

**Christopher Wren
Narrator**

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History 5370- Oral History Techniques and Practices
Interviewer**

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at the home of Timothy Watts
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TW: Good evening, thank you for sitting down with me tonight. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

CW: My name is Christopher Wren. Where to begin? I was born and raised in Wyoming and moved down here [south Texas] about five and a half years ago, moved to Rockport. I am currently working on my Ph.D. in counselor education [at Texas A&M University]. I moved down here originally to work on my master's degree in counseling. I got that [degree] and got into the Ph.D. program which is where I'm at now.

TW: I'm sorry you may have answered this but how long have you been down here?

CW: Five and a half years.

TW: You are from Rockport [Texas]?

CW: Correct.

TW: Were you present at the time Hurricane Harvey hit?

CW: I was not in Rockport when Hurricane Harvey hit. I decided that it would be a good idea to leave down. Originally when it was stalled out in the gulf I had planned on sticking around, but as it began to intensify, I decided it would be a good idea to leave. I'm from Wyoming, and I can handle snowstorms, but high winds and rain scare me, so I decided that leaving was in my best interest. I don't swim well.

TW: [Laughter] That's funny. Where did you end up going?

CW: We went down to McAllen [Texas], where my fiancée's family lives.

TW: I'm assuming it was you and your, fiancée?

CW: My fiancée and I both, yes, and both our animals.

TW: Is there anything specific about McAllen that's important?

CW: We decided to go down there [McAllen, TX] because that's where Ashley's family lives and it is very far away. We'd been looking at the proposed trajectory of Hurricane Harvey. It appeared that it was going to go directly for Rockport, Fulton, Aransas, and Ingleside [communities located in south Texas along the Gulf of Mexico]. It didn't have much of a chance of veering off and going south so we figured that we'd be pretty safe going down there. That's the main reason. In addition to that, if it did go down toward McAllen, my fiancé's family has a very sturdy home, and she wanted to be close to them in case anything did take a turn for the worse.

TW: That's certainly understandable. Do you remember those days leading up to the eventual landfall of Hurricane Harvey? Could you explain and describe that experience for me?

CW: We knew that there was a storm out in the gulf [Gulf of Mexico], and we knew that it was a fairly decent-sized storm. Harvey didn't really seem like it was going to pose much of a threat to the Coastal Bend by any stretch of the imagination. A couple years ago there was a tropical depression that hit just south of Port Lavaca, and I thought it would, at best, be something like that. Something that would be easy to ride out and would cause minimal damage. I didn't really put a whole lot of thought into the storm. I just went about my day and kept an eye on things just to be safe. I do remember, for instance, my boss coming into work two or three days before the hurricane actually hit, telling me that she had just returned from Walmart. She had stopped to buy non-perishable food, flashlights and supplies for the hurricane, just to be safe. I kind of thought that she was being a little bit dramatic about everything. That happened Wednesday before the storm hit. Later that day we began to see that the storm was intensifying and went from a tropical depression and intensified to a Category 1 or a Category 2 hurricane. I was beginning to get a little bit nervous and was beginning to debate whether staying in my home would be a good idea. At that point, I still hadn't made up my mind for sure what I was going to do.

TW: Did you get a chance to go out and pick up any supplies before the initial landfall and were you still residing in Rockport at the time?

CW: At that point I was residing in Rockport Fulton. As far as going to get supplies, I did not. I had a friend of mine that I called while I was at work on Wednesday, and asked if he would go pick up plywood for me. This was assuming that there would be plywood left for him to pick up for me, so that I could board up my windows and my doors. [Making] everything as safe as I possibly could. I was still debating sticking around for

the storm. As far as other supplies were concerned I don't remember even thinking about going to Walmart or any place like that to pick up anything.

TW: You mentioned that you had talked to your boss. I know beforehand you had mentioned that you have actually two occupations, right? Am I right on that?

CW: Yeah, that's correct.

TW: Okay, what are those occupations? Can you describe them for me?

