

Charles DeHart

Interviewed by Malcolm Konicek

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Corpus Christi, Texas

Malcolm Konicek: Do I have your permission to record?

Charles DeHart: Yes.

MK: So I'm going to do some background information. What is your name?

CD: Charles DeHart. I go by Chuck.

MK: When and where were you born?

CD: Radford, Virginia. June Twenty-Ninth, Nineteen Fifty-Seven.

MK: How old are you?

CD: Sixty.

MK: Where do you live now and how long have you (pause) lived there?

CD: 1626 West Nelson Avenue, Aransas Pass, Texas. Moved there in March of 2006.

MK: Alright. So here's the interview. When hurricane--- When you first heard about Hurricane Harvey what was your reaction? How did you feel?

CD: Well. It started out as a depression and um I watch all because I'm an old weather train um.. Weather spotter. Anything like this is coming I have to (pause) be ready for it. And like today I was showing you that little part that came up and I have to prepare for it and saw it as a depression and it was coming this way and it would start a depression then all of the sudden it bloomed into a category two, and then it went to three. And by that time we was too late, well not too late really but then it went to four and we were here. Then there was nothing we could (pause) it came fast. Formed very fast because the water temperature was so high out in the gulf as it still is now.

MK: So, uh, why did you want to stay in Corpus Christi? What uh motivated you to stay at your house?

CD: Well (sigh) I got my Harleys there and I'd left if, well, five I'll leave. Anything three is the house structure we considered would be safe and sometimes getting on the road is more dangerous than staying. And the reason we'd stay is because the eye was supposed to go a little further north and it didn't move. It calculated risk which wasn't very smart but we made a calculated risk and I was probably of stayed anyway cause I have cats that can't travel. I have to grab them and put them in a cage and it's just too stressful and if I had to actually do it I would but (sigh) it wasn't too that point yet. And Liz too, my wife, she was at the uhh that University of

Texas Marine Science Institute in Port Aransas and she was preparing for it. And when she came home that's what turned to four and we thought what was going north one time, was going towards Houston, but now instead, it came along a little further and stayed along its track when we got it.

MK: So um how did you prepare for the hurricane? Did you get supplies or board up your windows or how did you prepare?

CD: Well we got um, water first. And I have a bunch of containers I keep just for that. And oh Welch, not Welch. Ocean spray cranberry juice, gallon containers, um leftover buckets, five gallon buckets rather it so much more water for drinking, water containers, turned the air conditioning down as low as we possibly could. We got it down to about sixty-two and a half before it struck. Ummm we boarded up the windows with this stuff called ply locks which boards them up. We bought the house from Hogan homes and you push them on the edge piece of the plywood and you push them into the window and you push your fingers and pull them out. But I had to board over the back windows with um screws, three inch screws, to go into the wood and the doors; I had to do that. Take everything into the house, all my hot pepper plants, and their Carolina reapers. I brought those in. Put everything in a can down low stuff in the house and put them in the garage. And (sigh) there wasn't much that we can do because there wasn't a whole lot of that stuff to blow around in our yard. But that wasn't the case in other people's yards. But we did best we could. Um food wise, my wife has a supply of canned goods and stuff for at least a month. We have food anyway. We wouldn't worried about that. Turned up the air condit- I mean the refrigerator and the uh the freezer as high as we could. And (sigh) we didn't know the water was going to be turned off or we would of put more water up. But they turned the water off on us. For the whole city, which I had never seen before.

MK: Okay. What was your experiences like during the storm? What did you do? Did you any certain things?

