

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **Paulette Shelton**

Interview Date: 07/07/2014

Interviewer: Jane Goodsell

Transcriber: Carlos Rubalcaba

Comments: Interview takes place in the Hotel Galvez
in Galveston Texas

22 Pages



This oral history is copyrighted 2014, by the Fort Bend County Historical Commission. All Rights Reserved. For information contact: Fort Bend County Historical Commission, Attn: Chairman-Oral History Committee, 301 Jackson St., Richmond, TX, 77469.

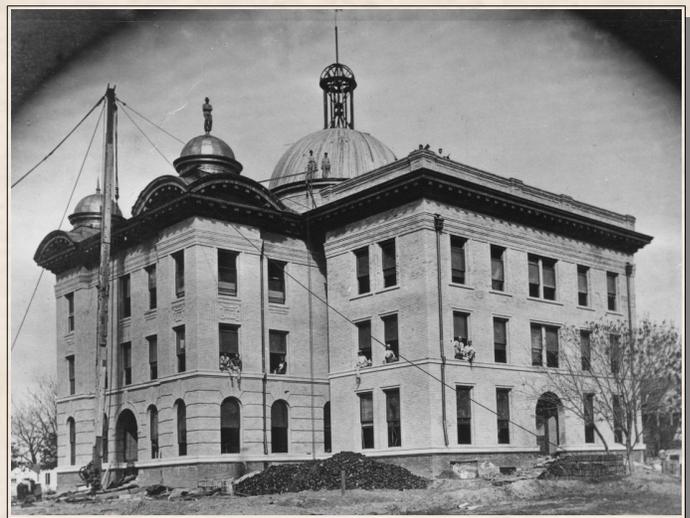
Terms and Conditions

This file may not be modified or changed in any way without contacting the Fort Bend County Historical Commission.

This file may not be redistributed for profit.

Please do not 'hot link' to this file.

Please do not repost this file.



Transcript

GOODSILL: Today we are discussing storm experiences. Some of your comments may be used to accompany the Fort Bend County Museum's upcoming exhibit called Tropical Impressions. So why don't you go ahead and tell us your storm experience.

SHELTON: I moved to Jamaica Beach, the other city on Galveston Island, in 1983. I closed on the house three days before Hurricane Alicia hit. So I've got a lot of history with the storms that come in off the gulf. Our house was not totally built at the time. It was a little bit damaged but nothing major. Through the years we've had primarily tropical storms, not a whole lot of intensity. Here and there you might have a category one or something like that. I can remember when we first started getting used to what you needed to do in evacuating. Every vehicle was packed to the brim and trailers packed with everything. Then the following year you would take the vehicle and no trailer. You redefine it down to a fine art, two or three days' worth of clothes and important papers. It took a little bit to learn how to do it.

GOODSILL: Tell us where Jamaica Beach is, for those people who don't know.

SHELTON: Galveston Island actually has two incorporated towns on it. The city of Galveston itself and then out on the west end of the island is another town that is incorporated, I don't know exactly when, maybe back in the sixties. It was developed and is called the Village of Jamaica Beach. We actually have a Mayor and city council. I used to be on the city council there. I was on the Park Board and I served on the city council. I actually ran for mayor once. It is a small community, everybody knows everybody. A lot of IBC's, Islanders By Choice. There are a few of the BOI's, Born On the Island. It's a good community, a good place to raise kids. I raised my kids out there. I was raised in the country on a farm down in south Texas. I always say I raised water babies, because we were here on the beach.

GOODSILL: How old were your children in 1983?

SHELTON: Let's see I had a sixth grader, an eighth grader and a one and a half year old.

ET 00:03:56

GOODSILL: So evacuating was quite a big deal. Did you evacuate in '83?

SHELTON: Well we weren't living here then. We lived in Houston. We bought the home with the intention of using it just for weekends. Once it was built I remember my husband saying, why are we going to continue to maintain two homes? I said, I don't know. (Laughing) So we moved into the house with only two bedrooms. There were five of us and we decided to add on to the house and make it our permanent home. The kids helped with the add-on, it was kind of a family project that we did over the course of a year or two. Eventually my parents and his mother were with us. I can remember a couple of storms evacuating with our parents and that was a bit of a challenge, they are not always comfortable with the accommodations for them. I remember one storm we had gone to bed, the predictions were that the storm was going to go into Louisiana. The storm kind of hung a left and was headed straight at Galveston. We were able to make it only as far as Sixty-First Street here in Galveston; it was us and the kids and the parents. My husband's mother she had several pets, birds, dogs and cats and stuff. We were fortunate in getting one of the last hotel rooms that was available there on Sixty-first.

GOODSILL: Why was Sixty-first as far as you could go?

