

(Tape 1 of 2)

An Oral History Tape Transcription

Of

Memories of Hurricane Alicia

Interviewer: Martha Mayo

Interviewees: Judy Smith, Irene Sanders, Lt. William Jackson, Norman Dykes

1983

JS: Came in at ... My partner and I were on the evening shift.

MM: What do you do? What is your ...

JS: I was working in, uh, Waste Water Collection.

MM: Oh, uh-huh.

JS: And, well we started out on our regular duty and ... then about, I guess it must have been 10 o'clock. I know it had gotten dark. And things really started picking up. It was exciting going out there, but we had to go take some diesel out to that Larch [sic].

MM: Ya, uh-huh.

JS: Out in Brownwood. That big machine. And we had to fill up this 55-gallon barrel with fuel. And we had to load it on the back end of this flatbed. We were standing out there and I was about to blow away. The wind was really picking up.

MM: Oh no.

JS: But it must have been only about probably 80 miles an hour then. It wasn't that bad, but it was remarkably dark. I remember that. Then we drove that out there and, gosh, by the time we got out there, it was really picking up.

MM: Was it still around midnight?

JS: No, it was before midnight, I guess. And we got that delivered. Made it back to the yard. The headlights wouldn't even do any good it was so – I guess it was the rain and the wind. But the road I guess it was just because I knew where the road was. But even with streetlights wouldn't do any good. They just, they weren't piercing the darkness at all. And ... then I lost my car keys, and I had to drive all the way to my house and get another set. And I live out way past I-10. And I, we made it back. That was right before the poles started coming down on Garth Road. That's where all those power lines came down. And we were kind of going around them and dodging that. When we got back into town and then, then that's when the storm really hit. That was, I guess it started coming in about 2:30. Then we just had to sit on the yard. Watch the – I remember whenever somebody would open the door, any of the doors, the panels of the ceiling would just suck up.

MM: Oh! Where is this that you were staying?

JS: At Public Works.

MM: Oh.

JS: Cause Dave and I were on the night crew and they told us, well y'all are just staying. So we didn't get to go home till four o'clock Thursday afternoon. So we were there 24 hours. Then early Thursday, it must have been – I'm not sure of the time, everybody was so tired – but it must, it was after daylight so it must have been eight o'clock. And City Hall must have gotten a call that there was a pregnant woman that an ambulance couldn't get to 'em because of the high water. And they asked if they had a truck available to go get it, to go by and pick her up in knee-deep ...

MM: In Brownwood?

JS: No, this was on, uh ... Bowie.

MM: Oh.

JS: 211 Bowie. Which wasn't that far from the warehouse. But by that time it was daylight and we went out, got in the flatbed and drove over there. And I couldn't believe the devastation just in that short four blocks. There was an old building right on the ... let's see that's West Main, about the 500, 600 block. And it was a two-story structure, and all that was left it was a wooden struct-, well the front part was a brick. But all that was left, the whole top story was just sitting on the bottom.

MM: Was it that orange building?

JS: Um-hmm. It was just ... I couldn't believe it. And the trees, those huge trees that were just like little toothpicks just blown over. But we made it down to the lady's house.

MM: The hurricane was still blowing?

JS: Oh, ya. It wasn't as bad. It was still raining a little bit, but the, it had really calmed down considerably. And we just ran, picked her up. Helped her into the truck and all five of us squashed into the truck and we met the ambulance and then, so he wasn't sure that he could make it back to the hospital because of all the trees and the water. So I said well ok we'll follow you and if anything happens, we'll kick everybody out and y'all get her in the truck. But they made it, and uh ... we went back to the yard. Tried to catch a little bit of sleep. But nobody really slept, I don't think. That was ... that's the first time I've ever been through a hurricane.

MM: Ya.

JS: I don't think I want to go through another one.

[Laughter]

MM: Not like that.

JS: That'll hold me for several years I think. But ...

MM: Did you work down in Brownwood at all? Or go down that way?

JS: No, huh-uh. They really weren't letting ... just Jerry Traylor and Miller Casey were down there with the Larch [sic]. And, I think mainly the Street Department was out there. But they needed us to stick around in case they needed somebody to run the flatbed because all the dump trucks were trying to help get people out of different areas.

MM: Did you go anywhere else in the city?

JS: Oh we had a call to go rescue a police officer that was, they thought when the call came in that she was hurt. So we made it out ... that was down on Ward Road. And we made it. Somehow we made it down 146, which was a disaster. And by the time we got there, another PD was there, so they just loaded her up and took her off.

MM: How had she been hurt?

JS: I guess a limb must have blown through her car window or something. She wasn't really hurt, but I think it just scared her more than anything. I'm sure they were getting a little tired, too. But ... I think that ... I don't want to go through another one of them. And if I am, I hope I'm not working.

[Laughter]

MM: Ya. Ya.

JS: But it was ... I'm glad we could help the lady. I really was. I think I'dve been pulling my hair out ... But she was real calm. It didn't seem to bother her at all.

MM: She's just gonna go and have her baby.

JS: Ya. She hollered at her mother, "Come on, Mom. Let's go. City's here."

[Laughter]

MM: Did you have to drive through water? Was there any water on the road?

JS: Oh yes, there was probably about two foot of water that we drove through. And that was just a real short distance. We had ... it took us about 15 minutes to get from the warehouse four blocks up on Bowie Drive. And at first I didn't think we were ever gonna get there. I may, I think I was more leery of the power lines being down and driving through that water. Or stepping out of the truck and ... But I kept telling myself, well maybe they got the power off somewhere. They're not hot.

MM: That would be scary.

JS: But just sitting in, you know, in that warehouse and listening to the whole building just ... felt like it was breathing. And tin was flying off parts of the building and ... it was really ... really something else.