CW: So, my main occupation is I work at the university [Texas A&M- Corpus Christi]. I am the director of a federally funded program. It's a TRIO program¹, SSS-Teacher Prep². We prepare students who want to become teachers. We help pre-service teachers with their testing and their course work and prepare them for life outside of the university or for moving on to a master's degree, or whatever comes next for them. In addition to that, my family owns ten acres out in Rockport. On those ten acres, we have a mobile home park. This mobile home park is a senior community. Everybody is fifty-five years of age or older. I am the manager out there, and I take care of what needs to be taken care of in addition to living on-site.

TW: Was this an [expected] eventuality then, living in Rockport, so close to the Gulf of Mexico? Was this an [expected] eventuality that the citizens in Rockport overall had at some point in time down the line said, "hey, maybe this could happen?" Was this in the mindset of anyone at the time?

CW: Yes and no. Living on the coast there's always the chance that something could blow in. I think that the people of Rockport and the others up and down the Coastal Bend got a little complacent. It's been a long time since any kind of major storm had really come to hit us. Honestly, I don't believe there's been a major storm in my lifetime, now that I think about it. The idea is definitely in the back of your head that it could happen. Just like the idea that where I'm from, there's a possibility that there could be a major snowstorm that snows you in for three months. You just go about your day and deal with it as it comes.

TW: It's kinda difficult to assume what's gonna happen. You're absolutely right. It has been a very long time since the Gulf Coast has had one of these major hurricanes at least

¹ U.S. Department of Education, "Office of Postsecondary Education: Federal TRIO Programs – Home Page, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html> (retrieved December 8, 2017).

² Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, "Student Support Services," <http://triosss.tamucc.edu/> (retrieved December 8, 2017).

hit Corpus Christi and the surrounding areas. You would say this is the first time you've gone through a situation like this, or similar to this?

CW: Similar to this, yeah. There was a hurricane season, I wanna say it was 12 or 15 years ago. There was a possibility of a significant storm, coming in and hitting Rockport and Corpus Christi. It ended up not happening, but I do remember. I lived in Wyoming at the time, I do remember trying to prepare as best as I could from that far away. I had made phone calls to check on the park. I had called the manager on-site at the time. I had called the fire department, the police department, to ensure that they would go through our mobile home park to check on our residents, and so forth. This was considerably different because I was in the dead center of everything at that point in time, and of course I definitely felt responsible for all of my residents that lived there. As I mentioned earlier, they are at least 55 years of age, and many of them run all the way up into their 90s. My concern was their safety and well-being, as well as mine and my animals. Also, getting everybody out of the park, because we live in mobile homes, high winds are not [our] best friends. [laughs]

TW: You mentioned that you had gone on to McAllen to be with your fiancée's parents. What was that experience like? What was going through your head while you were down there? I imagine you were keeping tabs on what was going on back home.

CW: Certainly.

TW: What were you seeing from your side looking in?

CW: Leading up to it, it was nerve-wracking not knowing what was gonna happen, hearing that the hurricane continued to intensify as it made landfall. [We] were hearing reports from every news station in the country, talking about Hurricane Harvey and how it was gonna hit Texas. They couldn't be exactly sure, but that trajectory was [heading] right for Aransas Pass, Ingleside, Rockport. Hearing all of that I was distraught, honestly. I did my best to try and hide it, because there was nothing I could do about it. I began to realize that I had made peace with my living situation before I left. I fully expected to come back to sticks that were once my house. This park has been in my family since 1968. It's a very significant part of my life, and I did not wanna lose it, and I was very, very worried about it. Leading up to it, we were up all night on the 25th [of August] paying attention to every single news cast that would mention it. I remember watching the Weather Channel. There was a fellow from the Weather Channel out in front of the Omni [Omni Bayfront Hotel] here in Corpus [Christi] and watching him and his reports. As the storm began to hit we switched over to Facebook Live, because of the technology we have now, it was really amazing to watch and know that people were actually in Rockport and reporting, I mean, as live as you can get. As everything was going down, there was people driving around and filming it and narrating what was going on. It was interesting to see that, and there was some things that would raise my hopes very high, [like] seeing that some parts of town during the hurricane seemed to be relatively intact.

