

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **Douglas Landrum**

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Interviewer: Patricia Pollicoff

Transcriber: Megan Moore

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10 Pages



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Douglas Landrum

Transcript

POLLICOFF: This is an oral history interview for the Fort Bend County Historical Commission. This is Pat Pollicoff interviewing Douglas Landrum on June 28, 2014, at the George Library, in Richmond, Texas. Today we're going to be discussing your storm experiences; and some of your comments may be used to accompany an exhibit at the Fort Bend County Museum. An upcoming exhibit entitled, Tropical Impressions. So, Douglas, first tell me where you're from.

LANDRUM: I'm from Missouri City, Texas, and I was born in Houston. I've lived here all my life.

POLLICOFF: And how old are you?

LANDRUM: I'm thirty-three. Born in 1981.

POLLICOFF: Tell me what storm experience we're going to talk about today.

LANDRUM: Well, when I was three years old my first hurricane was Hurricane Alicia. I was living off Landrum Lane, where my grandparents had moved, and he named the street after our last name. My family was living in a trailer home next to theirs.

POLLICOFF: This was in Missouri City?

LANDRUM: Yes, and my dad was working for the fire department. He's worked for the Houston Fire Department for thirty years and we were with my grandparents in the home they had built there. Alicia had destroyed the trailer home and the insurance money from that helped us move into the home that I live in now, since 1983. But the storm experience that I want to talk about was Ike.

I believe Ike was the one that was coming after Katrina, and we were told was coming for us. My grandparents' house – I boarded up all their windows. My house – I boarded up all the windows. My friend's mother and father – I boarded up their house. And my dad's girlfriend – I boarded up that house with him. Four houses that I boarded up, all day doing a lot of work and that night. Other friends had done hurricane parties before, I had never done one, but I wasn't going out THAT night. I stayed with my grandparents and rode it out with them. And the next day, no power over where we lived – for about two weeks.

POLLICOFF: And tell me where you lived.

LANDRUM: Over off McHard Lane in Missouri City. The electricity was out more like a week and a half.

POLLICOFF: Tell me about the night of the storm. Obviously, you worked all day boarding up windows for all your family and friends. And you stayed with your grandparents. Why'd you stay with them?

LANDRUM: Because they were elderly. They were both in their eighties. I can't specifically remember how old they were. As a matter of fact, just days after the hurricane my grandfather had gone up a tree to start doing some cutting. He wasn't too old to climb up a tree. He was a Marine in World War Two, and he went up that ladder before my dad got there, before my dad came to get me to go over there and help him. And he fell out of the tree! Grandma called me that morning, saying how he was bleeding. I guess he had cut himself on the way down. People stayed with him before I got there, and the ambulance had already come and got him. Dad had just gotten there and rode out with the ambulance 'cause he knew the guys. And Grandpa passed away after that, later that day.

POLLICOFF: Because of injuries from his fall?

LANDRUM: Yeah. Yeah, and Grandma passed away a short time later. But I always remember that hurricane specifically because of that. It's pretty crummy.

POLLICOFF: That's very sad. Were they afraid during the hurricane? Or was it something they felt they were ready to ride out, and they'd seen this before?

LANDRUM: Well definitely, it was just another one that was gonna come, and we had prepared for it. So I really think I felt like it was hopefully going to be no big deal. But we were worried that – they had a chimney – so we were worried that that might come down.

POLLICOFF: And after what happened with Hurricane Katrina, was there more alarm, you think? Were people more determined to be prepared?

LANDRUM: Well, yeah, definitely. Considering all the people from Katrina were still here in the Astrodome. Or at least, they were still working on housing. And like I said, my dad worked in the fire department and he worked three days straight, in shifts with other guys, going to the Astrodome. I think everybody remembers the stories – how the conditions were, for the people, and the smells and everything.

POLLICOFF: Yeah, it was very difficult. I worked at the Astrodome, myself.

LANDRUM: Volunteered?

POLLICOFF: Yeah, just as a volunteer.

LANDRUM: That was sad, yeah.

POLLICOFF: Yeah, so obviously, that wasn't that long after. You were there to help make sure your grandparents were okay, and that if there were an emergency you could help. What were your feelings as the storm was coming in?

LANDRUM: I don't really think about 'em too much. And I guess that's just our mentality, maybe. Allison was a tropical depression that flooded us up pretty bad. But that wasn't a hurricane. That was just rain. We deal with a lot of big weather, so, it was just another storm to ride out.

POLLICOFF: I think fifty miles inland from the coast what we worry about more is the wind and the rain.

LANDRUM: Oh, and also at that time, there was no evacuating. People would try to go to Dallas. The traffic-jam from Houston to Dallas, I think that's when that was going on.

POLLICOFF: That's exactly right.

LANDRUM: That's right, there was nowhere to go. So you were staying with your friends and partying, like I said, hurricane parties at the age we were. Well, I just stayed with my grandparents.

POLLICOFF: Any other storms that you can think of, that you've ridden through?