SHELTON: Waves were coming across the Seawall and the wind and the debris, it was a challenge even getting the eleven miles in to Sixty-first.

GOODSILL: How close is your house in Jamaica Beach to the Gulf?

SHELTON: I am actually on a canal on the bay side; I have a beautiful view of West Bay. From the beachfront itself I am about a mile.

GOODSILL: So what is the danger in a storm? Is it flood or wind or both?

SHELTON: I think it depends on the storm. They are all different. Some of them are a wind event and your damages are more related to the wind. And other cases it's the water and the storm surge.

GOODSILL: Have you had water damage?

SHELTON: I have had water from tropical storms, maybe a category one, on the ground level of the house. Hurricane Ike was different; we had a good 8 or 12 inches of water in the main living area.

GOODSILL: Had you evacuated?

SHELTON: Oh yea! I was working at the Fort Bend County Emergency Management. I had taken the job in 2005 as transportation director.

GOODSILL: It falls under their offices of emergency management?

SHELTON: It does. I report directly to the court and we are a separate department. Emergency Management involves being ready to evacuate people for whatever the emergency is. It could be a hurricane, chemical spills or chemical emergencies. We have Amtrak train service that comes through the county every day. What if there was train derailment?

GOODSILL: So part of the transportation services would be used to...

SHELTON: To evacuate the whole population.

GOODSILL: The rest of the time it's used to transport the population.

SHELTON: It is.

GOODSILL: So we are back at Ike and you were at work.

SHELTON: I was at work. We were preparing for the storm well ahead of time when it looked like it was coming to Texas. I came home and I had two hours at the house to pull together a bag of what I needed. My oldest son was at the time a sheriff's deputy in Galveston County and assigned to the jail. He was on-call also. We had two hours to do what we needed to do at home and then go back to work. I reported in to the emergency operations center. With Hurricane Ike I was probably there five or six days, I never even left. Slept in the dormitory of the Emergency Operations Center. We do thirteen-hour shifts and worked the transportation desk primarily evacuating the Richmond State School in Fort Bend County. We also had some other folks that we took to shelters. We would get telephone calls in the Emergency Operation Center, 'there is someone here and they are stranded' and so we would dispatch buses to pick them up and get them to shelters. We had people who lost power and were dependent on the power for oxygen machines or even home dialysis. Our biggest responsibility is always Richmond State School.

GOODSILL: Where did you evacuate the people to?

SHELTON: The folks that were in county went to Red Cross shelters that were opened up just before the storm hit the coast. Richmond State School was evacuated to Brenham, Texas to Brenham State School. It takes a lot of resources to pull that off and a lot time to pull it off. Our main thrust during a hurricane is accommodating the needs for the State School. It's challenging. It's called a State School but it's more of hospital facility. We are usually moving a minimum of 600 people. Three hundred are in wheelchairs and they can't transfer to a seat, a regular seat in a vehicle. I have to have enough wheelchair vehicles to get those folks out. Usually a bus is configured to seat two wheelchairs at the most. Do the math ... we will literally send out sorties, convoys, 60 at a time.

GOODSILL: Fort Bend County has 60 buses?

SHELTON: We would use the Fort Bend County Fleet, which was 20 or so buses at the time. We couldn't have done anything without the help of the school districts, Lamarque ISD and Fort Bend ISD. They would get the kids home from school and then drivers in school buses and supervisors would reposition under our direction and assist with getting the residents of the State School.

GOODSILL: Wow, I can see the logistical issues. I didn't know there were so many people at Richmond State School.

SHELTON: About 600 that are receiving care there and a couple of hundred staff people there. All of which had to go.

GOODSILL: With all of their equipment.

SHELTON: Yes, and this is just those who could go on a regular bus. They had other evacuations that were done with people that had to be transported in an ambulance or EMS units; they just couldn't go in a regular vehicle.

GOODSILL: Wow

SHELTON: It was not the first time we had done it. It was actually the third time we had done it since 2005. I came to work for the county May 31st of 2005, which was the year that we had Katrina. For Katrina we evacuated. And post-Katrina we overlaid services for people who had come out of Louisiana to this area. We were doing shuttles to shelters and food banks even after the storm.

A year or two after Katrina was Rita and during Rita we evacuated the State School again. That was a challenge, Rita was the hurricane responsible for all of the traffic congestion, and people would sit in their cars for 12 to 24 hours just trying to get out of the region.

GOODSILL: Were any of your buses stuck?