Then you'd see total destruction in other places, and that would just dash all hope. Thinking that the death count of my little town and the total destruction that we were coming back to was just going to be horrendous. It was an experience that I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

TW: Have you been keeping up with the death count since?

CW: Offhand I can't remember what the death count is. It is significantly lower than anybody would have expected. One of the things that I do remember is hearing a news report when I was down in McAllen. The mayor of Rockport had said, if you plan on sticking around, please take a sharpie and write your identifying information on your body somewhere so that when they pull your body from the wreckage, you can be identified. That freaked me out more than probably anything else, because you're hearing that, you're thinking, oh my goodness.

TW: Well, you can't get any clearer than the message he's trying to convey.

CW: Yeah, pretty much he was saying that you're gonna come back and it's gonna be a barren landscape and filled with nothing but death and destruction.

TW: So was that the case?

CW: It was not. It was not. Again, I don't remember what the death count was. Less than fifty. Significantly less than fifty. Less than twenty, if memory serves. I do know that after the fact they had given a couple of death counts, and I wanna say it was twelve or thirteen. Then it went up maybe two or three as they [rescue crews] began to sift through the wreckage people's homes.

TW: Just to clarify, that's specifically Rockport?

CW: It's specifically for Rockport, yeah. I'm not sure what the total death count for Hurricane Harvey was. I paid very close attention to Rockport but not, unfortunately, to the rest of them. I was just surrounded by Rockport at that point.

TW: It's your home, that's your community. It makes absolute sense.

CW: Absolutely.

TW: You and your fiancée stayed the night with your future in-laws.

CW: Correct.

TW: When did you guys decide to come back?

CW: We drove down there Thursday morning, and we returned Sunday. I was actually back in Rockport Sunday afternoon making a brief pit stop in Corpus to drop off our animals and check my fiancée's house for damage. Which was minimal, luckily, and then directly out to Rockport.

TW: What were you expecting to find when you got back out to Rockport?

CW: I was not entirely positive. Saturday evening, I remember we had gone to get something to eat with my fiancée's family, and I had tried to keep open communication with as many people in my community as possible. One of my residents said that her son had made it out to Rockport and checked on things for us, and said that my house looked like it was intact. They said that they couldn't get through the entirety of the park because there was too much debris down on the ground but they could see my house, and probably six or seven other houses in the park that, most of which seemed to be relatively intact from what they could see by just an outside appearances.

TW: Okay, and how does that compare to what you actually saw once you got back?

CW: Surprisingly, when we got back, [from] driving -

TW: Did you have any difficulty getting in?

CW: No difficulty at all getting in. We drove right in. There was nobody to stop us or ask us questions. We drove in just like it was any other day. It certainly was not any other day. About the time that we hit Gregory, [Texas, and] Portland is when we started to see very real devastation it was starting to sink in that this was just an absolute disaster. And as we continued to move up the coast, into Aransas Pass to Ingleside, and eventually into Rockport and Fulton, the devastation just grew and grew and grew. Seeing the amount of houses that had been blown over and wrecked, [and] the trees that were all over the place. What usually takes about 45 minutes to get from Corpus to Rockport, took us better than an hour because we had to slow down, go around debris, see how high water had gone over the road. Much of it had receded at that point, but just seeing the high water mark was stunning. When we got to my home it didn't look ideal, but I could look at my house and see that it was intact. There was trees down, many, many trees. My park has close to 300 trees within the park and it looked like every last one of them had been toppled, branches stripped. There was not a single leaf on any tree. Branches down all over the place, but it appeared, from what we could tell, that the homes, were largely intact. I could see that there was one home that the roof had peeled back and not to sound funny or anything, but it literally looked like the old-timey sardine cans with the key that somebody had just peeled the front quarter of it back all the way. That was the only home that appeared to sustain any major damage. I'm not a very emotional person [laughs] by any stretch of the imagination.

TW: Sure.

CW: I cried.

TW: Wow.

