

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **Rayshaad Jamail Jackson**

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Interviewer: Patricia Pollicoff

Transcriber: Megan Moore

Part of an Oral History Fair, at George Memorial Library, for

Comments: possible inclusion in the Fort Bend Museum's exhibit, *Tropical Impressions*.

11 Pages



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Transcript

POLLICOFF: This is an oral history for the Fort Bend County Historical Commission. I'm Pat Pollicoff; and I'm interviewing Rayshaad Jamail Jackson.

JACKSON: Yes ma'am.

POLLICOFF: This is June 28, 2014, at the George Library in Richmond, Texas; and today we are discussing storm experiences. Some of your comments may be used to accompany the Fort Bend County Museum's upcoming exhibit, entitled, Tropical Impressions. How long have you lived in this part of the state?

JACKSON: Well, I've lived in Texas all my life. I've lived in the Missouri City area for twenty years. So I moved out here when I was seven.

POLLICOFF: Well, if you've lived in this area for the last twenty years, you've been through some storms.

JACKSON: Three of the major ones. Allison, Rita, Ike, and Katrina, well we didn't get hit by Katrina, but –

POLLICOFF: So, why don't you tell me about – let's start with Allison. That happened in 2001, I believe. Where were you at that time?

JACKSON: Early 2000s, I was a freshman at Hightower High School. In Fort Bend County. And I believe I was in school that day, when that tropical depression hit. I was stuck in school for several hours and they finally were able to bus us home. When we got out of school it stopped, and when I got home it started up again. And it flooded in my area – but not very bad. But I know certain areas of Houston were extremely flooded. I want to say it was about nine or ten inches of rain. It was probably more than that.

POLLICOFF: Where you were living at the time?

JACKSON: I was living in Quail Run subdivision, in the heart of Missouri City. It was the suburbs., right off of Cartwright and 2234.

POLLICOFF: Your house was safe?

JACKSON: Yeah, we got a little flooding in the back yard but it didn't damage the house. It didn't damage OUR neighborhood.

POLLICOFF: And did you have to miss school for any reason?

JACKSON: Yes, I believe I missed two or three days of school for Allison.

POLLICOFF: That's a pretty significant rain event, as they called it. (laughs) Having nine inches, and I think it was actually about seventeen inches in the one day. The one day total – it was pretty amazing. It's enough rain for a year in a lot of places. So, the next storm that you remember was?

JACKSON: Katrina, I remember because it devastated Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi. And I know Houston got a lot of the refugees.

POLLICOFF: Do you remember any coming to Missouri City?

JACKSON: No, but a lot of them came. There's a Fiesta off of South Main and South Post Oak and there were hundreds of people in the parking lot, just living in the parking lots and in the area. So you saw a lot of Louisiana people. We saw them everywhere there. And if you went in certain parts of Houston, there were a bunch of them with nowhere to go. I believe Houston had a spike in crime. But then it went down. I believe Houston and Louisiana laws are different. So they weren't ready for our Houston laws. We didn't let that happen.

POLLICOFF: Did you work with any volunteer efforts for the refugees?

JACKSON: I did. I'm trying to figure out which one. I think I worked with Star Hope that year.

POLLICOFF: Cool. So what did you do?

JACKSON: Fed people, passed out clothes and blankets, and just kind of helped people get settled into Houston.

POLLICOFF: Because really, this could happen to any of us.

JACKSON: Oh yeah.

POLLICOFF: So it's good to be able to try to help those, who obviously needed that help. Ok, so that was the Katrina, and all the refugees. It was a difficult time for all of those coastal states. And then also, a lot of them stayed. Did you meet, or do you know, any of the Katrina refugees now?

JACKSON: A lot of them I went to school with. A lot of them I went to college with during that year and a lot of them stayed in Houston because they couldn't get home. One of our friends, Conrad, lived in New Orleans, and that was hit bad, so he went up to Dallas. He had family in Dallas. So he was in the line with people going up to Dallas from Prairie View, that's Prairie View University, it's off of 290. And some people went home. I had one friend who just went home to Louisiana, was in the floods and the riots and all that.