[Tape cuts off]

JS: Ok, the way I understood, it, the first time the winds were about 80 miles an hour. And they figured that the water surge would be anywhere between six to eight-foot. But then after it hit, it crested at 11-foot. Eleven-foot surge of water. And I think that's why we had a lot more damage and more people were trapped than what they predicted. Cause like out in Lakewood, those people got hit. I mean there was – the water line on those houses you can still see 'em. And they're above the windows. And that had to have been four foot of water. And Lakewood's pretty high anyway.

MM: Ya.

JS: And ...

[Tape cuts off until 10:43]

MM: September 12, 1983, talking with Irene Sanders, Secretary of the Baytown Public Works Department.

IS: We started to work on the afternoon of about 4:30, five o'clock – on the afternoon of the 17<sup>th</sup>. We spent the night, the entire night there, in the preparation for this storm and then rescue during the storm. We dispatched from this location to all the Public Works units that was involved in the rescue and the clearing of the streets after it hit. We were constantly in contact with the emergency center at the City Hall, following their instructions as to the rescue units they had. We had several – what you

would say – just common people that did some heroic things. And I think the City of Baytown should be proud of the Public Works employees of the job that they've done. And mostly at the Service Center, we did the dispatching, and when the phones went out then we used the radio on an emergency basis on a power plant that we had.

MM: What were some of the heroic things?

IS: Well, one of them we had two men that went into the water after two ladies.

MM: No, I didn't hear that. Where was that happening?

IS: Ok. It's in Brownwood. These two ladies were stranded and could not get out of their home, and, uh ... Rick Walsworth and Kenneth Judd went out of the boat into the water and got the ladies back to the boat and helped 'em get in and carried them to safety.

MM: Oh my goodness.

IS: Another incident out there I believe, Mr. Johnson and some more of his employees went in after about five people. Some of these were children. And they, uh Mr. Johnson carried the baby out himself.

MM: Who is Mr. Johnson? [Inaudible]

IS: He is the – I don't know – he is the street, street foreman.

MM: Emmanuel Johnson?

IS: Emmanuel Johnson.

MM: Ok, I found his name. Will he be a good one for me to interview?

IS: He would be a good one. He worked the entire ...

MM: I can get him through you?

IS: Ya. Um-hmm. He worked the entire storm. He never went home. And I know this about Emmanuel, he is a single parent. His wife is dead, and he left his children at home and worked the entire thing. His youngest child is probably ... not quite two years old. His oldest one home is probably 16.

MM: Oh my goodness.

IS: That's right. Our men.

MM: And they had water in their homes. A lot of those men.

IS: Ya. Not this particular home. That's right. A lot of these people had water in their homes when they went back.

MM: Oh my goodness.

IS: So I feel like they did real well, you know?

MM: I believe so, too.

IS: I don't know if you talked to those people that went in to the apartment building on East James.

MM: No, I haven't. No I have not.

IS: Ok, Fred Johnson and a crew there went into Taylor Lake Village Apartments, I believe is the name of it, on East James at Kilgore. The roof caved in and there was a man there with a broken arm with his family. They went in and tried to get the man to leave and he would not. So, Fred went inside – well he had some medical knowledge as an ambulance driver – and he went in to help. They had one crew that went on in to Missouri Street after some people and the trucks could not get down. And the people were afraid to wade out because of the electrical lines.

MM: Ya.

IS: Now this was some more of the Street and Water Division that went in after this.

MM: Is that [inaudible], you would be able to tell who these people were? Or who would be aware about it?

IS: Ya, I can tell you part of them, right. Fred was another one that was involved there. Louis Martinez. And I'm not sure who the others – these people could tell you who went in with 'em. We used a, I believe it was First Baptist bus to go in there, but we couldn't get to 'em. The water was too high.

MM: When did you all start using the First Baptist bus?

IS: I believe that was on the 18<sup>th</sup> after daylight. That we went in.

MM: Because all the city vehicles were in use?

IS: Well, yes. And it was a larger van than we had to carry people out.

MM: Oh, uh-huh.

IS: We used most of our heavy equipment out in Brownwood. We did have some heavy diesel trucks that traveled on the local roads. And immediately after it hit and after they could get out, the Street Department, Water Division, Waste Water and all started clearing streets trying to get people.

MM: But y'all only lost one truck in the whole thing, didn't you?

IS: One truck.

MM: And that was because – they told me – because they, he couldn't, all the street signs were down and he couldn't see the location. I know.

IS: Ya, but they did save the people, you know.

MM: Ya.

IS: Sure did.

MM: Why was it that, um, they had so much trouble with the amphibious thing? They didn't have a key to it?

IS: No.

MM: Why was there ... what happened with that?

IS: It had ... it takes someone that knows the amphibious, or what we call the Larc.

MM: Was that person not available?

IS: We did get him. He is a mechanic, and he is, you know, Paul Battenhorse can operate it.

MM: Uh-huh.

IS: And it takes someone that knows, or that has operated it during the war to know what they're doing.

MM: Oh.

IS: Paul had a pretty bad experience with it. He didn't think he was gonna get it turned. The wind was blowing him out to the bay, and ...

MM: Oh now, I didn't ...

IS: Did you ever interview Paul?

MM: No, I haven't even heard his name.

IS: Paul worked the ... Paul Battenhorse.

MM: Just like it sounds?

IS: Ya, um-hmm.

MM: Force or Horse?

IS: H-O-R-S-E.

MM: He works for the city?

IS: He works as a mechanic.

MM: Ok, now I can get him through you?

IS: Ya, you can get him through me, ya.

MM: Ok.

IS: Paul worked the entire time there. And he could tell you the story about the Larc, and he didn't think he was gonna turn it, but he did and brought it in.

MM: Oh.

IS: It is being repaired in case we have any other problems.

MM: Ya. I understand that was hard to ... cause you don't turn that like you turn a regular boat.

IS: No, you don't. No, um-mm. You don't maneuver it like they did the small boats. Sure don't.

MM: And when you give it power, you can't turn at the same time or you [indecipherable]

IS: I don't really understand it. I've never ridden on it. But, uh, I have seen it, and know that I understand it, you know, it takes someone who knows what they're doing to operate it.

MM: Uh-huh.