CW: When I saw everything it was a very emotional time for me, and thinking about it right now, I can feel it coming back up. It's really odd to go back to that day, and I picture it very vividly in my mind. But it was definitely an experience that will stick with me more so than even thinking about what was going on during the hurricane, actually coming into Rockport and seeing this very much a picturesque town back just down to its bare bones, literally to its bare bones without anything at all. One thing that I distinctly remember is the lack of leaves on the trees and everything just blown down. My first thought was that it looked like winter, or fall, rather, where I'm from. The sky was still very much overcast and it looked like it could snow anytime, even, and that was very odd. Then as I continued to drive in and see things, I've never been to any place that's been ravaged by war or anything, but in my mind, that's what I would imagine that'd look like, [It] was just what we were seeing with the total destruction, seemingly, of everything around us.

TW: Can you give me some examples of what you were seeing, especially around the community itself?

CW: The one house that had the roof been peeled. One of the things that definitely blew my mind was there is a small Vietnamese market across the street from my house, and it looked like an eighty-foot giant used it as a trampoline. I mean, it was just trampled. He [the owner of Vietnamese restaurant] had a white Chevy delivery van, full-sized van, and it looked like that same giant used it as a soccer ball. Just the side of it was caved in. It still drove. I saw the guy drive it the next day, which was really stunning. Those types of things. It looked like a bomb had been dropped right in the middle of it, and it was an odd feeling knowing that my home had been spared and this market across the street was just utterly ruined.

TW: Wow. How close would you say is your family's property to the center of Rockport? I imagine the damage itself was widespread, but how close was it to the center? I wanna say the hurricane landed first on St. Joseph's Island.

CW: Correct.

TW: Right off the coast?

CW: Yes.

TW: How far away was your home to this?

CW: We are located not even a mile from Fulton Beach Road, which runs right along the bay there. The eye of the hurricane passed right over the top of my park, and we definitely got it. As we were watching the Facebook coverage of it, the very brave young man went out in his car, and he was surveying the damage while he could, in the relative calm of the eye. And I remember him driving up the road, which is a fairly main thoroughfare going in and out of Rockport. I remember him driving up the road, and as he's driving up there I'm frantically typing, keep going, keep going, let me look at my house, let me look at my house. And he stopped, and everything his camera was pointed forward. We couldn't really see a whole lot. I was worried, very, very worried at that point, that everything that I had was lost because it seemed that he just could not go any further up the road, and he was less than a quarter of a mile from my house at that point. We come to find out that there is a county maintenance barn that is located just down the street from my house. I think that the tallest point that it had was about three stories, and a good portion of that had blown all the way across the highway there, and so he simply could not go any further. We didn't find that out until later, so worst case scenarios popping through my head.

TW: So kinda fast-forwarding a little bit. So you come back and the storm has moved up the coast to Houston. It's gonna be affecting Houston for some time after that. To the point to where the recovery's still going on, the damage is still going on from that to this day. With the amount of damage you described, with the amount of destruction to a community like Rockport, how do you even begin to recover from that?

CW: It's baby steps. We are a little better than two months out of landfall from this thing and Rockport has made tremendous steps in getting back on its feet. It is gonna take a very, very long time for Rockport to be anywhere near the town that it was three to four months ago, honestly. The people of Rockport are some of the most amazing people that I've ever met in my life, and I'm not just saying that. They all banded together, all of us banded together and helped out where we could. Beginning to clean your property as best as you could first and hoping that you had property to come back to clean, and then that it was worth your time to actually clean it. Like I mentioned earlier, mine was worth cleaning, and that was the first thing that we did. I needed to have some semblance of normalcy before I could even begin to look around me to see what else was going on. So that's what we did. I had my fiancée, her stepfather, and then some [other] people who live in the park that returned about the same time that I did. We began clearing away debris from my house and moving it and just doing our best to make it look as best as we could given the circumstances.

TW: Now you had mentioned the residents in the park.

CW: Yeah.

TW: Did the residents leave? Was it a mandatory evacuation? Did anyone stay behind? If so, was anyone hurt?

CW: Well I'll go back and answer the first part of the question first. It was a mandatory evacuation. As I mentioned, the mayor said, write your identifying information on your arm in markers. Before I left, I went and spoke with everybody that was still at the mobile home park at the time. I knocked on every single door and checked to make sure that people had planned on leaving. There was one of my residents, a very interesting guy. He called me a wuss because I was taking off, and said that he's rode one out before and he's gonna do it again. I tried to explain to him, yeah, but last time you rode it out, it was not in a mobile home.