SHELTON: We were able to take back roads out of Fort Bend County to Brenham State School but we had sheriff's deputies clearing the way for those buses and then once they got over in Austin County, Austin County sheriffs met them. It's a very sensitive population, a lot of times the medications that they are taking will react to heat or cold and so it was very important that we kept those busses moving for health reasons. The county did a good job organizing and planning their emergency management operation and coordinated with law enforcement, EMS, the public transportation operators and the school district. If there had not been that coordination I don't know that we would have pulled it off as smoothly as we did. You had Katrina and Rita and by the time Ike happened it was kind of old school for us. We were used to it. We had a couple of tests earlier in the year, I think it was Gustav and another one where we had a pre-readiness where we updated telephone rosters for the school bus drivers and how many buses may be available. We were probably more ready that year than we had been in other years when we had just one storm event.

GOODSILL: Did it turn out there was any damage to the State School from any of those hurricanes?

SHELTON: Not that I heard of directly. But it was possible, the biggest thing with the State School was the power outage, we monitored that after the storm came through. We then had to make arrangements to bring folks that were down in Brenham back and couldn't bring them back until we had power back up. It was at least a week or five days after the storm...

GOODSILL: So had they all been here they would have been without electricity, which would have been a catastrophe.

SHELTON: [nods] I understand that the state has gone back and put emergency generators on some of the buildings out there. That would possibly allow the ability to shelter in place or maybe to come back sooner. It's not on all of the buildings but it's on some of the buildings. That may give them some alternatives when we have another storm.

GOODSILL: Is the location of the State School particularly prone? Is it in a flood plain or anything like that?

SHELTON: Not that I am aware of. I know that the grounds out there have big beautiful oak trees, pecan trees and such. There were a lot of limbs down. Getting power back to Richmond State School affected our ability to bring them back from Brenham. The other thing was getting the roads cleared. Ike did damage well inside of the interior of Texas, it wasn't just limited to the coast. These counties were dealing with debris caused by the wind and lots of damages on homes, 70, 80 miles inland. Each hurricane seems to be different. There have been hurricanes where everyone has left the coast, evacuated to Austin or San Antonio and once the storm hit it moves inland starts generating tornados and there's extensive damage. I have seen that in other areas along the gulf coast. I think it was Camille, something like that, that went in to the Mississippi, Alabama area and caused 112 tornados. So we really don't know. Up front what the storm is going bring to you or where you are in relation the eye. Look at Allison 40 miles inland in League City, Texas it just kind of camped there and League City and Friendswood had 20 inches of rain in a couple of hours and you had houses that were literally sliding off of their slabs. Good preparation and getting out of harm's way is what makes the difference.

GOODSILL: Because you just don't know what to expect. From a county level you have to be prepared. Are there any nursing homes that you were helping?

SHELTON: Yes, post-Katrina and Rita, the state did some overlays with requirements for a nursing home and hospital to have plans. Prior to that they weren't really required to have evacuation plans, or their own evacuation resources. After those two storms it changed. More responsibility was put on those facilities to make evacuation preparations ahead of time, up to and including finding transportation providers.

GOODSILL: So the county wouldn't have to do it for a private industry?

SHELTON: Because the resources are strained, when that happens. I don't believe a lot of people realize with Hurricane Ike we evacuated literally the entire Texas coast. When Ike first formed it was predicted it would go into Brownsville so you had all of the resources headed down to Brownsville to evacuate Brownsville. Nursing homes, hospitals whatever might be in that area and then it starts shifting northward. The next set of data coming in, it's saying it's going to go into Corpus Christi so it began to move north in terms of turning those resources and focusing on another area and then Houston further north up the coast.

I remember sitting in the EOC and we had weather briefings from NOAA periodically as the storm got closer there were more briefings. I remember they were beginning to predict that the eye was actually going to go onshore in Beaumont and Port Arthur. Think about the distance between the Rio Grande Valley and Port Arthur near the Louisiana State line. Distance and time in good conditions do not lend themselves to being able to respond quickly. Without the local resources and local cooperation, school districts and others I don't think we could have done what we did.

GOODSILL: Of course you are just one emergency management center but they are all up and down the coast, right?

SHELTON: Everywhere. And there are state schools everywhere. There is a Corpus Christi state school. There was one down in the valley. We would get updates from them with what was going on/

GOODSILL: Were they all evacuating as well?

SHELTON: Go down to the valley and take care of that one there. Looks like its gong north to Brownsville to Corpus Christi. Logistically it can get challenging. Where do you go and when? We learned from the other two evacuations of Richmond State School that it was better to go early. I was extremely happy because we were able to do the Ike evacuation in the daylight. Even at that we were starting early. Actually buses at the school began to load at seven and seven thirty in the morning. It was completed all said all done all over at about ten thirty that night. Having the daylight hours, all the heat and other things might be an issue but it really makes a difference [to be able to see] if you have breakdowns. We were blessed, of the three times that we evacuated that state school, we never had an issue with buses breaking down with passengers on board. But we were going at night a few times and we really worked with Richmond State School to get them to begin to make those decisions earlier.