IS: Uh, let's see if I could think of another incident that ... oh, ok. We went out on Marlin Lane three times after some people.

MM: Now where is that?

IS: It's close to Roseland Park.

MM: Oh, I know where that is, ya.

IS: Yeah the Canal Street's just before you get to Roseland Park.

MM: Ya.

IS: We went in three times after these people. And they would not come out.

MM: How much water did they have?

IS: They had a lot of water. Because our diesel trucks wouldn't go in.

MM: Oh.

IS: It was too much. Our two men waded in to their door, and they still would not come out. Because we could not get a vehicle to them.

MM: Well ...

IS: But there was no way.

MM: They weren't willing to wade out?

IS: No, they were not willing to wade out.

MM: Why?

IS: I don't know.

MM: You can't blame 'em if they didn't want to get wet. [Indecipherable]

IS: No they had water in their house.

MM: Ya. [Laughter]

IS: They had water in their house. I don't know why they didn't come out. But we went the third time and the boys waded in neck-deep water to try to get those people.

MM: My goodness.

IS: See?

MM: That's tough to imagine.

IS: It is. Sure it. Because that's dangerous, you know? It really is.

MM: Were they pretty disgusted when the people wouldn't come out?

IS: No. You know, if they want to stay, fine. You can't make them come.

MM: Ya.

IS: But, uh ... it's very ... I don't understand why they wouldn't come after they had made an effort, and they had called asking that we come.

MM: Ya.

IS: And that's the problem.

MM: They had called and asked to be rescued?

IS: They called asking, ya.

MM: And then wouldn't ...?

IS: Then would not go. They were safe. The water went down and this was in the morning 'cause it was [indecipherable] ... you never knew.

MM: I just don't understand that.

IS: I don't either. Sure don't. Sure don't.

MM: Alright, and did you just work around the clock without sleep? Or what did you ... when did?

IS: Yeah we went to work. We went home at 4:30 on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

MM: And then when did you get back home?

IS: 4:30 in the afternoon. I come back at seven o'clock on Friday.

MM: I bet that was a busy day.

IS: It was, except we were without electricity except for the emergency generator. And the phones would not, you know, they were out because of the trees and all.

MM: Uh-huh.

IS: So, it was hectic.

MM: Where did y'all even begin cleaning up? How did you ... how?

IS: We began that night people calling in the main – we began on the main thoroughfares to clean. Cut the trees off so we could get 'em through. And then we just cut the city crews work day and the clearing through the streets so that people could pass and get in and out. We had a crew in Brownwood for quite a while after that. In fact, we still have a crew in Brownwood pumping the lift stations at night, you know, there's not electricity there yet. But we have to do that for the houses that's still left up on the hill in Brownwood. Those boys are still working overtime.

MM: My goodness. But y'all are now back to your regular hours yet? I, they were telling me how they were working 13 and-a-half and 14 hours a day, seven days a week that week after the storm.

IS: We still have some people that's working seven days a week 12, 13 hours a day. That is the ones that's helping with the brush cleanup.

MM: Ya.

IS: We still have contractors here that's working seven days a week. Clearing mostly limbs and tree damage is what we're getting now. We're not getting any heavy appliances or anything. We can't. 'Cause the tree limbs and all is a fire hazard to have, so we have get that. But it's looking better.

MM: [Laughter] Ya, it does. If you drive around, you can tell it's a lot better.

IS: Ya. Hopefully this week maybe we'll draw it all together.

MM: Oh. I wonder what it's cost to do all that?

IS: I don't know. Probably, I think the estimate is \$750,000.

MM: Gracious.

IS: When you interview Norman Dykes – I think he's to come tomorrow – he'll be able to give you all of that. He's worked very closely with it.

MM: Oh. Now were the police working with you all this time, too? They were all just ...

IS: Ya. Everyone. It was a complete, city-wide ...

MM: That's, that's what I hear from everybody that I ...

IS: Ya. Everybody worked equally.

MM: Equal operations.

IS: Right, right. There was no ... And the smallest to the largest worked together.

MM: I'm not used to that. Everybody worked. I mean ...

IS: That's right.

MM: Nobody ran home to take care of their ...

IS: No. We come to stay. Sure did. A lot of 'em left their families at home.

MM: Ya.

IS: Sure did.

MM: That's pretty amazing, I think.

IS: Well, when you ...

MM: 'Cause if something has been [indecipherable]

IS: I don't understand because ...

MM: [indecipherable]

IS: No I don't believe so. I don't believe they have that cooperation and that dedication from employees.

MM: I heard that from somebody, though, he ...

IS: And I think that's real dedication.

MM: I do, too.

IS: I really do.

MM: Leave your family in a situation like that.

IS: Right.

MM: Did you get water in your house?

IS: No.

MM: Oh, that's good.

IS: We had one tree fall on the house, and when it hit the house it just stopped, so, neither one of us was home. I was the first home at, well I went home about 2:30 in the afternoon to see if I did have any damage. But, uh, did not.

MM: Did the time pass fast?

IS: Yes it did.

MM: While it was happening?

IS: Ya. It did. Sure did.

MM: Ok, now how come people weren't calling the city? Were they? I mean, and saying [indecipherable] during the hurricane [indecipherable] would they call?

IS: Ya, they – ya. Because we – right – because we went in like trees on houses and people didn't know what to do or where to go.

MM: Oh, ok.

IS: And things like this. This is what we did during the ... but it wasn't as bad until after it finally died down and all the trees, uh ... I imagine it hit about somewhere around four, five. And we began to try to get people out then.

MM: Oh.

IS: But during ...

MM: Now Brownwood, they started the night before about 10 o'clock, didn't they?

IS: Oh ya.

MM: That was when the water started to rise?

IS: Ya. I think Brownwood went under about one o'clock I think, but I ...

MM: Yeah that's what I'm gathering so far.

IS: Yep. It went under completely. We had one big scare: I misunderstood when I went I thought we had lost our men and all when that truck went under. It, you know, it really, you're all concerned because

they were told to come on, get out, there's nothing else you could do. And they put their life in order to save those people that stayed.

