

Rosario Arambula
Narrator

Tabitha J. Adkins
Interviewer

October 28, 2017
At Starbucks, Weber rd.
Corpus Christi, Texas

TA: Can you introduce yourself and tell me little bit about yourself?

RA: My name is Rosario Arambula. I am originally from the Valley, but I've been in Corpus, roughly about 12 years already. I am a former student at Texas A&M – Corpus Christi and right now I just enjoy life.

TA: What did you know about hurricanes before Harvey? Have you ever gone through this type of a situation before?

RA: We had gone through one when I was little in the valley, but honestly at that point, I was so young that it was more about camping out at my sister's house versus actually being scared, because of not understanding what was going on. We had a scare in corpus, maybe about five years ago, that one was a little bit different. I was living on my own, my daughter was older, I was working at the local JCPenney's and I remember boarding up the retail store, there was a lot of flooding going on and we evacuated for that one. I was in a house when I came back I was very fortunate that nothing happened that was more of a scare than an actual hit. So this is the first one that I've been in that I was affected by, personally affected by.

TA: How did you first hear about Harvey, that you knew that it was going towards an area where you were going to have to leave?

RA: Oddly enough, telephone. I was in Houston and my daughter called me to bring back some water, because water was starting to finish. So then of course I inquired as to why water was finishing and she told me that there was a hurricane coming. Then I started to follow it through social media and then just online news casts from local station, since I was in Houston. So I came into Corpus as Harvey was just following right along with me.

TA: Where were you during hurricane Harvey did you evacuate or did you stay here in Corpus?

RA: We left. We evacuated, we went down to Harlingen. We went online and we checked the weather updates for San Antonio, Houston and in the valley area. The valley showed that it was going to get some water but it was more in the Brownsville area so when I looked up Harlingen which is the city I was going towards, it didn't look like it was going to be much rain. So we left two days before one and a half almost 2 days before Harvey and we turned right after Harvey.

TA: Why did you feel compelled to do this type of a recovery? Going out into the areas, did you just get asked or was it just something that you felt like you had to do?

RA: I don't know if necessarily asked personally, a friend of mine Lavern decided to post on social media that she was going to be out distributing meals if anybody wanted to help. My

health situation for the past several years has limited what I was able to do, and this was the first opportunity since I have recovered from health issues to be able to actually go out and do something, so I took advantage of it. I like the idea that when I was able to get out into the community and help somebody as well with the idea of being a part of something that would make a difference to somebody else. It started as a group of girls or group ladies and a couple of men. And we went and we distributed and eventually we branched off and it ended up being more than one group. It is the example you set because at the end my daughter and her coworker and her husband and they need to make another little group so how can we affect the community if we don't show that one person can make a difference.

TA: What areas did you visit?

RA: We started with Gregory, Ingleside, Aransas Pass, I ended up in Port Aransas and I think that was it.

TA: When you first went into these affected areas like Port A, Rockport, Bayside, what did you find? Was it something you expected?

RA: No. You see on TV and you hear about it and it's on social media and you're watching it and you think you're prepared to see it, but when you see it is completely different. It is never what you expect. You expect to go in there and just see some trees brushed over and some damage but when you're actually involved in the community and you go in and you're handing out food and there's a gentlemen comes out, an older gentleman comes out, and he is wanting to tell you that he's got a tree going through his roof and there is nobody to help him. You're not expecting that. You're expecting to see the damage you're not expecting to feel the emotion, or to hear the stories that they make it more personal so it was worse than what I expected.

TA: What were some of the problems you encountered when gathering supplies?

RA: Believe it or not the heart is that most people don't help. You do you have your close knit friends or family that does want to help and they don't think you're crazy for doing it. You come across the problem of it's hard to get somebody to contribute to something they don't want to personally do or feel that it's important to do. I came across a lot of "oh good job" and "oh somebody should do something like that" But it was never "well let me go out there and help you" or "let me go out there" or "you know what come by and you can pick up anything everything whatever" we were expecting anything. I think that's more of what I encountered and you just think the whole community is going to come together and it doesn't.

TA: When you were going on your feeding these people. Were you having problems finding like the milk, the eggs, water, and bread.