TW: [laughs]

CW: [laughs]

TW: You're being very kind to the words that he actually used, I can tell.

CW: He called me a pussy. [laughs]

TW: [laughs] How old is this gentleman?

CW: I believe that this guy is 84, 85 years old.

TW: Wow.

CW: [He's] mostly blind. Legally blind and very hard of hearing.

TW: Now, I have to ask, was he there when you returned?

CW: [laughs] So he rode out the entire hurricane. When I get back there's this 85-year-old man with his shirt off dragging tree branches across the road.

TW: [laughs]

CW: Looking very much to me like He-Man at that point in time. I went and spoke with him and asked him if he stayed. He said, yeah, didn't you? And I said no, I got out of here. And he re-emphasized that I was a pussy at that point in time. [laughs]

TW: [laughs] Well, more power to him. Did all the other residents take on this kind of attitude?

CW: He was, he was my only resident that actually stuck around.

TW: And so have the residents since returned, and what's life been like for them?

CW: Every resident has returned to the park, with the exception of one. They decided that Rockport is not an ideal place. They're like me. They're from the North. They're from Colorado originally. Unfortunately the wife [of the residents that did not return] has inoperable cancer, and she opted to go be with her family and not worry about everything as the cleanup went so they have not returned. Everybody else has returned. We did have three homes that were damaged enough that they had to be demolished. Those residents did return and claimed a lot of their stuff. The homes were not completely one-hundred percent damaged, so they were able to claim many of their personal possessions which was a blessing for them. They have since found other accommodations and I believe that two of them still reside close to the park right now. One of the damaged homes, was a fishing lodge, as he [the owner] referred to it as. He was not a full-time resident of my park and he will not be returning after he demolishes his house. He decided that being in the Hill Country was far safer.

TW: I imagine. [laughs] Based on what I have heard from you, the damage seems to be much more contained than other parts of the city and community. Why is that? What's your working theory right now?

CW: We have no doubt that God put his hand on us as we were going through this. We don't know why, but that definitely is something we just can't deny that happened. The answer that most people choose to believe is that, as I mentioned earlier, we have close to three-hundred trees in the park. Our mobile home park is set up like a horseshoe and we have the homes situated along the outside of the horseshoe with the interior of the park being largely undeveloped with all the original trees from when my grandfather purchased the property back in the late [nineteen] sixties. We believe that the trees broke the wind so it could not get strong enough to really cause any great damage to the park. Yes, trees blew down. At this point, we believe that we probably lost forty or fifty trees, which sucks. But they probably saved the entirety of our mobile home park. That's our working theory,

TW: Um-hum. Okay. Now, there have been several articles that have been published since the main devastations in Houston. Towns like Rockport, Portland, Ingleside were the first line of defense for these communities. I don't think anyone was really expecting the storm to do what it did.

CW: Certainly not.

TW: There have been several [other] articles written stating that compared to Hurricane Katrina, efforts of relief have been much faster in providing communities with that support. As a member of that community [affected by Hurricane Harvey] is this a reality?

³ Shaila Dewan and John Schwartz, *New York Times*, "How Does Harvey Compare With Hurricane Harvey? Here's What We Know." August 28, 2017.

CW: From what I've been able to see, relief efforts were very quick to roll into Rockport. My concentration has been Rockport, so I don't know a lot about what's happening in other communities. I have had the opportunity to speak with people outside of Rockport and Fulton and they largely described the same type of deal.

TW: Are these your students?

CW: I only had a couple of students. It's been partially through social media that I've learned about some stuff. Occasionally I will speak with somebody who is going through the same thing that I'm going through from a different town. I'll run into them and we will speak at length about our experiences. We have found that our experiences are fairly similar in that outpouring from not only the community, the Coastal Bend, Corpus Christi, [all of] Texas in general, but from the country and the world as a whole has been just unbelievable and the help that we have received. People have come in with supplies, chainsaws, water, food. It absolutely blew my mind as we began to clean up in the days and weeks following. You could drive down the main streets and roads that were open and on every single corner there was somebody trying to give something away, trying to help out, trying to cook food for everybody. It was humbling to see this many people willing to help out the small little town of Rockport that until August 25th most people in the country didn't even know existed. It was truly an amazing thing to see that.

