that I've missed or anything important to you that you want to share?

JH: Just that um, like I mentioned, I really wasn't hit, my family wasn't hit all that bad as some other people here in town. We're slowly getting back to rebuilding things. You can see different you know, restaurants are opening up. It's just starting to get back to where it was. It's probably going to take a couple years, so we're going to be patient.

GB: All right, thank you Justin. This concludes our interview.

JH: All right.