

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewees: **Dorothy Lynne McGee**

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Interviewer: Roberta Terrell

Transcriber: Megan Moore

Location: Oral History Fair, at George Memorial Library, for possible inclusion in the Fort Bend Museum's exhibit, *Tropical Impressions*.

8 Pages



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*Dorothy Lynne McGee*

*Transcript*

TERRELL: This is an oral history for the Fort Bend County Historical Commission. This is Roberta Terrell interviewing Dorothy Lynne McGee on June 28, 2014 at the George Library in Richmond, Texas. Today we're discussing storm experiences. Some of your comments may be used to accompany the Fort Bend County Museum's upcoming exhibit entitled, Tropical Impressions. Let's get started, Lynne. Can you please tell us some of your storm-related experiences?

MCGEE: During Hurricane Rita, I was in Richmond. That's where I was living. It was back in 2005, and we decided to evacuate. (with humor)

TERRELL: Oh. (both laugh)

MCGEE: So I left work early after we prepared the building, and I went home and got the kids and we were all packed up. And we headed up towards Cleveland, Texas. And we get in the car, and it was free-going, free-going, free-going. and I pulled off somewhere on the north side of Houston to put a diaper on my child, on my son, and when we get back to the freeway and it was gridlocked!

TERRELL: Just that quick?

MCGEE: That quickly. It blew my mind. And it took us another hour to get to Kingwood. And it wasn't, maybe, fifteen, twenty miles. We get to Kingwood, and I stayed with my sister-in-law, with the two kids, and my husband was back fixing up our house. He wanted to make sure everything was fine and he had his plan of where he was gonna go. My mother-in-law called and she was freaking out, and said, "It's supposed to come straight through Kingwood. You need to come up to Cleveland." So we all got in the car and now we had my sister-in-law and her daughter (soft laugh) and we headed further up US-59 and through all the traffic and I think we ended up taking some side roads and making it. And when we got there everyone started drinking. (louder laugh)

TERRELL: It was a hurricane party?

MCGEE: It was a hurricane party...of women and children, and one man (still laughing). We had to move everything in her house and make sure it was weather proofed. We had a LOT of warning for Rita. Katrina had just gone through. I coordinated everything because I wasn't drinking. I had the two little kids. I made sure we put all the food in the hall closet. We put everything in the bathroom and filled up the tub. We had containers full of water and just kind of bossing everyone around. You know, girl scouts (with pride).

My grandmother wanted to move her four-poster bed into the living room because she wanted to make sure it was safe and she didn't have enough plywood. So we had to move grandma's bed. So we spent the rest of the day moving her bed – taking it apart, putting it back together in the living room. So the kids and their grandmother had somewhere to sleep, and we just slept wherever. And at about six thirty in the morning, after it had already blown through – we heard it come through, we go out, there's no power. The water's out. We'd even put by some water for the restrooms, because, you know, it's Cleveland. It's almost the country.

And I got a phone call. I got a phone call, and it's about six thirty in the morning, six, six thirty, and it's my sister. She and my grandmother had had to evacuate from Sugar Land. They'd put out a mandatory evacuation, otherwise my grandmother wouldn't have left her house. She was sixty-nine. They got in the car, and driving to Huntsville and stopped for gas. And while they were in line for gas, my sister decided to use the restroom, which was right next to where they were in line. She got out, and when she almost got to the front, the person in the car next to them said, "Hey I think there's something wrong with your grandmother." And she went back to the car and she had died.

*[Editor's note: From the City of Sugar Land: No mandatory evacuation order was ever ordered for Hurricane Rita. State and regional officials issued a "recommended" evacuation notice to all of Southeast Texas because of the record winds and intensity of the approaching storm and the expected landfall in a large populated area following so closely on the heels of Hurricane Katrina's devastation less than 4 weeks earlier. Rita was the 4th most intense Atlantic hurricane on record and the most intense Gulf of Mexico hurricane ever recorded with winds reaching 180mph.]*

TERRELL: Oh my heavens.

MCGEE: And so she calls me once all this has happened. They called the ambulance, which took a while to get there. She still had no gas, no way to leave, and – oh my gosh, how old was she? Eighteen...maybe?