GOODSILL: How far ahead of the time did you have them evacuated for Ike?

SHELTON: It was about three days if my memory serves me correctly.

GOODSILL: That's why you could avoid the traffic. What's it like in an emergency management center during these... how many days did you say you were there?

SHELTON: I believe I was there five days before I even thought about being able to leave.

GOODSILL: Is that five days before the storm.

SHELTON: Yeah.

GOODSILL: So it's hectic, its controlled chaos, noisy, quiet? What's it like?

SHELTON: The first couple of days it is kind of quiet, lots of planning. It's a coming together of the team. We get to know each other; we've updated the entire resource list. We are making sure we have everything that we need at our desks, contact numbers and that kind of thing. We might work a scenario or two, what-ifs and what we would do just to kind of make sure we are all used to it and thinking in the right direction. As the storm gets closer that's when the phones begin ringing and the questions come in and hopefully by that time you have all of the answers they are looking for. When the general population starts to react it tends to be when is much closer to the storm...

GOODSILL: By this time for example in Ike you have already evacuated your people?

SHELTON: We had the matrixes done up, we were in communication with the school we worked with resources, we actually had said okay we want to start at seven, seven thirty AM on this day. We had enough preplanning to actually designate the time and it wasn't nighttime.

GOODSILL: Its coordination of county resources and the school resources?

SHELTON: A huge amount of resources.

GOODSILL: So you had everybody evacuated, then the storm begins to get closer and to hit and then the phones are ringing.

SHELTON: The tipping speed on buses is wind speed of 45 miles per hour so we are trying to accomplish everything before 45 mile per hour winds reach Fort Bend County. At 45 miles per hour we need to be parked and out of the busses. So there is this rally to get it all accomplished before you have the effects of the storm on you. Then you go back into that quiet period because it's now upon you. You're trying to see what's happening out there, how long is it going to take to get over. So you have that quiet before the storm and then it's the burst of activity.

I can remember working the desk and the different phone calls that would come thru. Once people started moving, when they were losing power. I remember a call from Sugar Land and Missouri City; there was one lady that I could tell she was in a panic. She wasn't out of control or anything but she was breathing hard into the phone and she kept saying, 'I just don't know what to do'.

She had an elderly parent that had an oxygen machine. They had been out of power long enough to where her portable oxygen bottle was close to running out. Her oxygen machine couldn't be filled up because there was no power. For some reason the call came to my desk. Typically it would have gone over to the EMS or the Sheriff's office desk but it arrived at my desk and right across the aisle from me were the EMS guys. I remember saying to her, 'Okay don't worry we will get some help out to you, hold on just a minute and let me see what I can do.' I put her on hold and I talked to the EMS guy. He said, 'Well the ladder trucks have a generator on them. We could send a ladder truck out there and she could run her regular oxygen machine using the generator and fill the temporary bottles.'" I was like, that works! So I got on the phone and I told her what we were going to do. She asked how long is it going to be before they get here and she just kept breathing real hard and I said let me check. Anyway I ended up staying on the phone with her until the Missouri City Fire Department arrived. I put her on hold to take other calls. I could tell she just needed assurance that we hadn't gone away. I would pick it up every few seconds and say we haven't forgotten about you we are still here and it's coming. They ended up leaving the generator at her house with gasoline so she was taken care of.

If you can imagine those kinds of isolated incidents, those were the things that began to come in over the telephone when the storm was underway. There was another lady, the call came through and she was at the corner of Highway 36 and 59 she said she had been stranded. She didn't speak very good English; we didn't know whether or not she had come through on an inner city bus of some type like a Greyhound or whatever. Now what do we do? We worked with the women's shelter, called them on the phone. I think it was eleven o'clock at night and I said I have this problem and they said sure we'll take her in. So we went and got her and got her over there and got her setup.

It's that kind of thing that happens while a storm is going on. Your partners out there that you may not think are partners, but they are. The Women's Shelter typically is not in that type of business but they have been a good partner and helped us when we needed it. Even the school districts, most people don't realize what a huge service they provided to us. Think about the drivers, they have taken kids to school and then come in early and taken them home. Then they turn around to help us get folks to Brenham.

I don't know if you have seen anybody tie down a wheel in a transit vehicle but you are crawling around on the floor. There is a four point system; a strap that goes across each wheel and it's buckled into the floorboard of the bus. It's not easy and they are generally up by the door that's opening and closing, the wind, the cold, the heat or whatever.

They get exposed to a lot. We couldn't do what we do if it wasn't for what I consider to be a really special bunch of people. They have to have a heart to do that. They go above and beyond many times to get it done when we get into situations like that.

GOODSILL: That's a good story. So then the storm has hit and the peak is gone, then what happens in your emergency management center?