CD: Oh yeah. When it started coming in, it started getting like a regular uhh (sigh) start wind blowed, overcast, nothing big, no-no thunder, no lightning this time it's really odd I'd never-not a star spin off storm, nothing that I saw. Didn't hear any thunder at all and it started gradually- the wind began picking up more and more and more and I went into the garage and I secured the garage door. We have uh where it latches, what pulls onto the garage door opener disengaged it and put bolts in the door. Sometimes it would rattle and the door would come off. So I bolted the door down and that's why I was in there when the power went off at four thirteen on that Friday. Yep and the uh – I was sitting there, we went back in and there's no power, I started reading and the winds picking up and it started really, really picking up and I knew it was over a hundred miles an hour and I couldn't see out except for the little holes around the door, I peek through them- everything moving. It got so bad you couldn't see anything. Those winds were blowing so hard and th-the I-its rain was going sideways almost, almost ninety degrees sideways (sighs) and we was sitting there and my wife was worried and the kitty cats were very worried. They'd gone and sought shelter most of them except little Bobby and Toby laying there right beside me and Pixie. And beside Liz was Sunshine and Nimkee and one of the kitty cats I brought here from A&M, well he stayed out and most of them hid. Right around ten o'clock at night, I heard this, the wind shift from the north back to the northwestern and that's when I heard noises started outside. Um, I heard some crash like dropping a drawer full of utensils and it was my neighbor's

storage unit coming into the yard. It moved forty yards maybe and there it was ten feet high and it slammed down in the backyard, destroyed the fence, killed in some, uh, I just put in some bamboo, a hundred and fifty dollar bamboo plant, and it was just sitting on top of it now and didn't move. I just waited and I heard: like a freight train going over the house, like it was a tornado and I knew if it touched down, then there was nothing that we could do. But when you hear the sound of a train, that's the sound of a tornado coming. You get the Doppler Effect like (train noises) as it goes by. I actually heard two. One was off in the distance, one was close and it didn't touch down. If it did, we didn't see any evidence of it. Then it was, that whole night, this front started moving off and I went outside. Destruction was everywhere. I was one of the first ones to go out. And I looked across at that church and it lost the façade, a lot of its roof, sides, but it was still intact. And the neighbors fences was all down, water was deep, and everywhere that night: no power. You could go outside and hear all of nature, the birds chirping, and the frogs croaking. And the next morning, we got up, the birds and all wouldn't fly. They were disoriented. And after the preparation, you're so busy doing stuff, you don't have time to worry about what's going to hit you. That's it, and the preparation, there's not a whole lot you can do. You don't know what's going to come at you. You just hope your building is secured. That's the only thing you can do.

MK: Yup. Alright, so were you uh worried about running out of supplies during the storm at all?

CD: I got to worry about water.

MK: Water.

CD: Because eight days, it's getting kind of low. Because what we did was, we had rain coming in and off. When we get low, I just put buckets outside, catch water right off the rain off to use for toilets and washing hands. Of course for water we had to take, I took a five gallon bucket and maybe two gallons of water and a cup, and sitting and standing in the shower (chuckles) and poured it over our heads. That's how we took showers. I was worried because, sitting there; you're not doing anything and you're still sweating, but if you moved, you sweat even worse. It was horrible, horrible. There was no relief. You couldn't get away from it. And the food wasn't worse than the water. I had plenty of beer (chuckles) and other drinks and water for cleaning and for the animals. Then again, the ice was melting. That was another concern was what happens when the ice melts. And my generator, that was another problem. It wouldn't run correctly. Afterwards, we thought we had run the refrigerator and the freezer, maybe to get the air conditioning but it wouldn't run correctly so we lived off of fans. I worked on the dang thing, you didn't want to go too far because the fans were working. If the fans weren't working, it would have been horrible. I couldn't have imagined what it'd be like. It was absolutely; you could not breathe.

MK: It was hard to breath?

CD: The good thing was the hurricane brought the wind out of the north and it cooled it down a little bit. At night, you could go outside. I spent a lot of time standing outside mainly during the day because it's cooler out there. Plus I was watching the neighborhood for any looting going on. And nobody moved much the next day, afterwards.

MK: So um, I know you said you had pets in your house so how did they react during the storm?