RA: Yes, absolutely. I had a friend bring in bread from out of town for me. My brother brought in water for me from out of town and soap. We were not able to locate even bug spray for the residents out there because that was one thing that they were requesting. We had trouble finding up tortillas to make them breakfast tacos when we're doing the breakfast runs, we had trouble with burger buns, we had trouble with eggs with limited you were limited on how many eggs you could purchase, and even that started to become scarce. We definitely noticed the limited supplies that were available.

TA: How long did you continue these deliveries and how long to the group themselves continue?

RA: I probably did about a week. I had to return back to Houston for personal reasons, so I did about a week. The group switched over, we did for the first part of the week probably the last day of the week or the last two trips that we did were more supplies than food. There was still some snacks in there but it got to the point where people are asking us more for the cleaning supplies, just trying to get the stuff back in order, trash bags, mops, bleach, just your basic let's try to clean and recover our home. The group kept going another week, they probably did at least two weeks all together. Because we switched, we collected food for the animal shelters, we did the supplies, we did food, and pretty much anything we could get our hands on that we knew people needed.

TA: What were the kind of reactions you received during your deliveries and how did the people you were helping out respond to them?

RA: We had both kind of responses we had to the responses. We had the response of complete gratefulness and shocked that there was somebody out there wanting to help, because we were not a part of an organization. Laverne that started the group, I knew her from school, from A&M. Some of the ladies that she also brought into the group, there were from where her children go to high school. So it wasn't an organization, we were just people who knew each other, who were willing to come together to work. So they were surprised when they would ask us if we were a part of an organization and we said no and we just wanted to help, when we were handing out hot meals. They were just very thankful and grateful for what they did receive. We would hear sometimes, "oh I'm glad it's something hot, we're tired of eating sandwiches. We haven't had electricity to warm up anything, or cook anything." So when they received either a hot breakfast taco or a burger, it was a reaction you didn't expect to see, because we have burgers and tacos everyday and don't think anything of it. But when they have been eating cold sandwiches for a week and we told him we had a hot meal it was heaven sent to them, because they were tired of eating cold cuts. Every now and then we did counter the reaction of "oh no I don't need anything" and they were kind of standoffish. And at first I first almost took it personally, "like I'm trying to help you and you don't want my help," but then I had to step back for a minute and realize they don't know me, no more than I know them. And the same way for us we didn't knock on any doors, because we don't know what we're going to encounter on the other side of the door. I am sure they felt the same way they don't know what I'm putting in my breakfast taco that I'm giving them, or they don't know who I am or if I'm out to use that as lure to cause damage to them. So after the first couple of times I started to realize that it wasn't so much that they didn't want to help, or didn't need the help, but it could've been that they were scared of the help, since we weren't an actual organization.

TA: That makes sense. So through social media we've seen inspiring acts of human compassion and kindness and helping not only their loved ones but also strangers. Have you witnessed any acts of courage anything that inspired you in the midst of this tragedy?

RA: Well, I was already volunteering with the girls in distributing, and I got a phone call from a brother of mine, that we had a falling out maybe like 10 years ago almost. He called and asked me if he could come stay at my house in Corpus, because he was going to bring a group of guys from Harlingen to go cut trees down in Rockport. He didn't know anybody, wasn't asking for anything, he brought everything required to sustain himself out there working and they came in they brought supplies, additional to what they were going to use and they went out and cut trees,

starting at six in the morning that first day that they were allowed to go into Rockport and came home when the curfew was kicked out. They did it for the weekend and they came back and did it again, with no regards to the expense they were incurring, no regards to “who is going to compensate us for anything” I saw that personally with in my own home and in my own surroundings. Being back-and-forth between Corpus and Houston, I saw a little bit of that in Houston as well. People were just showing up to help, we heard a lot of stories when we're handing out food, that “the neighbor just came over, and I haven't talk to my neighbor, I just moved into the neighborhood and they help me put up my window coverings. Something that typically wouldn't have been done on any other circumstances, so you did see the community come together when it needed to.

TA: You said you were in Houston. What kind of devastation did you see there compared to what we have here?