MM: Ya.

IS: And I can't understand. Well, I guess I can understand because they've always been, you know, we holler every time the tide rises.

MM: Ya.

IS: And I, one of the men made the statement to one of the employees that, "well, I didn't think it would get over three or four foot."

You know, and that's easy to weather. But it didn't.

MM: Have they thanked, have the people thanked you all, or for the ... ?

IS: No, not that I know of.

MM: Oh.

IS: But I'm sure they're grateful, but they have such a loss.

MM: Ya.

IS: You know, that ... that in their mind is the most important thing right now.

MM: I guess you're right.

IS: They have such a ... that must be a devastating feeling to know that ...

MM: It must be.

IS: I would feel completely lost and not know. I think ... I think they appreciate it. I really do. But, uh, you know, it'll take time.

MM: Ya.

IS: In time they ... they probably appreciate the city more than they did, you know. The workers themselves. They might not appreciate what they're doing now by condemning Brownwood, but I think they'll appreciate the employees more.

MM: I hope so. [Laughter]

IS: Well I think they will, you know. After they all dies down, I think they really will appreciate what has been done; what, you know, will be done.

MM: Can you think of any other funnies? Or, not funny. I don't mean funny in that way.

IS: I can't even think of ... No, I can't even think of any odd situations that ... happened. I know we kind of got excited one time when the water started in our building and the tin started flying. We just knew we was gonna lose the roof and be ...

MM: Is that the same place Judy ...

IS: Yes, she works out of there.

MM: With y'all? Ok, she was talking about the building feeling like it was breathing almost, in and out.

IS: It did. It did. It did. We were, we are in a metallic building.

MM: Oh, ya.

IS: And it shifted so that the ceiling tile - it just rose, you know, and moved around.

MM: Now, is this what they're calling the 'Command Post'?

IS: No, Command Post is in Wooster.

MM: Ok, that's what I thought. Ok.

IS: Right, right.

MM: Just wanted to make sure I was understanding.

IS: Now we're on Lee Drive, 1200 Lee Drive.

MM: Ok.

IS: But, it's an odd feeling of being in a metallic building and you don't know how long it's gonna be ... We thought the tin - we have a little utility building to the back - we thought that tin was coming off our building. But it wasn't.

MM: Oh!

IS: We was in a, oh we had two to three inches of water.

MM: Oh my goodness.

IS: Inside the building.

MM: And yet you were still trying to ...

IS: Ya, we stayed.

MM: ... carry on in spite of ...

IS: And I don't think anyone ever got afraid. Because it was a group of us.

MM: Uh-huh.

IS: And you never really thought ...

MM: You were just there to help.

IS: Ya, the only time that I really kind of got concerned about it, uh, I believe it was Mr. Dykes called and said they're predicting 20-foot tides and 150 mile an hour wind. Well 20-foot tides, we would have went under. I said, well, our building is not gonna stand. He said, 'Oh well. We'll face that when we get there.'

[Laughter]

IS: It was really done with a calm atmosphere. It really was.

MM: That's wonderful.

IS: It was.

[Tape cuts off]

MM: Tell me about it.

IS: A lady and man – I think they were trying to find their house. As you go down the hill, it's one of the first ones that's gone, and they would go to this mailbox that was still standing. And one of 'em would stand here, and the other one would walk across. And I know those people were trying to find their home.

MM: Oh. And it just wasn't there anymore?

IS: It wasn't there. You know?

MM: Oh.

IS: And I saw this young man - he must have been, oh, probably close to 30 – come out in tears rolling down his eyes. He had waded in this mud I guess looking for anything they could find. And Jack Carter's house, the little ditch that goes by Jack Carter's house, there's some people out there just picking up little things. You know, and looking at 'em. To find out I guess if they were something of theirs that they had lost.

MM: Oh. How sad.

IS: They ... In one part, there was a rabbit cage, and all the rabbits were left. They were in this cage.

MM: They were alive?

IS: No, they were dead. They had drowned.

MM: Oh. Well those people who were in the two-story. Now they told me about rescuing the five people, but they didn't say, they didn't describe the house. It was ...

IS: It was two-story house.

MM: Uh-huh.

IS: Let's see. What is that? Bayshore I think. And when they brought the, when the water went down, there was nothing of the second ... of the first story except the studs, the outside studs standing. And those people had spent the night.

MM: I wonder if they knew what was ... how much had blown away?

IS: No, not until they come got, you know, until the water receded, and ...

MM: Ya.

IS: There was water over people's roof. Some of 'em have nothing. But ...

MM: And they all tell funny stories about the dog.

IS: Ya.

MM: Everybody wants the dog rescued.

IS: Right, right. So it's ... well, ya. Me, too. I brought mine to work with me.

[Laughter]

MM: Ya. Well I was excited that they ... that they all of 'em mentioned a big, shaggy dog because he got on the roof and didn't want to get off before they finally got back to higher land.

IS: It must, you know, I ... this really ... the sad things that you see there. There was a beautiful piano washed out. And there was a nice table with like a [undecipherable] hanging up in a tree.

MM: Oh my goodness.

IS: I ... the people's ... the things they'd worked for all their life. You know. And people where their chil-...

[Tape ends]

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Transcribed by: AS 1/19/18

[Tape 2 of 2]

IS: ... lunch there.

MM: Having a picnic out, huh?

IS: Having a picnic. But there was no fun.

MM: Not much fun.

IS: No fun. You'd see children's toys washed away. Bicycles and the little three-wheel carts and things just washed. Window shades and clothing hanging out in trees that was left. Bushes.

MM: How high up? Did the water go? I mean, what, 10 or 11 feet isn't that about the ...?

IS: Ya, ya. Ten and something feet. Almost 11 feet.

MM: Goodness.

IS: An unusual thing that you would see would be a water tap, a water meter, and the water would be shooting up out of it. The houses would be washed away, but yet the water lines were still there. One thing that really was amazed me: everything in this house was washed away except a commode. One commode was there.