TERRELL: Tough job.

MCGEE: Nineteen? Yeah, and she was pretty sheltered. They didn't want to let her go with them to the hospital but she eventually made it into the ambulance. They took her to the hospital, she was in a waiting room, and she called me, "Granny's dead." And I said, "What?". And she said, "Well, Granny's dead. I'm at the hospital in Huntsville. What do I do?" And I said, "Well you need to call Mom." Like, you always need to call your mother.

And so she called my mom and my mom couldn't get AAA to go get her. They wouldn't go up there. And so my mom drove to Huntsville and made it back to her house in about three hours. Later on they had to go back to Huntsville and arrange everything and have her shipped back.

TERRELL: So she went to Huntsville and picked up your - ?

MCGEE: She went to Huntsville and picked up my sister. And we sat at my mother-in-law's house with no power, no electricity. We'd forgotten my son's shoes, and he was learning to walk, he was a toddler. So we used duct tape and taped cardboard to the bottoms of his feet.

TERRELL: Oh my heavens. (quietly)

MCGEE: And after I got the phone call, I said, "You know, I need a drink." (both laugh out loud)

MCGEE: And everyone woke up because I was walking through the house and I told them what had happened. And that was our wake-up for the day. And then I went and sat by the door and waited for my husband to come get us. (laughing).

TERRELL: Well did she have a heart attack?

MCGEE: She had a heart attack. And died.

TERRELL: It was a major heart attack.

MCGEE: Mmm-hmm.

TERRELL: Goodness.

MCGEE: She had heart disease, but it was, as far as everyone knew, under control. And her high blood pressure was under control. But it was really her not taking care of herself, and then stress because she wasn't planning on evacuating. And then Rita didn't even hit us in Sugar Land.

TERRELL: I know.

MCGEE: And it came through where we had evacuated to! (laughs)

TERRELL: Well, what was your level of preparation when you were preparing to drive?

MCGEE: I felt like we were very prepared. I'd spent the day going around places, picking up preparation items for where I worked and I was able to get what I needed, that I knew I was gonna use in the car, and up there. We get a lot of warning now, before storms happen and I feel like, overall, we're a lot more prepared than we used to be.

TERRELL: I think so too. What was your level of anticipation? I mean, were you anxious?

MCGEE: I was very anxious. I didn't want to leave my home. I didn't want to go up to my in-laws, even though I love 'em. I wanted to be at my house. You leave everything behind and you hope it's still gonna be there. (laughs).

TERRELL: That's true, you don't know.

MCGEE: Especially after Katrina.

TERRELL: How was your house when you got back?

MCGEE: It was perfect! Nothing had happened.

TERRELL: Did you board up anything?

MCGEE: My husband had boarded up things. He'd taken it down before he came and got us. And it looked just like when we'd left, except everything had been cleared out of the back yard. We'd made sure to do that so that if there were winds it wouldn't hit the windows.

TERRELL: What are your feelings about acts of nature?

MCGEE: Nature is crazy. (laughing) You never know what's going to happen until it happens. We had warnings that it was gonna go in this direction and that direction, and then we finally decided to leave, that's where it hit. You never know.

TERRELL: Did you have a feeling of being powerless?

MCGEE: Yes. Yeah, and you can't control the other people either. And people's fear just makes them crazy. I could not believe how people were acting when we'd stop, or when we got back on the freeway, and it hadn't even hit (laughs).

TERRELL: I know.

MCGEE: It just really made me have very, very strong feelings towards all of the survivors from Katrina, who HAD lost their homes and had to evacuate completely out of the state. I couldn't even imagine.

TERRELL: Well, how WERE the people acting?

MCGEE: A little more frantic. I mean, people out here are usually pretty laid back (laughs). They get angry, but it's still...laid back anger, "I'm mad at you. Ok, well we'll just keep on going." But in this, it was people clearing the shelves in the gas station, nobody wanted to obey the lines, nobody wanted to follow the rules of the road. There were people trying to use the HOV lane, and I just couldn't understand, because you didn't know where it was going to hit. If everyone just followed the plan, then it would have been so much smoother. But people's fear just makes them wanna run. And that was scary.