SHELTON: The effort focuses on clean up, when is power coming back, if we have evacuated people when can get them back home. Again that's when we start planning the other leg of the round trip, which is bringing folks back. When do we get them back? Are the roads clear, do they have power? Where do they need to go, it's not just the roads in Fort Bend County. It's between us and Brenham or where ever they may have been taken. With Rita we took people as far as San Antonio, that was where the shelters were set up. I forget now how many we transported out there but we had to go back to San Antonio and get them and bring them home.

GOODSILL: And of course after the storm there is the four or five days without electricity and the county and the phone calls are still coming and people are getting tired. Not only the emergency workers but also the population

SHELTON: And with us and public transportation people are beginning to be able to go back to work. Businesses are opening up. So when is the transit service going to open up? They ride county busses every day to get back and forth to work. When are you going to open up again? We are fielding those kinds of calls, having to make those kinds of decisions. When do we shut down the public service and move into emergency service? And then when do we move from emergency service back to regular routine service?

With Ike we had one of our commuter park and ride routes that goes into the medical center and we actually brought it back up first at the request of the medical center. They were needing to get nursing and physician staff in there with what they were dealing with so we opened it up before we did anything else to get those nurses and doctors into the medical center. It's funny I just now remembered that since you asked that. That was different. Ordinarily we bring it all up on the same day but I can remember with Ike that we did TMC first for medical issues related to the storm. It was a reduced schedule but we did it.

This year we had two ice events in Fort Bend County. There was ice freezing on the roads. We continued to operate our commuter services, particularly into the Texas Medical Center because getting the health care workers there is so important even though the conditions outside are bad. We brought down in-County service. We limited that to medical trips only. Shopping and those kinds of things we stopped on those days. But if you had to get dialysis or a doctor's appointment, pharmacy or whatever, we continued to do that. It was probably the hurricane and the Texas Medical Center staff that changed our position on that.

Each storm teaches you something different. You're able to learn from your success or your failures. You get better, you get better every year and you tweak it and you change it for the year after that.

GOODSILL: So it's becoming a science, but there are still so many unexpected events that it's not scientific you just have to go by the seat of your pants (chuckle).

SHELTON: Yes, you do. The Galveston County Judge was talking about the emergency operations center and management. I remember him saying its organized chaos. I think that's true.

GOODSILL: Is it personally exhausting for you or exhilarating for you?

SHELTON: I have one of those type A personalities. (chuckling) It is exciting ... working it kind of keeps you going.

GOODSILL: You're thinking on your feet?

SHELTON: Yes. I like to problem solve and to a certain degree I like the unexpected. On the other hand I like to plan.

GOODSILL: And be organized

SHELTON: I think you would see that with any emergency operator. There is something that keeps them going. Do they get tired? Yes. The first couple of times that we did it was, we need to do something about that.

GOODSILL: About the fatigue?

SHELTON: We did, we were not as good. So I began to take staff within the department and train them so that we had more coverage and we could actually run two shifts. After every storm, actually after every emergency event, we do what's called an after-action review. Everybody comes together again, everyone that has staffed the emergency operation center. We have meeting a few days afterward and we say what worked, what didn't and why not. Those after-action reviews have resulted in things like; we need to have better foods, we need to be sure that someone is watching the folks that are working the desk, we need to make sure that they are relieved and they go and they get rest. When we did Katrina the emergency operation center itself and Fort Bend County had really just came up. I think it may have been one of the first events. We had food there to eat, I remember that it was sweets, you know honey buns and donuts and that kind of thing.

GOODSILL: People are going to get zizzest (meaning high on sugar).

SHELTON: Yea, and I am not being critical at all, because everybody was flying by the seat of their pants. But we did learn from that. Part of our planning needed to focus on what we were doing with the workers. We couldn't just have sugar and coffee.

GOODSILL: You had to have nutrition.

SHELTON: Some different choices. We did need to have something that would sustain us better. I remember the next event after that which was probably Rita. It was a world of difference, our purchasing department really got on that and they did a wonderful job.

GOODSILL: And of course that's all preplanning. Because in the heart of a hurricane you can't be getting food delivered or go out and get it (chuckling)

SHELTON: That's where we come up with every other community partner that you wouldn't think of. I remember that Bobs Taco Stand, down in Rosenberg, in the middle of everything when everybody was closed down. He took everything he had and made these bags of wonderful burritos and brought them up there to us. It was just incredible what some people would think about for emergency workers. That made all the difference in the world to some of us that evening and day. Other community partners are becoming aware of it and seeing where they could help. The workers remember that and it made a difference to them when those kinds of things were done.

GOODSILL: One of the things that I notice about a hurricane is that it does have a way of building the community. If it doesn't destroy the community it really can help to knit it together because everybody is working. TV's aren't on, people are talking, there is more communication going on. Despairing people are coming together to help, that's nice feeling.