MM: [Laughter] That's all that was left?

IS: Yes! Right, right. And it was funny, you know.

MM: Ya.

IS: But it was sad. But it was real funny to see that one commode.

MM: Ya.

IS: And someone's tree house was left.

MM: [Laughter]

IS: Ya. Just the treehouse was there. It was, it was, you know, real disheartening. I wish I had not gone. But I probably would not have been satisfied had I not gone.

MM: Oh, that's right.

IS: But it was ... on one of the streets I think it – maybe Schreck or somewhere along there – there was four big ducks or geese, they were geese, wondering around on the highest road. They had gone to high ground and they were coming back.

MM: They were headed home, huh?

IS: Yep. Sure were.

MM: I'd love to go down there, too, to get some idea to put together with what I've ...

IS: You need to. Right. Right. You need to see. They probably a lot of people have gotten their things, you know. But the things that you see there wouldn't be any way I don't think they could save it. No way. But it, it would help you put together what you're trying, you know, to do. It would.

[Tape cuts off]

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[02:44]

WJ: ... everybody else, I came to work Wednesday morning before the storm, the 17<sup>th</sup>. Assistant Chief told me that I was gonna be in charge of Brownwood, which I suspected anyway. And so, I guess I started out there about 12:30 trying to get things ready and get phones put in. And then I worked ... about 10 or 11 o'clock that night. And uh, of course last word we had then was that the storm wasn't going to hit until seven or eight o'clock in the morning, so I went home to get some sleep. Well I got to bed about 11 o'clock, and then 3:30 – you know I was gonna get up at four anyway – but 3:30, my son come in, woke me up, said a tree just fell on our car. And it fell unfortunately on my city car and right dead center to his car. Demolished it. Big, about 30-inch diameter oak tree. So I had to call somebody to come get me to start with.

MM: This was in the middle of the hurricane?

WJ: This was in the middle of the hurricane. And I'd went home, went to sleep, and it hit while I – I think it hit right before two o'clock.

MM: Ya.

WJ: And while I sleeping the tide came over the roads. Course I had Sergeant Glenn was down there in charge when I left. Of course he was still there when I got there with ... Lieutenant Shaffer was the graveyard ...

MM: Is that Paul Shaffer?

WJ: No, that's Charles Shaffer, the Lieutenant.

MM: The Lieutenant Shaffer you said?

WJ: Ya. He's graveyard lieutenant. And he was out there when I got there. Or, sorry, Glenn was there and we'd already had, I think it was six people assigned to work 12-hour shifts. Let me count that to make sure. Yep. Six peop- men and a sergeant for each shift.

MM: Oh, ok.

WJ: But see what they put ... these were all on 12-hour shifts. By number 10 it said 24 hours. That's what they sent me right there.

MM: [Laughter] That must have puffed you up. Ya.

WJ: Oh, ya. I knew that was gonna happen. Well right before I got there, of course, I like I say the water had come over the Perimeter Road. And they were down there, they had been down there in dump trucks and, well patrol cars, too, before the water came over, telling everybody to evacuate. And they got some people out in the trucks and all. But then after the water came over the road, they had this, what they call the Larc, this Amphibious Vehicle. They were down there in it cause that's the only thing we had to, you know, get down there in. We had a flat-bottom boat. There wasn't no hope for ...

MM: That was a rented boat? The boat they rented?

WJ: I don't know where they got it.

MM: Oh, ok.

WJ: But, uh, it might have been. I knew they had it out there, and uh ... Course with the wind blowing as hard as it was and waves and water, you couldn't use it at that time. And Sergeant Cochran was graveyard sergeant. And him and Officer Pardon were in one of the city dump trucks. And they went down on South Burnett and rescued a lot of those people there. And, well, Sergeant – we sort of got worried about him cause we couldn't get him on the radio. But Sergeant Cochran was out directing the truck backing up, you know when you turn in the driveway? And he stepped off the culvert. Up to his neck in water, drowned his radio out. [Laughter] So we, I had to, we had to send a couple cars down there and you know they wouldn't answer their radio we didn't know what happened to him. And all the sudden he showed up at the ... so he was at the old Wooster water office [indecipherable]. But right before I got there is when the front door blew off. About, I guess about 3:30 in the morning, and they nailed it shut. Well, then the roofing then blew off a little later. And it started leaking and all the ceiling tiles started falling in. Oh it was fun and games for a while, I tell you.

MM: Ya! [Laughter]

WJ: But, about six o'clock in the morning, course they'd be, like I say, this Larc had been out rescuing quite a few people. And then they'd bring 'em to the command post there, and we had a patrol car take 'em down either to the Church of Christ or Baytown Junior High. About six o'clock in the morning, Bueller Langford who is supervisor over at the Public Works, he apparently they had one, see the Public Works people were helping us. They were, in fact of the matter a Public Works employee was driving a Larc. Apparently he was the only one knew how to drive it because, uh ...

MM: Let's see, that Miller Casey?

WJ: I don't know what his name was. I never did get it.

MM: You don't know the name.

WJ: But uh, anyway, Bueller Langford come in here asked if I could send one of my officers out with 'em you know. Course the officers had been on it with 'em the whole time anyway. But he wanted to know if I could send one of my officers out to learn how to drive it. And then this guy got to telling me how hard it was to drive in all that wind and rain, and they got blowed out in the bay one time, I understand.

MM: Ya, I know.

WJ: And they had a problem getting back in. So I went out and looked at it. Course I was thinking about going out on it myself, but after I looked at it - I don't know whether you've seen it or not - but it's flat all across the center. And there's no handrails, nothing to hold on to. And the wind was blowing at that time around 100 miles an hour. Due to get stronger. So I decided to have 'em park it, you know, it was getting to where it wasn't safe to be out in it.

MM: Well where they rescued people, where'd they put 'em?

WJ: I guess they all ...

MM: On that flat top with no handrails?

WJ: That's the only place they could put 'em. And just hold onto 'em I guess.