CD: Well, most of them hid. They w-weren't themselves except for Sable, the one who lived here, on campus. He walked around pretty good. Bobby, he was walking around being happy the best he could. Toby, he was really scared because when he hear that noise, he would crouch. And Misty, she stayed hidden under the bed for three days. She'd come out and eat, drink, and then she'd go back under the bed. And she came out and talked for seven minutes. She meowed and told me all about it (meowing noises). I'd like to know what she was saying. Seven minutes, she just meowed quickly and walked out, and was happy and flicked her tail. But they were all very spooked. Archer and Aries, their brothers, they were really spooked because their mom was feral, and they're about half feral. Anyone walks in the house, there gone (fast noise). They don't like anybody and they were really scared, and Misty. Bobby did well, Toby did well, Pixie did well, Archer and Aries were scared, Minky and Sunshine were scared but not too bad because they were beside Liz. Ariel was fine, Bell; who lived here on campus stayed in the back room, she wasn't scared. She just didn't come out. See, all my buddies, I got so many.

MK: So how many pets do you have?

CD: Twelve.

MK: Oh okay.

CD: See I was going to get some pit bulls. For some reason I waited before I bought them, and they were older, and I wouldn't of had any place to put them because the storm came and stormed the fence; all the neighborhood fences. Everybody lost their fences minimum. Everybody.

MK: Wow. That was the minimum damage. That means the wind were really strong.

CD: I say they were about a hundred to a hundred and thirty. I've been in hurricanes before. There a hundred and thirty miles per hour so I got a good idea of what the wind was like. But this one. It hung around and wouldn't move. It just stayed and that's where all the damage came from. If it wouldn't of hung around long their wouldn't of been as much damage but it just stayed and it's moved back now, and it finally went back to sea, and then it went up towards Houston. See, it came in, stopped, came back, and went back to the ocean and it gained more power, and then from there went to Houston and it started getting all the rain.

MK: What was your experience like in the aftermath of the hurricane, after the hurricane blew through? How did you feel?

CD: Hot.

MK: Hot?

CD: It's when, if you have PTSD or anything when something comes along like that, then you start thinking about what happened and how lucky you are. And you look around and everybody. It's kind of hard to say I-it's. You're in a state of shock. And you look around and you try to do things but your powers off. You can't do anything. You can't tape the boards, you can't go anywhere. The hospital was down. There was nowhere to go, nothing to do. You just sit there and hopefully help would come soon and get the power line, the water back on, and just wait.

Just waiting is what bothered me. There's nothing you can do. And everybody's sitting there and their worse off than I am, so I'm not so bad and finally I saw all the power companies coming around and that was a good relief. They did an excellent job. They were very good. And when it came back on, and God, I wish; it was the eighth day. A week from Friday we was there, it was the eighth day. Sitting there I was like "man I wish this power would come back on" and I just laid back and all of the sudden the light came back on. It came on around the same time around four o'clock. A week, eight days later.

MK: Eight days later.

CD: I was hollering and my wife thought something had happened to me (chuckling) and I was like "shut the windows, "shut the windows"! I was "we got air conditioning" "God the air conditioning is tilted", so I ran out there going "please let it be running" and I was like "oh hell yes, yes yes yes," So we were coming back, but then you go outside and look at my neighbor; Mike, and he's lost everything. I meant his house is intact, but he had to pull out his couches, just furniture, everything was soaked, carpet and all. He's a teacher at West Oso. His wife is um uh Del Mar student, so they had it pretty rough. And her daughter and their dog; they stayed through it. Then eventually, they got to go to Robstown when traffic moved towards that way. But our neighborhood, it fared well; roof damage and that church; they finally tore it down

MK: Did your house receive any damage?