TW: So what sources of relief were made available to the community?

CW: There was a lot. Of course the Red Cross was there. In the first couple of days, they drove through the park, they saw me and a couple of people working out there. They would stop us and ask who had returned, who needed aid of any sort. They provided food to us, which was really great. There is a group, I believe it's Franklin Graham's group, called Samaritan's Purse. They were there pretty quickly and they provided as much help as they could. They provided manual labor, all free of charge, of course. They sat and prayed with people and just gave comfort to people who really needed it. There was people within my park who really needed somebody to sit down and pray with them. That was a tremendous relief for a lot of people. There were people from, again, all over the country who immediately went to action, started collecting supplies, [like] generators, building supplies, heavy equipment, and just made a beeline. We've had people, just within my tiny community of the mobile home park. We've had people from New York, New Hampshire, Washington state, Utah, Colorado, all helping. More recently we had a couple of gentlemen from Australia come in and help us do some manual labor, as well. That was kinda surreal to have that happen because they're from so far away, for one, and for two, I never in my life thought that somebody would actually approach me and say g'day, mate.

TW: [laughs]

CW: So that was kinda cool, too.

TW: Has that intensity of relief maintained [now] these months later as Harvey has dissipated, as people have returned home. Is that [incoming relief] the same level at which you're seeing? Or is that [relief] even [still] needed in Rockport?

CW: It's still needed. It's not there like it once was. People have to get back to their lives, and that's a hard reality that the people of Rockport have to face. Initially there was that great outpouring of support. I still believe that we have a lot of support. There still are a lot of people helping out, but it has diminished drastically. We still have FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] there. We still have Franklin Graham's group, the Samaritan's Purse is still there, the Red Cross is still there. The Salvation Army is making a much larger presence. I guess maybe they had a large presence before, but they are definitely making a very large presence right now [by the time of this interview]. They are making themselves felt around the community, which has been really great lately, because it's very much needed. But a lot of the heavy machinery that initially rolled in has long rolled back out. Many of the volunteers who had come down to help out have largely rolled out. Many of the churches from Corpus Christi still have a presence there, but not nearly as large of a presence [since the beginning]. Unfortunately, because Rockport and the surrounding areas are so small, I believe it's easy to forget that they're there, and that such a tragedy occurred. It's just kind of on the periphery, and it's not in their sights like it was directly following. Which is understandable.

TW: Because of the damages in places like Houston, one of the country's largest cities, do you think that's gonna take some of the attention away from communities like Rockport, Portland, Ingleside?

CW: I think that it's twofold. Because Houston is so large, and they did sustain an incredible amount of damage with the flooding that happened there their spotlight is much, much larger than ours. But because they did, and are still working through all of that [wreckage] it brings people back down to Rockport. At least their minds back to Rockport, Portland, Ingleside, and Victoria. All those places that are much, much smaller. So I think it's still staying in people's minds, but it's not nearly as fresh. In addition to that, the devastation of Puerto Rico. They [the people of Puerto Rico] have so much to go through. It's just an uphill battle for them. That's eclipsed us and they have so much more devastation, and they need the resources much more than the people of Rockport do right now. Rockport is back on the power grid. We have phones. We have internet. Like I said, power. Grocery stores are back open. Some of the smaller stores are beginning to open back up again. You can get gas. Those things are great for Rockport. In light of the recent events that have happened in Las Vegas, just outside San Antonio, and so forth, the spotlight's no longer on us, and that's, in a lot of ways, good for us, too.

TW: Just for clarification, which events are you referring to?

CW: The mass shootings that have occurred in the last month and a half.

TW: What has been your experience working with FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] thus far, and the experience of those living in the park?