SHELTON: When we had Rita, I had not been at the County but a couple of months. I made relationships that I still have today in that emergency operations center working that storm. Other department folks that work for the County as well as outside people working across the schools I still feel today like family. They were so wonderful and so kind to me during Ike.

GOODSILL: Who was kind to you during Ike?

SHELTON: Everybody in the Emergency Operations Center. I was worried about my home; I didn't know what I was going to have to go back to. We were looking at a major hurricane and at one point when they started saying it's headed straight (laughing) for Galveston I was wondering, 'where am I going to go after this?' I didn't know and they were so kind to me. There are big screens in the emergency operation center. One is streaming text from all over the region with what's going on in the regions. You can watch that again for the purposes of preplanning if you see something going on with your neighbors. You are constantly watching that board and the other board might have the weather service and the tracking on it. Then they had a bank of screens on which they had the news stations. They knew I was worried about my house and I wanted some sort of news and if they saw a news camera and it said Galveston they would say, 'Hey look, look it's up there.'

GOODSILL: And you knew it was bad in Galveston.

SHELTON: I knew it was bad

GOODSILL: But your son was at the jail so he could not get home and check.

SHELTON: No he couldn't. I knew it was bad a few days after the storm because the pictures started coming in. A lot of the folks that were still working there had different sources. Jeff Braun, the Emergency Management Director, had forwarded an email to me from some friends of his who had a house in Jamaica Beach and it was very graphic.

GOODSILL: Graphic bad?

SHELTON: Yea, I remember reading that. I was still trying to get word. I wasn't able to leave yet because we still had not brought Brenham State School home yet.

GOODSILL: But the roads to Galveston weren't open yet.

SHELTON: They weren't open. I remember the day that they said that they were going to let people come and check. I remember I was running behind getting out of the Emergency Operations Center and then kind of just jumped in my car and took off. I waited in line to get through the checkpoint over there near Bayou Vista. I was too late, and the poor fella, he was a National Guard guy. My eyes welled up with tears and I said, 'I just want to see' and he was, 'I'm sorry ma'am we are not going to let anyone else on to the island.' So I had to turn around and go back and not see it. That's when they were kind again. I really knew that they cared and they understood my worry. My son never left the jail. He said they stayed in the jail; the guards that were on duty slept in the bunks themselves. I picked on him and laughed at him I said I'm glad that the door was open.

GOODSILL: (laughing)

SHELTON: That it wasn't locked. I spoke with him on the phone and he told me that the water was still up. He said, 'Mom it's still waist deep everywhere around me.' To this day he will tell you about the sounds during the night. I said, 'What do you mean Joe?' He said, 'It wasn't just the wind and things hitting, you could hear people calling for help.' I think even to this day that haunts him. So I was kind of prepared it was going to be bad. I don't remember when I was able to get down here and see my home. My first impressions were it looked like a war zone.

GOODSILL: The whole area?

SHELTON: The whole area, from the time we got to interstate 45 and highway 6 it was like you had crossed into the twilight zone. The debris, boats everywhere along the freeway and then down on the island.

GOODSILL: Boats where there not supposed to be? On land on top of hills on top of houses, on the freeway.

SHELTON: Everywhere and the piles of debris were stunning. Coming out of Fort Bend County I saw the tree limbs and shingles and that kind of thing. When I got down here and what I saw wasn't tree limbs, it was pieces of homes stuff like that out of homes. Then the boats and the cars and all that... how much of it there was, was stunning. There was no relief from it, from highway 6 and 45 other than on the causeway. There wasn't anything on the causeway. On land on the other side of the causeway bridge there was the debris again. Up to Sixty-first and the seawall and then I would head out towards Jamaica Beach and it was everywhere. I carried with me at all times four cans of fix a flat. There were no services, you just couldn't get a flat and call a wrecker to come change the tire or tow me out of here. I had to become very independent.

GOODSILL: Because emergency management in Galveston had been pretty decimated.

SHELTON: Everything, everything.

GOODSILL: You had to make sure you had enough gasoline, food, water...

SHELTON: I didn't want to be a problem and certainly the City said, 'If you don't need to be here don't be here.'

GOODSILL: Right

SHELTON: I didn't want to become someone else's problem with what I was doing. So I had my water, I had my food and I brought the fix a flat. Going out to the west end of the island, I remember this sand being all mixed in with all this debris out on FM 3005 and it was that way for a couple of months before it got to looking like a regular road again. There were building materials everywhere, nails everywhere. But my second trip out I made it to my house. My entire bottom floor downstairs was gone.

GOODSILL: Gone.

SHELTON: There was nothing there, where there had been walls and a garage and a fish tackle room all of that was gone. The stairway to access my house was gone.