MM: I had not even thought about that.

WJ: Ya. Cause when the wind's blowing that hard and the waves was coming in like they were, they go to tell me how hard it was to manage down there, and you knew it was bound to be going up and down plus the wind. So I just told 'em to park it till it calmed down some. And apparently they'd already gotten everybody out cause that's one of the worries we had that, you know, whether we got everybody out or ... I say we got everybody out, there was two men I know of that spent the storm on the roof of their house. And one of 'em, we had tr - I say we - they had when he was down there, they finally talked him into letting his wife and children go about four o'clock in the morning. But he was gonna stay. And he did stay. And when he got out, I understand he told 'em that he stayed up on the roof all night fighting snakes cause snakes was getting up there, too. Cause his house was under water. And there was another one, another man that spent the night down there that - I don't have any idea who he was cause we never saw him, you know. Some people say he swam out, then I heard that there was three boys that lived down in Brownwood that had come across from Lakewood in a canoe to check their house. And uh, the Coast Guard helicopter was circling up there and pointed 'em where the guy was on the roof. And they carried him in and let him off on land, and then went back to Lakewood. But, like I say, that's two different stories. Some people say they, he swam out, and some people say he was rescued, so ... More than likely he was rescued, but that's a long swim. Cause this was after the hurricane winds had been blowing and all, but ... but the water was still over the whole place down there. Couldn't get down there anywhere. And, course the biggest problem, course the problem during a hurricane is one thing. Then as soon as the wind quits blowing and all, we had to put up road blocks to keep people from going down there. And this is one of the big headaches was then trying to keep people from going down. They would come ...

MM: Sight-seers, you mean?

WJ: The, even the property owners. See now everything was underwater.

MM: Oh, ok.

WJ: And, uh ... but we had this one boat that we'd patrol, patrol it around every once in a while, but uh ... It was all underwater up to the eaves and over on some of the houses. And the home owners would come down, and they wanted to go down and look at their house. There wasn't any way. We tried to tell 'em, you know, you can't get down there. And they still won't believe us. And ... but we had – well not a big problem – we had quite a bit of problem with some of 'em. They just, you know, just couldn't understand.

MM: Ya.

WJ: So, course now they still ... I stayed out there until Tuesday after the hurricane. And by that time it was all calmed down, the water was out. See I'm in charge of the [indecipherable] division. And, so I stayed out there that long. By that time I pretty well give out anyway, so ...

MM: I bet.

WJ: So, uh, right now, you know when you have one road blocked and the rest – the roads blocked, but we got one that they go through and back through and all.

MM: What was your job? I mean while you were in the command post you were ...

WJ: Well, I was in charge of the whole operation in Brownwood itself. Well actually part of Lakewood, too, as far as that goes, but ...

MM: The keeping up with who went on, who went down there?

WJ: Who went, who ...

MM: That must have been hard to do, wasn't it?

WJ: Oh, yes. It got real dif-, well during the storm we had to try to keep up where our people were. Because they were still out on patrol. Course I'd go out every once in a while and patrol around and see how things were. And so, I can remember the storm, when it really got to blowing hard I was out in it. The patrol car just went like this, you know. And, uh ... then, course then after the storm, we had to, well, issue passes to the people going down. They're still doing that really, but only the property owners and residents are the only ones being allowed down there. Well and you know, if you've been down there, it's pretty well wiped out most of it.

MM: I haven't.

WJ: Yeah. The especially the south side and west Bayshore. It's pretty well wiped out.

MM: Oh. Ya.

WJ: Well I, the part I go is all of it. They all have water. Like I say, the water was up somehow just in low spots, water was over the roofs. But that – every house down there in the low part had water up to the roof or higher. So you know they're pretty well demolished.

MM: Do you know who spent the night with the snakes on top of the roof? That must have been ...

WJ: Yeah well I, I know when we, you know, we had that Hurricane Allen scare three years ago. Well, some way or another I got – seems like every time they have a hurricane I get appointed down there.

But he refused to leave then. And of course he was lucky then. He sat on his tailgate of his truck during that, drinking beer. And the water then, the water just got up and started coming over the road and the tide went out. It just barely started coming over the road. I mean not enough to even ...

MM: Talk about luck!

WJ: Ya. Course he lives in one of the highest parts.

MM: Is he somebody I maybe could talk to? Or ...

WJ: Well he lives at the corner of Bayshore and McArthur.

MM: Who? Who is this?

WJ: I can't think of what his name is right now.

MM: Course he doesn't live there now.

WJ: Well no, see that's one of the problems. We've been getting reports from thefts and stuff down there. And they'll give their address down there in Brownwood, and you can't find 'em, you know, to do an investigation because ... they don't live there no more. They ain't never was gonna stay.

MM: Oh my. Depending on ... his might be a pretty good, pretty interesting story to ...

WJ: Ya. He could, like I said, I didn't get to talk to him. He, uh ... well, when they got him out of the boat, I mean out of the car, or out of the house and brought up to land, well, apparently he just left, you know. But his family, even when we went down there looking for him, his family come down Thursday afternoon, you know, they hadn't seen hide nor hair of him. Course we knew the whole thing was underwater.

MM: Ya.

WJ: So I sent the boat down there to check to see if he was there. Like I say, we were awful lucky that we didn't lose anybody down there.

MM: I think so too.

WJ: And as far as I know there was nobody injured. So, we're coming out like somebody might say, 'smelling like a rose'

MM: Yeah and only lost one vehicle I understand. Just the one.

WJ: Yeah one Public Works vehicle. What happened to it, the uh, apparently the water started coming over the road and a big four-by-four timber got up under the wheel and locked it up, and it wouldn't go. Of course it was just lucky there was another vehicle there, close. Because I understand the water, when it started coming over, it come over in a rush.

MM: That's what I keep hearing that it at first it was two inches over, and then the next within 30 or 45 minutes it was six feet. But it came up faster than anyone ...

WJ: Ya. Well, I think that's what they call the tidal surge, you know.