CW: Sure, my experiences have been largely positive working with everybody. I applied for and received money for my travel expenses and for alternate lodging because I cannot move back into my home. It wasn't a great amount of money but I'm very lucky in that I still have a job, I can go to work, and I can pay my bills because I have a steady income coming in. In addition to that with the [American] Red Cross, I did receive some money as well. That is about all that I've really applied for because, as I stated earlier, I'm in a lot better position than a lot of the people around there, and I want those resources to go to the people who need them more than I do. Now, to answer the other part of your question, other people's experience with some of these organizations is not positive. There are many, many, many people who are not at all happy with the [American] Red Cross. There was a lot of rumors going around, some of which I believe have been substantiated. Some of them were just wild rumors about where the money was going. Many people believed that a lot of the money that was coming in was being diverted to the CEO and being given to workers. There was reports that many of the donations were being cherry-picked by some of the workers for these organizations, and the good stuff was being taken out and reserved for either the workers or for friends and family. Simply thrown away if they didn't believe that they could use it. In addition to that the small business administration has been hit or miss with a lot of people. Some people have received loans, and the people that have received loans are very grateful for them. They have incredible interest rates that these people have [been given]. I mean, it's the closest thing to free money that anybody can get. We are applying for a business loan, rather than a personal loan, and it has been a long, drawn-out process. We've been working [going] on two months trying to get our business loan going. It is just a long frustrating process. The one thing that I did notice is that the people who work for, for FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] and for the [American] Red Cross that I have encountered and that many of us have encountered, they truly are empathic people, and they want to help out. They provide as much aid as they possibly can. Even though people may or may not be receiving the money, at least they're not coming up to people who are being rude and looking down on them. I think if nothing else, that is a very big thing for the people affected by Harvey to experience.

TW: Are there any other roadblocks that you've come across in terms of insurance-wise?

CW: As far as insurance is concerned, I know that for us, insurance was not really much of an issue. My home was very old. It was put into the park, when my grandfather bought the land. He bought the land in sixty-eight, the home was put in in nineteen sixty-nine. There's not an insurance company in the world that will touch my home.

TW: [laughs]

CW: I understand that, and luckily I didn't have any real claims to speak of. My home is currently unlivable, but that is due to [that] I had a tree fall just over my bathroom and create a hole, and I [also] have a good amount of black mold in my house.

TW: Oh, goodness.

CW: How much of that was in there before the storm? It's tough to say. [laughs]

TW: [laughs]

CW: In reality, that has not been a huge issue for me. It has been a big issue for other people. My neighbors have been battling with their insurance. Some insurance companies are trying to exclude things, trying not to pay out, and that has been very frustrating. These people have paid for their insurance. They have stuff written into their insurance that says that they should be paid right now, to have their homes repaired, and the insurance is balking at that. To say that I'm pissed on behalf of these other people is an understatement, because it's just a huge injustice to everybody that is having issues right now, having trouble, getting back on their feet after everything that's happened.

TW: So, Chris, you had mentioned earlier you had a couple of students who have gone through this experience and have been affected in some way. I know this devastation occurred right before the start of the new [school] term, correct? As students were coming, were moving onto campus at the time.

CW: Well, they were supposed to be moving onto campus.

TW: They were supposed to be moving onto campus. Okay.

CW: Yeah, they set all of that back.

TW: How has that affected the school term?

CW: I can tell you that, [laughs] as the end of the fall semester, draws very near to us, many students are finding themselves saying that, oh my goodness, this has been such a short semester.

TW: Sure.

CW: Dealing with everything that we've dealt with, even those that weren't directly in the path of Harvey, [even though] many of my students are from Corpus Christi, or San Antonio or Austin, where the devastation was not nearly as much. But they have seen what's going on, and it affects them on many different levels. They have friends and family who were affected by it emotionally. Many of my students are having a tough time

right now. I will say that my students are an incredibly resilient bunch. I have been very impressed with them, even those that have experienced a lot of grief and heartache through this. They are making it through the semester. Many of them are doing very, very well.

TW: Excellent.

CW: They have set their sights on something, so it is very impressive to see them, and watching them has given me strength going through this, as well. I feel like if they're able to do it, then I can absolutely do it too.