POLLICOFF: Very, very, very tough time, I know. I had family that was over there as well, in the middle of all that. A lot of people evacuated. Did you evacuate for Rita?

JACKSON: No, I didn't evacuate for any storms (with humor).

POLLICOFF: Yeah, the entire state became a parking lot, with the freeway system. Ok, so really, Ike is the one that you're going to remember the most?

JACKSON: My mom was in five hour traffic from Houston to 290, trying to get to us [during Ike]. Because the storm was supposed to hit Prairie View (where I was in college) really, really bad, but it didn't really hit at all. And so she was in traffic for five or six hours, she ran out of gas, she got sick. She came and picked us up and then we went back to the house and prepared the house and everything. And the power was out for two, three weeks.

POLLICOFF: Wow.

JACKSON: And I was down, I was at home for four days. And I remember the power was out, the streets were flooded, and it was constantly raining. Thunderstorms, power lines were down, trees were down. One of the stories I have from Ike, I believe it was Ike – me and my friend walked out of the house, while it was storming, to move a tree that fell in the road. We picked it up and moved it because it was in the middle of the road and we didn't want the cars to hit it. Because it was flooding real bad, you could barely see it. We noticed it because we saw it fall down. So we got out in the storm, it's lightning, my mom was like, "what are you doing?" "Moving a tree". For us, it was like, "Moving the tree up onto the median." She's like, "Why? You could get struck by lightning."

POLLICOFF: How big a tree was it?

JACKSON: It was...it wasn't that big of a tree. It would take probably four people to move it, but we moved it with just two of us. I mean, it was a struggle. (makes sounds of struggle)

POLLICOFF: You guys are good.

JACKSON: Yeah

POLLICOFF: (laughs)

JACKSON: It was just to keep the road clear.

POLLICOFF: Because you knew that if somebody came up they might not see it. It might cause an accident.

JACKSON: Or if it flooded bad enough, it could have run into our yard or run into someone else's yard.

POLLICOFF: Now, where were you living at that time?

JACKSON: On West Ridgecreek Drive. It's near the Hiram Clarke area.

POLLICOFF: Ok. So that's in Houston.

JACKSON: It's the line. It's Missouri City, Texas. It's right at the line of Missouri City. We were living there and luckily we didn't lose any fence. We lost a lot of shingles on our house.

POLLICOFF: Because really, it's the wind and the rain that we need to worry about mostly, in this part of the state.

JACKSON: Mm-hm. And we had a lot of the wind and the rain.

POLLICOFF: Were you afraid at all? Was there any point that you were alarmed about the storm?

JACKSON: No, I've been in hurricanes before. That was a really bad one, but I knew what to expect, so I wasn't scared...but I WAS bored. (laughs) Because we didn't have any power – there was no power, and normally I read a lot of books, but I didn't have any books to read. I should have stopped to get books. I could have had five or six books I could have been reading.

POLLICOFF: That's an important part of a preparation kit, right?

JACKSON: We had water, we had candles. We were prepared.

POLLICOFF: So you actually went and helped do the shopping to prepare?

JACKSON: Mm-hm.

POLLICOFF: Was it your whole family?

JACKSON: No, my dad works off shore, so...

POLLICOFF: So he had to be brought back in, I'm sure.

JACKSON: Yes. He was stuck in Louisiana, I believe. He was off shore; he works on the oil rigs, off shore.

POLLICOFF: So he weathered the storm in Louisiana while you were here with your mother?

JACKSON: Yeah, me and my mom and my roommate, because his people lived in the Livingston area. So she was like, "You can just come with us and stay with us in Houston." And we rode it out in Houston pretty well. It was just that after the power went out it was really hot!

POLLICOFF: So your level of preparation, you felt was really good.

JACKSON: Uh, we could have done a lot better. (chuckles)

POLLICOFF: Live and learn, right? (both laughing)

JACKSON: Live and learn, yeah.