GOODSILL: And of course for people who don't know, in Jamaica Beach you build up on stilts, but everything down below, lawn equipment everything... just floated away

SHELTON: Most of it had floated away. The debris that I had under my house and in my yard was not mine.

SHELTON: (laughing) There was this huge barbell weight looking set... what you see in a gym. Those kinds of things amazed me because you don't imagine the water being able to move that. That's how powerful water is, it was a huge set of weights.

GOODSILL: So no stairs to your house?

SHELTON: No stairs, I had two stairways, they were both gone. I could see broken windows upstairs in the house. The houses also had decks on them. I could tell that most of my front deck that hung over the canal was gone. Off of what I call the back of my house, which is where the driveway was, the deck was pretty much in place. While I was there and looking around... a friend drove by. He had a ladder. I was able to go up the ladder. Believe it or not my front door was locked. He said he had been by earlier and he had gone up and pulled the door shut and locked it. So at some point it had come open. My Mother's walker was down underneath the house. I think that happened after the water came out... some wind or something because that was weird that that was under the house.

GOODSILL: Because it had started upstairs.

SHELTON: It was upstairs.

GOODSILL: Had water got into the upstairs part of your house.

SHELTON: Yea I got eight inches of water.

GOODSILL: So how deep was the water all together then?

SHELTON: I would say about 13 feet.

GOODSILL: Thirteen feet.

SHELTON: I could see on the interior walls of the house, you know where the wave action had kind of splashed it up further.

GOODSILL: So you think your house and all the area around had 13 feet deep water sloshing and moving around?

SHELTON: There is no doubt in my mind that happened.

GOODSILL: And everything that was in your house had been sitting in swampy salty...

SHELTON: Salt water. I would say within two weeks we began to see what was the next disaster. I started cleaning the debris out of the yard first. It was something that I could do. I didn't have to go up and down a ladder to do it. But up in the house the mold started to grow and then I realized, 'Oh my Goodness I need to do something about this.' By that time there were crews of people coming around and looking for work. A lot of them from out of town and I remember asking one of them, 'What they would charge me to help me get the things out of the yard that I could not do on my own and to tear out all of the sheet rock in the house?' They said something like \$3,500! I had work done on my house a couple of years before that and it just so happened the fella who did that work drove out there to check on me. I asked him and he ended up doing it for me, he did the yard, tore out all the sheetrock and the insulation he got that all out of there for \$1,500.

GOODSILL: Sheetrock had to be removed how high up?

SHELTON: I took everything out. My top floor, it was like three floors I called it the loft. Both windows up there had been blown out. No salt water up there, but rain water and so there was mold starting up there. So I just took it all out and treated all of it. Replaced a lot of the flooring.

GOODSILL: How long was it until your house was back to normal?

SHELTON: It was three years before I got back home. It was three years. It took almost two years just dealing with the insurance. I had what we were required to have, homeowners, windstorm and flood coverage. And everything that was damaged had to go through a process of wind and flood adjusters deciding what damaged that the water or the rain or the storm surge. I can remember being very frustrated one day out there and saying, 'I want you both out here together, I am tired of doing this one thing at a time. Let's go through this thing together and try to move on here.' They then began to work with each other. The flood guy said, 'Okay I'll cover the sheet rock from the floor to four feet up' and the wind storm guy says, 'fine I will take it from four foot to the ceiling.' We began to make progress with that, but I had gotten angry with them and said as far as I am concerned this should be a wind event because lets face it, if it had not been for the wind we would have had no storm surge. We argued almost a year whether it was the chicken or the egg and I am the one caught in the middle.

It's an extra charge on your policy to pay for alternate living and I had bought that and paid for that. It's not available on flood, the flood was a national program and it was not available. If you were not able to live in your home because of the flood, the storm surge, you had to go through FEMA. Windstorm says you're ineligible under the windstorm coverage because it wasn't wind. Wind is not the reason you can't live in your home. Its flood so I contact FEMA, FEMA says do you have this coverage on your wind and I say yea; well we are not going to cover you. So I went through this process of getting caught in the middle of the federally sponsored flood insurance program and the state sponsored wind insurance program.

GOODSILL: And you still choose to live down here?

SHELTON: Yes.

GOODSILL: Have you gotten over it yet?