TW: That's wonderful. I'm sure you've been asked these questions over and over and over again as many people living in this area have. Not to repeat yourself, but is there anything you feel like that we didn't answer here tonight or that you want the world to know about this?

CW: I guess there are a couple of things. To re-emphasize the outpouring of support has been tremendous. Coming together, working with people. There's a mobile home park that is just up the road from me, [which] serves a different population, but it was recently acquired by new owners, and as they were going through the process of purchasing it, this was earlier in the summer before Harvey was even a raindrop. The new owners had contacted me to discuss the area and best practices. My mobile home park is a very, very nice park. We maintain it very well. We have the best people living there and the guy who was buying the mobile home park up the street absolutely understood that. He reached back out to me in the days leading up to Harvey, throughout the whole ordeal and we shared resources, we shared insights and tips and there was times that we just sat on the phone in disbelief at everything that was going on. That was another experience that will probably stick with me forever. Just a random person who I'd never met became a source of comfort for me which was really interesting. Then there's the opposite side of that spectrum. Going back to the other side of that, there were a tremendous amount of people that helped out. There were a tremendous amount of people, less, but still a lot, who tried to take advantage of the situation, and that is something that still is happening and continues to blow me away. People were coming from out of town to Rockport because they heard that there was free supplies being given away. There was diapers being given away. They heard that there was chainsaws being given away, generators, clothing, all that stuff, some of it brand new, still in the packaging. They were driving to Rockport to get these free items, and they would openly brag about how people of Rockport aren't gonna get this, because I got it. They would essentially pick fights with people over, over it. I mean, one person described it to me as kind of like a Black Friday at one of the big box stores. Somebody would pick up a box of diapers, and somebody else would try to steal them right out of their hands, and that's just crazy to me. There was also many contractors who were not approved by the city who tried to take advantage of situations. My neighbor had a huge tree, um, uh, fall onto his house. Fall is a little bit of a dramatic word. The wind blew it, and his house was what was keeping it up. It did cause

some damage to his house, but his house was still standing and livable at that point. We had a group of men come through the park and ask if there was any trees that needed to be cut down. This was in days following the storm. This was also before I knew that the city of Rockport and Fulton were issuing permits, basically, for contractors to come in and do work. These guys drove around the park, they saw the trees that were down, and they gave us a quote. A couple of my residents decided to take them up on their offer, and, and they were okay, cool. It's when they came to this huge tree that was leaning against this guy's house, that would be chore, just a chore to remove, and they said it would cost \$12,000 to have it removed. Two days later we decided not to use them. Two days later, we had a professional tree trimmer from Corpus Christi come by and I asked him to look at it. He said, well, we're gonna have to get a crane in here, we're gonna [need] a group of five to seven men come in here. It's gonna be a big, big ordeal to get this thing taken out, but we can do it for \$1200. This other group was gonna charge us \$12,000.

TW: Wow.

CW: Just the people trying to take advantage of it. They were never heard from again, these people. Their phones were turned off when we tried to call them again to see if they could be competitive with that price, and they would not return [my] phone calls. Eventually their phones were just turned off altogether. We had heard about another group fairly prominent businessman in the town had received a shipment of donated generators. He thought this was a money-making opportunity, and he began charging people \$500 apiece for them. He has since been charged for what he has done and he will face a very stiff penalty. Through all of this though, you hear about it, you know it's going on. I think that, I can only speak for myself, but I think many of the people of Rockport have chosen to not focus on those negative people, because they do see that there are some wonderful people who have come to our aid. It has surprisingly made our community stronger through all this.

TW: Well, that is wonderful. I'm glad to hear that even through these difficulties, through this chaos that Harvey has thrown into the small, poor community of Rockport, that recovery seems to be going on its way and that the people have, as a community, from what you've told me are standing together and I'm glad to see that there is still goodness in that community.

CW: It absolutely is. Yeah, it absolutely is.

TW: Well, Chris, thank you so much for sitting down with me tonight. I greatly appreciate it. I know the listeners to this recording are going to appreciate all that you have provided, as well, the breadth of information. Thank you so much.

CW: Absolutely. Thank you.