TERRELL: Do you have a spiritual belief?

MCGEE: No. It was just – it was just really scary – that's how people act. And nothing's even happening. (laughs)

TERRELL: They needed to wait for Ike (with humor) for something to happen.

MCGEE: And then during Ike, we stayed home. And it blew through. And we had some limbs fall down. Our street after Allison, they had really fixed up the drainage in Sugar Land, which helped a lot, but with the rainfall during Ike and Allison, the streets filled up and we had people canoeing down the street.

TERRELL: I've done that in Houston.

MCGEE: It was really funny. The water came all the way up TO the house, but not into our house. It was just a much calmer feeling – being at home.

TERRELL: And did you lose power?

MCGEE: We lost power for two weeks during Ike but my job was still with power, which was really lucky. It was a restaurant, and so I could go to work and bring food home. We actually bought a book called Apocalypse Chow. Where you can cook over a little burner, and it makes tasty food. My daughter wouldn't eat beans for weeks afterwards (laughs). But we made it through Ike a lot more smoothly. Just by being somewhere comfortable and being prepared.

TERRELL: Did you board up your windows?

MCGEE: For Ike? We boarded up some of our windows. We taped up others. And we used cardboard because we didn't have enough plywood. But it was, the feeling that if it's gonna happen, it's gonna happen, and we'll have to deal with it then. We do have two attic entrances. It's not comfortable, but if we needed to we could get onto the roof, which wasn't unheard of.

TERRELL: Not after Katrina.

MCGEE: Yeah.

TERRELL: You saw a lot of people on the roof.

MCGEE: We had plans with the cats and the dogs, so I feel like it was just – it's a lot better when you're in your own environment.

TERRELL: Did you take any pictures off the wall or gather papers together, where, if you had to leave you would have it all?

MCGEE: I have. I already have all my important papers because I have to use them for different financial dealings, but I have them in a little bag in my organizer so I did grab those and we put those up somewhere so that we could just grab them if we needed to, but when you have kids, you start with, well I want to take their pictures, and I want to take this, and have these important things to me. As the storms go on, you're belongings, the list of what you HAVE to have gets much smaller (laughs).

TERRELL: That's probably very true.

MCGEE: And we have bins of food and we had plans on how we get them to the car, put them in the car, and if we have to go, we go. It's very soothing, having a plan (laughs).

TERRELL: I imagine. How many children do you have?

MCGEE: I have two. And now they're ten and twelve. And they were one and, I guess, four during Rita.

TERRELL: They were little.

MCGEE: Mmm-hmm. And we had plans on who was gonna get tied to who if there was a tornado or if the hurricane blew through and it was more than we thought and – ugh (laughs).

TERRELL: But you had a plan. That was wonderful.

MCGEE: Yeah.

TERRELL: That was good.

MCGEE: I mean, things I'd never thought of before – just having four women there who had been through so many different storms, and their different experiences really made it a lot better for that part of it. Where you could say, ok, well I remember this happened. I remember this happened, and this is how we handled it then. But it was still really scary.

TERRELL: Were these family members? Or were they neighbors?

MCGEE: My mother-in-law and my two sisters-in-law, all our kids, and one of their husbands. So I guess my brother-in-law, by marriage? (laughs).

TERRELL: Can you think of something else that I haven't touched on, or you would like to mention?

MCGEE: I'm just really impressed with how Fort Bend has handled (laughing) all the improvements needed from all the different storms. It seems that every time we have a disaster, the government kind of steps up and says, "this is what we need to fix". Whether it's the city government or the county – and I'm really impressed with that. It really has guided my decision to keep living in Fort Bend, as opposed to moving to Harris or further out.

TERRELL: Well I enjoyed hearing your stories.

MCGEE: (laughing) Thank you.

TERRELL: I really appreciate it. And I hope we don't have any more, but you know how to be prepared, for sure, Lynne.

MCGEE: I think we're due for one soon (laughing).

TERRELL: Hope not. Well, thank you very much for coming.

MCGEE: Thanks for having me.