MM: Oh.

WJ: And ... some of the patrols down there in patrol cars, one or two of 'em said, you know, they were getting scared they wouldn't get be able to get out. When it really started coming over the road.

MM: Ya. That must have been scary. Well that's interesting. You wouldn't want to repeat that again any time soon, I'm sure?

WJ: [Laughter] No, no. I think I had enough.

MM: Ya.

WJ: But see, like I said, Thursday I worked 3:30 that morning till 10:30, 11 o'clock that night. Then I started cutting my hours down along after that, but I still spent 11 or 12 hours out there Friday.

MM: The people who refused to leave: did they think ... this time they could ride it out again? Or ...

WJ: Well, apparently. Well, like I talked to some people and they said, you know, they didn't figure the water was gonna get over two or three feet deep.

MM: And they've seen that before.

WJ: And they've seen that. They just stay there. But this time, you know, they got I think it, what? Ten, 11 feet I hear is the exact level.

MM: That's what I heard from Public Works.

WJ: Ya. But it was a lot deeper this time than it has ever been. When fact of the matter, some of the houses up on the hillside that never had water before, held water in 'em this time.

MM: Oh. That's sad.

[Tape cuts off]

WJ: Sergeant Cochran and Thornton, course they had some Public Works people with them, too. But, she's an elderly woman. I mean real, quite elderly. And they had, must have had a good seal on her door, or her doors, because the water on the outside got two-foot higher than it was on the inside of her house.

MM: My goodness.

WJ: Well they come knocking on her door and finally got the door open and flooded her house. And she's telling me about this, and I thought she was complaining, you know. And she said, "Ya, he said, and that guy just told me said just wrap yourself around me and let's go."

MM: Aww. [Laughter]

WJ: And she said, "I went." She really wasn't complaining, she was, you know. But the way she started out telling, I figured, oh. 'Course I've been hearing complaints all day – this was on Thursday afternoon – I've been hearing complaints, I believe it was Thursday afternoon or Friday. You know, time sort of gets mixed up. And you have stop and think, you know, when was this? Cause Thursday and Friday seemed like a week.

MM: Yes they did.

WJ: Ya. But anyway, she said, "I just, I told ya: wrap yourself around me." [Laughter]

MM: Ya. [Laughter]

[Tape cuts off]

WJ: I don't know what kind of dog it was. Black with a white stripe around him, around it so. And one of our patrolmen, I didn't even get a chance to ask him if he'd take him down to the command, I mean the shelter. He said, "I ain't putting that dog in my car." [Laughter]

So we got one of the Public Works people with a pickup truck to carry him down there.

MM: Well they talk about one man wouldn't even go to the rescue – wouldn't even go to one of the shelters – because they wouldn't take dogs.

WJ: Ya.

MM: He just sat in the rain with his dog rather than get separated.

WJ: No I didn't hear that one yet. [Laughter] There was ...

WJ: This one bunch in a house didn't want to leave. And they said, "When the water gets high enough we got a boat tied to that tree out there."

WJ: They were sitting around drinking. And they said, "When it gets high enough, we'll get in our boat and leave."

WJ: And the guy who was trying to rescue him, he said, "What tree?"

WJ: He said, "That one used to be out there."

[Laughter]

WJ: So they decided to leave then.

MM: Ya.

[Tape cuts off]

[17:43]

MM: September 13, 1983, talking with Norman Dykes of the Baytown Public Works Department.

ND: And preparation-wise, I think we, we didn't have as much warning as we normally have, you know, with hurricanes. And we were not knowing where it was coming in or if it would come anywhere close by. And I think that there was quite a bit of hope that it would come in quite a bit south of us. And we thought we might get some high tides. We had our normal, you know, we asked our normal standby people to be available to take care of the Perimeter Road pumps. Pump the water out of Brownwood if the tide gets too high. And I guess it, that evening, I know I went home and had a bite of dinner. I guess it would have been a Wednesday evening. And told my wife I was gonna run back up there to see how everything was progressing. You know, see if the storm had gone south of us. When I got back up there around 7:30 or eight, and I expected when I went in just to stay about maybe an hour just to check on make sure everybody was in, you know, doing their jobs. Well when I went into the operations center at City Hall, I ... it was pretty evident that things were getting a little more excitable and that it was probably not going as far south as they thought. And they were beginning to get, you know, expect the

worst or something worse than what had been expected, and so they, you know, the decision was made that on my part at that time, you know, it was something I had to stay with and it wasn't a matter of going back home. And I contacted my people, and course those people looking after the pumps were already in position as they had been all day. And, but I had other people when we realized that the tides, when we had the, I guess, the first report that the tides could be four to six feet. Tides go over the Perimeter Road around four-and-a-half to 4.7. So it was at that point that I asked for the, our folks in Public Works to get the airboat and the Larc and everything ready to go. And I remember that, I believe it's Mike Pruett told me that the airboat was not working properly and that they didn't want to, it'd be dangerous to get it out there for fear that it wasn't dependable. So I asked Mike Pruett to go down to the local boat rental place, and rent another boat and to have it out there on standby and have it ready.

MM: Was that an airboat, too?

ND: No. It was, I think it was just a regular boat. And he had to rent a motor to go with it and everything. So Mike got some boats, one or two boats together, in preparation. Smaller boats. And then of course we had the large, the Larc. And our mechanic, Paul Battenhorse, is the normally I guess is sort of checked out on that Larc and drives it and ... He was at the garage and when we discovered then that, or when things got so bad that we felt like we needed later in the night, you know, to use the Larc and start evacuating people with the Larc, well that's when we ran into problems with the due to the high water. Paul was, his vehicle that he was installed out here down here on West Main. Here at 201, close to City Hall. And he was delayed in getting out to the Larc. And that's the reason that the others had to start the Larc with their makeshift operations [indecipherable]

MM: Well I've been wondering. How that ... why?