CD: Luckily, the fences are gone, some of the shrubbery and all got tore up and it's coming back and the fence. The trees were laying down and we couldn't do anything about it if my neighbor gets his storage unit out of my backyard. I don't know when he's going to do that, but he'll have to bring a forklift in. And we only lost one shingle. I didn't even know we lost that until Liz told me that with the wind storm. I thought we were fine. That could have been any time. That happens, things fall off. Um, we lost the refrigerator, and the electrical stove. Something happened. I don't know if it was the power surge, or water got into it or what. One thing, in this area, Rockport and Aransas Pass, the wind pushes trees over this way. Well this wind staked my tree straight up. It used to lean a little bit to the right and now it's straight up. You can see the roots were hidden and not a root is above ground a little bit. So it straightened it up. What amazed me is the speed the leaves came back on this tree. It's almost full in five weeks. It usually takes two to three months for it to come back. But it's a very healthy tree. We got lucky on that part, we got shade in the front part of our house and shade for the neighbors across the street and the churchgoers.

MK: So I know you were talking about your neighbors and everything but what were their experiences like during the storm and after?

CD: My next door neighbor, Alan and Kristine (unintelligible). They left and went to San Antonio. John and his wife; I can't remember her name, they went somewhere because he had a bunch of rental property so he must of went to one of his rental properties. But, I can't remember if Debbie tended to him or not, but two other guys stayed there during the storm. They did well. Down the street, I think these people were say Filipino, I'm not sure. I think they work as nurses at the hospital, the Blue Cross Respond, and they lost a lot of shingles and their fence. The lady down beside me, her name is Debbie and I'd met her. The guy was watching the house, I talked to him and I had to challenge him because I didn't know he was out looking at the house so I was

like “what are you doing looking over my neighbor’s house for” because she left her house open. She lost a lot of shingles. The next guy Mike- shingles, fence, the fence all down through there. Some houses lost a lot of shingles and some lost none. Now up the road at the trailer park, across from the high school; there was some damage there. I saw one trailer and it looked like someone just grabbed the top if it and pulled the top of it off, opened it wide open. I didn’t go around too much in town because it’s not good to because everybody’s got problems and if your moving around, you might get into a situation that you don’t want to get into. If something falls on you and you have an accident, the best thing to do is just wait and do your stuff around the house. You could try to help your neighbors but what we all did was just picked the fence up and went “huh”. John and Annette, they were worried about the rental property and he was very upset when he came back and saw what damage it was to our house and what hit in the background. His building landed in my backyard; he was upset about it and it just hit him really hard. Alan and Kristine were fine; their African American, and the storm didn’t bother them. And John; their Caucasian, and there’s this guy from Jamaica named Linton and he did well. His sons went to the University of Houston and they decided to come home, and they got evacuated; from the University of Houston- Victoria, and they evacuated students to Houston. That was, you know, not the best idea but it was the only ideal thing to do and put them out of harm’s way. They didn’t mean too but his two sons stayed there. Their house, just about every house got some damage, and if you go down the street, some homes were destroyed. Older homes from the fifties. It got to a point in the late forties and fifties; they started going from all handmade to prefab type that goes by the boards; tapping in used to be the way houses were put together right and it took a while to do it. In the fifties, they started prefabrication by throwing them up to get somebody to live in them; those house got tore up. Wooden side; wooden clapboard, I think that’s what they’re called, and they had them up off the ground so the water wouldn’t run under them but it didn’t fare well. Oh! One part downtown in Aransas Pass; the school building they were using, it lost the side of a wall. If you could look on the internet, you can see the drone. There was a drone that went on top of the police department and it showed all the damage from HEB and how much water if you see damage. If there’s a place near Port Aransas and Rockport that looks like water in the streets; it’s Aransas Pass, it’s not Port Aransas. We got it, they got it bad because were right next to the water. The good thing where we lived is the FEMA mark, insurance was provided over twenty-five feet above sea level, and my house is twenty-seven feet above sea level which is good. We weren’t one to get that storm surge. A friend of mine at the doctor’s office, he lost his sportster Harley Davidson and he stored it in the guy he worked for, Dr. Ruse Russell, and when he came back the water level was above three and half feet. It was up halfway on his tank, almost covered his whole tank.

MK: Wow.

CD: The insurance paid him off and he bought another one but all the neighbors I saw, what I saw is everyone was friendly but it was concern. Everybody was worried because they don’t know how long this is going to take to get the power back on because everyone is so power dependent. Can you imagine living down here where there was no power?