POLLICOFF: But you all got food and water? How did you prepare?

JACKSON: We bought bottled water, jugs of water. What happened was, me and my roommate took the car, we had a Durango, and went to the Walmart. And that was chaotic. And hectic. And it was a LOT of fighting in Walmart, trying to get supplies.

POLLICOFF: Which Walmart was this?

JACKSON: This was the Walmart off of Highway Six. And we were able to get three or four of the twenty-four packs of water, canned goods. Basically anything we didn't need to cook. And we still had a refrigerator full of food and we just kept the door closed the whole time the power was out for, two or three weeks. And then four days later I went back to school, and my mom went back to work six days later. She worked for HISD. She's a school teacher for HISD.

And the power was out for two or three weeks, so I would call to make sure she was OK. The phone – the cell phone was back up, just the power was out...for three, yeah three weeks.

POLLICOFF: That's a long time.

JACKSON: It is.

POLLICOFF: And what about the neighbors? The aftermath? The day after the storm had broken? What was it like? Were neighbors helping neighbors?

JACKSON: Neighbors were helping neighbors. There was a lot of debris that was getting moved out. One of my neighbor's car flipped over because he parked it on the street and the flood water flipped it over. So we had to get somebody to come move that. And the gas pumps were dry for about a week because they couldn't get the trucks out to get gas. So everybody ran out of gas, pretty much.

POLLICOFF: Did you all have gas?

JACKSON: We had enough gas. So we just kind of kept the car – luckily we live down the street from three different gas stations. So when it hit, we waited and waited and we went up there, and I believe we were one of the first in line, and got gas. Got about five gallons. Enough gas so I could get back to school. And we got gas in that area [near school] because the storm didn't hit my school very much.

POLLICOFF: So your family, really – you're used to storms and so you really knew what to do.

JACKSON: Yeah, we've been in Houston all my life, my parents have been in Houston all their lives. My mom, she's 54 now, my dad is 60. We've been in Houston all our lives so we know, when a storm comes, what you do, what you don't do.

POLLICOFF: And you take it seriously.

JACKSON: Yeah.

POLLICOFF: But you didn't panic.

JACKSON: No, we didn't panic. Hurricanes are a common occurrence in this area that you know if it hits, what to do, but not panic. I know a lot of people that panicked, because they'd never been in a hurricane. A lot of people were panicking about the floods, about the wind breaking down trees.

POLLICOFF: And that's always the worst part, all the debris, the flooding from the rains and everything else. So tell me, with your family, did faith play a role in your preparations.

JACKSON: It played a role. My mom and dad are both very religious. So she prayed a lot, and I prayed with her, and we kind of just sat it out and waited... Yeah, faith played a very big role in it. Like I said, we wasn't too worried about it, because it doesn't hit where we live very often – a hurricane. We felt we prayed a lot for people that lived in Houston, because there was a story we heard on the news, where in the medical center, the underwater garage – like five people died. They went down the elevator, and it opened up and the flood water (claps) killed them.

POLLICOFF: Allison was really devastating.

JACKSON: Yeah, Allison was really bad.

POLLICOFF: So did your family participate in volunteer efforts? I think you said you did.

JACKSON: I didn't volunteer for this one, because I had to go back to school. But I know at my college we did a lot of volunteering. We got canned goods, donated canned goods, clothing and blankets to send to people in the other coastal areas. And I believe we raised money too. We had a car wash, a bake drive, to raise some money to send to the organizations.

POLLICOFF: The students were great. They all really helped. But you had electricity, obviously, out there, so you were in a good spot. And your family – no electricity for three weeks?

JACKSON: For three weeks.

POLLICOFF: How did they manage that?

JACKSON: My mom didn't like it. (POLLICOFF laughs) The problem was, it was very hot during that time, and she was sick. She didn't have heat stroke, because she had water, but she was just sick from the heat, from sleeping in the heat, everything like that. We didn't have a generator, which we're going to get now. We've been thinking of getting a generator for years, at least for the refrigerator and air conditioner. But yeah, it was really hot.