ND: But he was the man that had the key and that was to operate it, couldn't get to it. Because of high water. So that created a problem there, and some of the excitement that happened out there regarding the Larc. But think as the tides went up, we started to, we went through our normal Public Works procedures, and uh, when the water got up over the – well first they put out the word all evening to evacuate, or they recommended evacuation. And then later when the water – well I guess about three or 3:30 that afternoon, the tide started going down. And it nearly went over the road about three o'clock that afternoon, Wednesday afternoon. And then it began to drop. And I think everyone that lived in there had a false sense of security that they were ok and, and we still had reports of four to six feet tides coming in for that night. But the people that lived in there, they saw the tide going down, and so they started partying. I went out that afternoon later and there were people out there fishing like I've never seen before along Crow Road. Wading out in the water with their tackle and fishing all out in the area there around the pump and ... and for the first several hundred yards there along Crow Road there was a lot of fish, people fishing. And later, later in the evening well then my folks that were out there reported that people out there were starting to throw hurricane parties and they were partying and so on and were kind of laughing or ignoring the ... the idea that the tides were gonna get high again that night. Because they could see the tides dropping. They had receded down from nearly running over the road. And they dropped down a foot or a foot and a half lower than they were around three or 3:30. So we had some trouble getting people to believe that it, the warnings. And a lot of 'em, you know, didn't really believe 'em until later when the water began to come over the road.

MM: But then it started coming fast, didn't it?

ND: Started coming fast and they had the, I remember we asked the fire department to go out and to warn the people. And started getting people you know they did evacuate people, or people drove out as best they could. And then when the water started coming in the road, my Public Works people were driving the Perimeter Road. We got five sewer pump stations out there as well as the Perimeter pumps and they were told to turn those off before they went under water so they wouldn't short out motors and things like that. So they were driving the road and helping people get out, in the water and turning of pumps, motors, killing electricity to our various facilities. And I guess that continued right on into the point to where people couldn't get out any longer. Our people just barely got out with our trucks. And then of course then I started having reports that there were still people out there who couldn't drive out. And that's when I was on the telephone with the uh, with the center there in Wooster, the command post or whatever they want to call it there. Jean Sheppard was on the phone and I talked to her quite a bit, and then I talked to Mike Pruett who was there with her. And they were describing to me what was going on out there on the ground. And I remember late in the night when they told me that cars could no longer get out and there were still people in there. And that's when I told him they were gonna have to get the Larc and go in and get 'em. And so I gave the ...

MM: Was that sometime around midnight?

ND: Probably would have been. I was losing track of time. It probably would have been after midnight. That's when I told them to get the Larc and go in if they had to get those people out. And so I told Mike and the fellows that if they indicated they were trying to start it and then they later, a few minutes, I heard that they had it started. And of course at the same time I was talking to them trying to get it started and get them out to get those people, the mechanic was down here hung up on West Main in the high water. And we were having to route people around the low areas on Market over here in the low areas due to high water. Trying to get, and we were having people trying to get the City Hall to help us out with the center there with the lack of electricity. We were having problems there with the emergency generator at City Hall, so. That really hampered our efforts there. And so we had people scurrying around everywhere. But it was, you know I was in telephone conversation with Irene over at the Public Works Service Center there on Lee Drive. And with the shed out at, command post down in Brownwood. And just worked to coordinate between those two groups. And you know, the rest of it I, pretty well what those folks had told me. And I know during the storm, I was amazed that the phone lines stayed up as long as they did. To see all the damage later after the next day because we ... during the height of this storm, we had telephone communication.

MM: No kidding.

ND: With Wooster out there at the command post, and I had communication most of the time with our Public Works facility out here. And also I had phone communication with my wife at home. We had two numbers at the house, and one of those was out, but the, I believe the 4-2-0 number still worked. And my wife would call to see, you know, check on the progress once in a while. She was calling about once every couple hours I guess. And she called once during the height of the storm and said they were in the hallway and, man that ... she said she hear a ... well first she called, the first time she called, she called to tell me that the big oak tree by the side of our house had fallen down, that it leaned across the driveway. She called to tell me it was down. And about an hour or so later, she called me back and told me that she heard a loud noise on the roof and she thought something had fallen, but she didn't know what it would have been. But it looked like all the trees were still out there. And about 30 minutes later she called and said water was running out of light fixtures and air conditioning duct vents, and that she's

opened the stairway there in the hallway where they were and that my ... that they had their flashlights, and she had the candles and the lantern and all this all prepared like she's supposed to. And she said my son went up in the attic and there was four limbs sticking through the roof. And apparently a pine tree had fallen and water was coming through. And anyway he stuffed garbage bags in the holes around the limbs and put pans under it, pots and pans to catch water. And so I told her that was fine, not to worry about it, that's all they could do. And so about an hour or so later, well she called back – I guess it was about daylight – called back and said the large oak tree in the front yard had just fallen. And it was across our front sidewalk, but didn't hit the house. So at that point I told her don't call anymore, we've only got about five trees left. [Laughter] I don't want any more phone calls about trees falling.

ND: But it was pretty well over by then. We had, you know daylight was coming. I guess when it really looked the worst, we were within probably, and a lot of people were wanting, were wanting to bail out so to speak. Irene, the group at Public Works was, had weathered it real well, but the building over there was, it's a metal building and it was, they could feel it moving and the ceiling tile were lifted up and they could tell the building was under a strain and I think it was, you know about a half hour before daylight. And we had the same thing in two or three areas where people were started wanting to move to another location. I had some people calling us wanting - we had people calling us, had somebody call from a mobile home that wanted us to send somebody out to help them get across the street to a house. Had calls like that.

MM: Oh.

ND: And I started you know when I got those kind of calls I just told people there was about another half hour to daylight and just to stay where they were, don't move. Cause the wind was such out there that ... most of the calls, people were real concerned about their elevations and should they do, you know what should they do? And at 30 minutes before daylight, you know, my advice was everybody stay put. That was dangerous to be outside walking around with all the flying debris. And I guess the, you know, after daylight came, and everything was over, looking around I was amazed that no one ...

[End of tape]

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