MK: Horrible, hot.

CD: No air conditioning and even worse than that, no screens to keep the mosquitos out. Another concern of mine was there was a week that you had with mosquitos starting to breed and

they were just getting bad, those big suckers. The size of a quarter for the legs, huge things, they were coming out before the air conditioning came back on. That was a big concern. Because I had plenty of bug repellent and clothes of course but still. Drive you crazy.

MK: Yeah. There's a lot of them breeding and everything.

CD: Uh-huh. You ever seen animals being driven insane by bugs. Yeah it easily can be done.

MK: Okay. So did the storm affect you like mentally or psychologically by chance?

CD: Yeah. Yeah

MK: How so?

CD: Stress, anxiety, you don't know what's going to happen. I was talking to a counselor here on campus for PTSD. I have PTSD anyway and anxiety attacks from the Lyme's disease. It helps to talk about it because in and out, it's therapeutic. It gets the demons out of the way because you wouldn't think, things come back, and I don't want to worry about anything at all, it wasn't as bad but it did affect my wife bad. When she was on her way to work, firetrucks and cops went by her and she saw somebody looked like being electrocuted; she didn't know. It upset her. She was going to the doctor to get some medication. Because last night she went to see a counselor about it and everybody's providing counselors and it's (sigh) it's. (Takes deep breath) When you get something around all this disaster and you can't do a damn thing about it and that's what bothers you. Some people process information differently and when you go through death; someone's close near death; it affects you. It really does. Some people don't talk about it; heart attacks. That's something will be, in the next few months, I'm sure there is going to be a lot of people dying because of it from the stress that got too them. Because they haven't talked about it, tried to do anything, just kept it in to themselves. But yeah and I'm sick and am getting help now at the um, University Health Center down here in the mental health part. They've been, they've helped me out a lot.

MK: So is that the only way you dealt with this form of PTSD? Did you ever find other ways to deal or?

CD: Just (sighs) Keeping busy around the house because we were supposed to be in school and I was, we were all geared for school ready to go and all of the sudden the storm and what do we do? You can't study, you don't know what to do, and you're confused. What can I do? I was supposed to be in school now cuz and a vacation comes out from under you and you're like what am I going to do? And your mind races and (sighs) they. It's just hard to try to put things back to where they were before after the storm because you can't do it. But you'll try anyway. You'll go back to normality and there's no more normality for a while, it still now bothers me. Going down the road and saying "God, look at all this destruction" but the good thing is, nature wasn't destroyed as much; it's just man made stuff. So if you go out and look, and a few trees were down, but not every tree's over. Not everything was down, if you look at the cattle, they seem to fare much better; birds, I've seen seemed fare much better. I saw, I picked out five birds in my yard so far. We lost three chimney swallows. They were actually, they should have been gone but for some a reason they was raisin' these clutch of eggs. We lost those. But everything in nature seemed to be, and that bothers me if natures hurting then I'm hurting. I've never told anyone about an ice storm in ninety-five. Worst sound I ever heard in my life. It was trees

cracking in the wave of ice for days on end. It was like hearing people torturing animals you know. You couldn't put them out your mind because I had no power and I couldn't have. I just keep hearing (crunch noises) crack, boom everywhere for three, four days before it finally melted. So when I saw that here, I'm looking around and I see trees down but I don't hear any sounds so that helped me out much better. And then the normality- then, the helicopters started flying over. That was pretty wild. They would come over the house and look, checking on everybody. Yeah you can see the Guard going by and that made us feel good. The cops would come around. The bastards didn't even wave at you. The Guard waved at you "everybody okay" and the cop did not pay any damn attention. They wouldn't even get out of the car. I didn't see them get out of the car and didn't ask anyone for help.

MK: Do you think there is a reason why they didn't do that?