POLLICOFF: So your overall feelings about acts of nature?

JACKSON: It's something you're going to prepare for. You can't necessarily stop it. You can only prepare for it. You've got to be vigilant. You have to pay attention. A lot of times it veers away from the Houston area, which is strange. It'll hit everyone else but Houston. One storm, it's coming to Houston, and it veered to the left, all of a sudden and it'll go to Beaumont or Baytown. It's one of those things you can't do anything about.

POLLICOFF: So you don't have any great fear, but you just – you're prepared.

JACKSON: I'm prepared. I'm hesitant. A storm, Ok, there's stuff I've got to get prepared.

POLLICOFF: Ever any feelings of powerlessness?

JACKSON: During a storm? During a hurricane? Yeah. Well, it's an act of nature, it's an act of God, that you can plan against but you can't stop it. So there's always fear, what if something gets thrown into the house or thrown into the wall...a tree limb, bricks, fences... it's helplessness.

POLLICOFF: But if it happens?

JACKSON: It happens. Well, I have a philosophy – I try not to worry about anything that's out of my control. If it's out of my control, there's no point in worrying about it. Because there's nothing I can do about it. I can prepare for it, but I can't stop it.

POLLICOFF: And then after it happens, you just deal with it.

JACKSON: You just deal with it.

POLLICOFF: Any advice you would give to someone about what to do about storms and acts of nature?

JACKSON: Pay attention to the weather. If they say there's a storm coming don't wait to get prepared. Go out there and buy everything you need immediately. I recommend before hurricane season starts, you stock up on supplies, batteries, all that. That way, when it DOES happen, you don't have that mad dash two days before a storm, going to Walmart, trying to – 'cuz they'll run out of things. But prepare early, and then pay attention. That's the best advice – pay attention and prepare early.

POLLICOFF: Alright. Now you told me that there were a lot of fights that broke out at Walmart. Can you give me an example? You said the parking lot was packed.

JACKSON: Parking lot was packed. There were people fighting for parking spots. There were people that just left their car in the middle of the parking lot, I guess the parking space, the little driveway in between, that you drive to get to the parking space – they left their car in the middle with their car on just to run in the store. Someone had their car stolen...at Walmart. There was a fight between a pregnant woman and an old lady. The old lady was trying to get some water, and the pregnant woman was taking the water from her, and it was a fight. It was a real bad fight. It was sad. It was kind of as bad as a Black Friday deal event.

POLLICOFF: These storms can bring out the worst or the best –

JACKSON: It can bring out the best. It can also bring out the worst. It's just fear. It's fear. People don't know how to handle fear sometimes, and they lash out at people.

POLLICOFF: Do you have an example of your best experience, of what people did?

JACKSON: The best experience I had was – there was an elderly lady that couldn't get into the store to get supplies, so this one gentleman and his brother went in and bought supplies for her. They bought her water, everything, and gave it to her. Just gave her the supplies. One man there, he was single, he was just by himself – he GAVE his groceries to a family of five, and then went back in there and got for himself. And people helping each other.

POLLICOFF: There were really a lot of wonderful moments like that. That's great. Anything else that you can remember about your storm experiences that you'd like to share?

JACKSON: Hmm. I can remember the fear, I believe I thought we were going to get hit by two hurricanes at once. I remember it was before Katrina veered off. Because it was Katrina, and then I think it was Rita, and then I think the next year it was Ike. It was fearful because it was an experience I didn't want to go through again and again, hurricanes back to back to back.

POLLICOFF: Especially when you go through a long dry spell, where they don't come, and all of a sudden you feel like, are we a target?

JACKSON: Yeah. You're hit with three at once. (laughs). Pretty much.

POLLICOFF: That's just the way Mother Nature can be sometimes.

JACKSON: Mm-hm.

POLLICOFF: Right, well, thank you very much. This was great. Thank you very much.

Interview ends