SHELTON: No, I still have not built back what I call my downstairs with the garage. I haven't done that yet. I had \$264,000 worth of damage. The insurance only covered \$230,000 of that and that was between wind and flood. I ended up having to cover my living expenses on my own. I stayed out in Fort Bend County. I started out staying at the emergency op center then I started living between hotel rooms and friends' spare bedrooms or extra couches. I didn't have any idea it would take that long. The hotels were full because of the extent of the damages here and the number of people without homes. I could get a room at one hotel for about three days and then they would have a reservation and I would have to leave and off I would go to a friend's house or something and I remember early on a coworker had offered, 'I have an apartment out at my place, you're welcome to it.' I thanked her and I said, 'No, I think it will be alright and I'll be able to get home.' I remember waking up one morning I had been moving so much and so often and I woke up in the hotel room and I didn't know where I was. I had to think for a minute where am I. Then I knew I needed to make different decisions. So I called Linda Harris and I said. 'Does the offer still stand?' And she said, 'Absolutely.' On one of their barns they had built an apartment. It had been vacant for several years; it was perfect, it was nice, peaceful and quite. It was fully furnished, I didn't have any clothes and what I had been able to put together for clothes were what I could get at the stores as they began to open back up. So I was able to move in. It had the towels the linens and everything it was wonderful I would go to Galveston on the weekends started picking up and cleaning up.

GOODSILL: So when you say you haven't gotten over it, what do you mean?

SHELTON: I think part of it is because the house isn't entirely finished and so that's kind of a constant reminder.

GOODSILL: Financially you're probably not in as good shape as you were before...

SHELTON: It was financially devastating, I had to cover my mortgage and the insurance as well as a second place to live for three years and I had always been very responsible financially. I was the text book financial planner I had four months working salary in the savings to cover emergencies. I had a savings account and IRAs...

GOODSILL: Which is great and you used it all up.

SHELTON: I did. What I didn't need for living I needed to make up the difference with what the insurance wouldn't cover. They don't cover bulkheads and that kind of thing. But other things.... I can remember on a few things there came a point in time where I was just too tired to continue to argue with the adjusters. I had propane for my stove, my oven and my heater. The propane tank and all that had floated away so who knows where that went. They did not view that as being a utility! Silliness! I remember one of the adjusters came down from North Dakota and said, 'Your is house is on sticks.' A lot of times in storms like that there is so much damage that they are bringing in adjusters and people from all over the country. I said, 'Its pilings.' But I knew I was in trouble when he said my house is up on sticks.

GOODSILL: Right, did you have to redo your pilings or did they stand?

SHELTON: I replaced nine pilings, I was able to get them to cover the cost of three of them and it was just... unpleasant, because you do what you're supposed to do and buy your insurance and pay for it.

GOODSILL: It's not fair.

SHELTON: I don't think it was fair. But I would also say I don't believe that I was unreasonable. I don't believe that I had an expectation problem.

GOODSILL: Paulette, do you think that you would do anything different? In the event of another storm coming, is there anything that you could have done?

SHELTON: I don't. I do think in spite of the fact that through the years I began to take fewer clothes. I think this time I might take more clothes. You don't really realize how difficult it is to replace clothes.

GOODSILL: Essentials.

SHELTON: It's the things that you don't think about. It's not a question about going out and buying a pair of pants and a blouse. You need underwear, oh, well I don't have any socks.

GOODSILL: And shoes and a brush and your glasses all those things. Whoosh, washed away.

SHELTON: It's all that stuff that you have done, you don't really think about until you wake up and you realize I don't have it. I believe that I healed at my friend's house. It was a good place for me because it was quiet and because the animals were there, the horses, the donkeys, and the chickens and everything would wake me up. And I had the evenings to reflect.

GOODSILL: Did you have an experience of being crushed or awed by nature? It sounds like nature was part of the healing too.

SHELTON: I did not view it as being a deliberate violent act of nature. I have always accepted it as being part of nature and part of what comes with living here. I think you make a decision wherever you go to different things. If we live the city, well I am going to accept the noise of traffic and ambulances and fire trucks and cars going by.

Living on the coast you have to accept that you are going to evacuate and you're going to have damages. The beauty of it is just stunning, and I think that's what makes it difficult to think about moving away as I get older, I think about that. Do I think about leaving? Yes, because what I can handle at this age, I may not be able to later on. You have to make those decisions. I drive a long way to get to work, 71 miles one way and when I smell that salt air and go across that causeway it just soothes my soul and I love seeing the sunset over the water and the palm fronds swaying in the breeze. I know that those are the things that I would miss when... even when I go on vacation, I miss the sound of the seagulls waking me up in the morning as opposed to songbirds. I love the songbirds and I loved hearing them but I always will realize a couple of days into a trip and I am not hearing the seagulls.

GOODSILL: I think that answers my question about you living here and that kind of feels like a good place for us to end. Thank you for telling your story, it was truly interesting from many, many different angles. To think you had helped all those people and then you came down here to this devastation, really it's something isn't it?

SHELTON: But they helped me to.

GOODSILL: They did.

SHELTON: They helped me keep my mind off of it and helping others made me feel good.

GOODSILL: Thank you so much for your story.

End of interview