CD: Yeah because there thinking everybody is going to kill them or shoot them you know since all this stuff's happening. Ever since they killed that guy in Missouri, the cop's killed him, anybody's protesting, anyone of color or anybody. So now they pull the gun to shoot you instead of trying to control the situation. They figure everybody has got anxiety and "I need help" and thinking they might get shot or something. The only time you saw them was when they were riding around in a car.

MK: Okay. So looking back at the hurricane coming from your experience, what was the hardest thing about dealing with this hurricane in particular?

CD: Seeing my wife and animals worried. That was hard. And I had to (sigh), I can't break down. I had to be mean, I had to be tough. I'm the one in charge when I have a wife, and I have a structure. When natural disasters come around, I'm in charge. Whatever goes I say goes and other than that she's boss (chuckling)! You know, she makes the rules about the household and all but when disaster strikes, I have take over and I have to. I can't show no weakness whatsoever because my wife or if anybody else around here looks towards me. When I'm out there, when I'm walking around, you can't show any weakness. I was worried about my wife and my animals; it bothered me a lot. Everybody over here, you, the school, you know you think and that's the bad part when you start to thinking "how's everybody doing?" How you are doing, how Reagan's doing, how Debbie who works here and all the people, the kitties, Ed. You start thinking about how, you know that starts a fit and when the PTSD goes "man I got too" and "hell".

MK: Because you're worried about not just your family, but everyone else.

CD: Yeah! And then, you got be strong.

MK: Yeah you do.

MK: So, this is the last question. Will your experiences staying in Corpus Christi during the hurricane effect you for the rest of your life? Do you think this experience will?

CD: Oh yeah! Yeah sure. It's like what I went through three in North Carolina, the ground zero. One we had hover over our house. Liz was taking animals, all were two kitties, and we couldn't travel. Chimney would get sick and Smoky. He just couldn't him in as cage, he was an outside cat and we put him in the back room. And back then, it's affected me to this day and how I do

things when weather comes around. Now I've hovered over twenty five hours, and that bothered me. This storm here will bother me forever because I remember it. It's forever stamped in my head. It's like my motorcycle wreck; I'll never forget it. It's going to bother me because you hear all that stuff and you can't go anywhere. The only thing you can do is lay down on the ground and hope you don't get blown away. It was tough, real tough. It's just hard you know. The thing that. Nature's so strong and I'm so stupid to stay but where can you go? If you're going even inland, where are you going to go stay? Where's the motels? You know I have kinfolk in San Antonio I don't associate with because their trash, but I wouldn't have even called them. But luckily, we had some people in Austin we could of gone but see normally, we don't know anybody. I don't have any kinfolk here in Texas at all except for those people that I don't associate with. It bothered me a lot and it's still going to bother me. I saw just a little ago there's another one, what if the hurricane turns this way? That's going to be a category one and just knock the hell out of everything again. But its psychological effects is that it's going to really hurt because what we had in North Carolina, we had two hit within sixty days. That was really rough on everybody. Really.

MK: Are they still dealing with the damage in Aransas Pass?

CD: Oh yes! Yes. Golly, AT&T cell phone tower is still down. Like I said this morning, I don't know if there's a guy working there on the power lines in between Aransas Pass and Port Aransas. One of the lines might have hit the wire or something electrocuting him. Lots were going on. If anybody wanted a job, they can get a job. You can get a job and if you need one, call here, call everywhere. In construction yesterday, the trucks were going around picking up debris, tacking people's roofs back. It was slow but there's a lot of work needed to be done. Sonic is still down, the church is gone, I don't know I hope they come back because they just rebuilt that. Lowes is not open, Walmart is. Eckerd's, they're in a trailer. HEB, I haven't been in there; my wife has, they're coming back slowly; Popeye's, yes. Just things you see. When something like this goes on, it's best not to go into the neighborhoods and you don't want to bother seeing it because everybody's rebuilding. You'll just get in the way if you don't help. I'd get out and help and sometimes you can't help.

MK: Alright, well thank you for doing this interview.

CD: Yeah man!

MK: I appreciate it.

CD: Sure. Sure.