RA: Wow. As horrible as it's going to sound we were almost a drop in the bucket compared to what I saw in Houston. Where my sister lives, where I am staying, it runs through Buffalo Bayou. So it is the area that I traveled. The whole streets were closed, because there was nothing left, there was nothing but devastation. And when the street finally opened and you drove through the street. The debris piles of trash, were probably twice as tall as I am covered both sides of the road and was even being dumped in the median in the center, because people had nowhere to put the trash. The smell was getting bad, the debris was everywhere you could think of, and it had affects as far as even traffic. When I went back in after Harvey hit to Houston when I left corpus, what should've taken me 30 minutes to drive, took me 3 1/2 hours. Because all major roads due to Buffalo Bayou overflowing were shut down and you were going through neighborhood streets. You saw the aggravation and the irritation of residents because they couldn't get in and out of their driveways. Everybody that was on the road driving through these typically really quiet streets, everybody in Houston was on that same little street.

TA: What have you learned about yourself during this type of an occurrence?

RA: About myself, probably that I can affect more than what I think I can. I thought it was just going to make an effect to the person I handed a hot meal to. But in reality I affected my daughter, because she decided to take part, she affected her coworker, which affected her husband and her mother-in-law. So I think I've learned that even one voice or one small action can actually make a ripple effect that just carries on. I learned that if you really want to make a breakfast taco or a burger you will find a way to produce the product needed for it. Either calling in favors, driving to 10 different stores and you realize that it isn't such a shame to spend your last \$10 on making hot meals for somebody else. You always want to say that if it's my last \$10, let me hold onto it because I might need it. But in a time like this you learn or you realize that those \$10 didn't make a difference to you but \$10 lets you feed 50 people. And it was like ok, give it up. It was a lot easier you know, and I learned for myself that you just survive by whatever means necessary. You survive. I survived listening to all the chaos in all the social media but going out there and doing something. I survived by showing the next generation like my daughter and her coworkers same age group, that you can survive, you just got to get out there. And if you just put it out there, it'll eventually come around and people will gather and you see the appreciation so you just learn to survive.

TA: I remember you said that you were not here during Hurricane Harvey, so you came back home after hurricane Harvey and then you left again after a week, went to Houston and then came back. Was there anything wrong, did anything happen to your house, down in your neighborhood?

RA: My apartment complex was very fortunate as far as we did not lose power. I did not stay the whole duration, I left. Harvey hit and then I came back one or two days later and my neighbor stayed in Corpus and she was back in the apartment the following day after Harvey, and we never lost power. My apartment complex did have some damage, there was the typical trees down. Which no trees landed on any of the housing, so that was great. It was just tree debris all over. Some of the buildings though did have the roof pulled off and so across my building there was four apartments affected, because the roof got pulled, so the water went in and they had damage. My personal unit just smelled wet, My door had expanded from the water, from where the water was hitting my door, my door expanded so when I opened and closed it was a harder open and close, but that was probably the extent of damage to my apartment. It just smelled wet, like it had almost gotten wet but there was no water damage in the house, there was no windows broken in my personal unit. But our air system is connected to eight units, so I'm not sure if it was maybe a unit in the back and the smell just got to carry through. But no, I was very, very fortunate that I had no damage to my home, except for picking up roof debris off my front area and stuff like that but no, nothing serious happened to my actual unit in the apartment complex.

TA: Is there anything else that you can remember from what you did, or anything else that you want us to know?

RA: It's not over. We went out there for a week, and we handed out hot meals and we saw the shift of people who were starting to get electricity coming back on. There were more means of them finding food and supplies, but it just shifted. The next thing they needed were the cleaning supplies. So the cleaning supplies were what was starting to run out and was being requested. But there are still trees out there that still have to be cut, there are still homes that haven't been repaired because the money's not there, the insurance hasn't gone through. Or unfortunately it's elderly couples who don't have anybody to go out there. I think I've learned and even though the hurricane devastated us for two days, and we were without electricity week and we're here now over a month out. But there's still so much damage to Harvey and it's kind of been forgotten. I had to go to Port Aransas about a week and the pile of debris that they've started, a landfill I guess you could say. You probably stack two houses on top of each other and the debris still taller. We're not done. Everybody has kind of forgotten about Harvey and it's no longer on social media, you don't see what's being done out there anymore, but there is still so much work to completely recover from Harvey that I think we forget. We are so in tune to what's the newest, hottest topic on social media that we forget that even though there's a new topic, the other one does still exist. And there are still many people that are affected, or have been dislocated from their homes, because there was nothing to go home to. So, I think we just need to keep in mind that, we can be devastated and hit for two days, recover for a week. But it's going to take us almost a lifetime for some of us to put everything back together.

TA: Thank you for your time.

RA: No, thank you.