LANDRUM: I can't remember what year it specifically happened, but the First Colony Mall had just been built and some tornados came down and took Dillard's wall down. The sky, you could look out and see the greenishness of it, and even down McHard Road, I saw a tail come, but never touch. And you could just see the cone of, like a little swirl that had started, and it was moving along with the clouds. I remember that.

POLLICOFF: But you weren't at the mall?

LANDRUM: No, I wasn't at the mall. We were all just watching this on the news. And we still had power and everything, but yeah – green outside and really bad rain that day, but that's one other thing I can remember. Some tornadic activity, but not a hurricane.

POLLICOFF: So what are your overall feelings about acts of nature?

LANDRUM: They're gonna happen. And the readiness and preparedness is a responsibility for you and your family. It's smart AND a responsibility, I would say. Because it's better to be prepared.

POLLICOFF: As you boarded up all the windows, you thought that was an important preparation?

LANDRUM: Oh yeah, absolutely. Windows were going to get broken.

POLLICOFF: You said you were without electricity for about a week and a half?

LANDRUM: Well, over at Grandma and Grandpa's they had generators and they had some electricity. Over at my house I didn't deal with it. I was in between there and another friend's house, during that time, cooking meals. Going around and checking everything. As a matter of fact, my buddy, Brent Allen, over here off Highway 6 and William's Trace, it was like a bowling alley, with all the trees in the middle of the median – they had all got knocked down. And some of the other trees had just been pulled up. It was kind of like spotty damage. Yet he had electricity the very next day. That's weird (with humor).

POLLICOFF: I know. I work for the City of Sugar Land, and I was there for three days during Ike, straight. We got the streets cleared in about twelve hours. We had people from the Budget department with chainsaws, and people from departments all over the city. I was in charge of communications, so we actually went out with bullhorns because people didn't have electricity. And handed out flyers with warnings.

LANDRUM: I remember that at Grandma and Grandpa's. One tree did fall where we knew not to park our car. It eventually it fell while we were all inside, just (makes crashing sound), came down, one big arm in the driveway.

POLLICOFF: So describe that night again for me. How bad did it get during the night and what were you all doing?

LANDRUM: Well, I believe Dad was still there, he stayed awake the whole night. I eventually went to bed around one or two. There were a lot of pressure sounds, you know, from outside. 'Cause the wind was blowing so hard. At first it wasn't so bad. I went outside and actually sat around while the wind was just gusting really strong. But then when the hurricane was at its strongest, I went inside. When it's over you and you don't want to be outside. I tried to get some rest. I knew tomorrow was gonna be a lot of work.

POLLICOFF: Big cleanup day.

LANDRUM: Yes.

POLLICOFF: Did you all lose a lot of trees? The branches?

LANDRUM: Yes, definitely that one that fell and just a lot of leaves, it seemed like. And the biggest, oldest branches. And then, you know, the one that was broken that my Grandpa was gonna cut off, out in back. For the most part, I guess we didn't lose as many as we could have. I know my wife's grandparents lost a lot of trees on their property out over off I-10 and Blalock.

POLLICOFF: You said that they had more than one generator? So you guys were really prepared.

LANDRUM: Yeah, they were

POLLICOFF: And you had food and water and gas and money, and all those things, in case you couldn't get them.

LANDRUM: And an ice chest. Yeah, yeah. I got all the water and everything specifically for them.

POLLICOFF: Did you put water in the bathtubs?

LANDRUM: Yeah, so we would have water to flush the toilets.

POLLICOFF: Right.

LANDRUM: That's kind of a no-brainer thing, I think. Because just recently they cut off the water in our neighborhood, and they let us know so we had time to fill up some buckets with water so we could flush the toilet.

POLLICOFF: It may be a no-brainer to you, but not to a lot of people. (Pollicoff laughs)

LANDRUM: No! I know. It isn't. Yeah. I had to be told.

POLLICOFF: (laughing) We have to learn, right? How to be prepared. But the good thing is that it sounds like, obviously, that your family takes this very much to heart – very seriously.

LANDRUM: Yeah, because my dad has worked in the fire department, he knows about all that kind of stuff, and has seen all the cleanups. And he works whenever storms and things roll through.

POLLICOFF: The tragic loss of your grandfather. Did he feel like he didn't have somebody else to call on to do the work to cut down the tree? Or was he just determined to do it himself?

LANDRUM: That's what he was gonna do early in the morning. Getting up before everybody else and going out there and starting it. 'Cuz well, I can do it – I've done it before.

POLLICOFF: How old was he?

LANDRUM: I think eighty-three or eighty-four. And Grandpa? Like I said, he was a Marine, so he was gonna do whatever he wanted to. That was always Delbert – that was his name – Delbert Earl Landrum. I'm Douglas Earl Landrum. My father is Dennis Earl Landrum. We're all D.E.L.

POLLICOFF: That's really neat. Any members of your family that feel that faith was part of what also prepared you, or got your through the storm? Even with the loss of your grandfather?

LANDRUM: Prayer is always important, and I think it made me a little bit closer after he passed away, with some of those things that we have trouble coming to terms with, or just thinking about in life – what we're not really sure about. But when someone like that passes--

POLLICOFF: It's kind of like, with nature, we don't really have control.

LANDRUM: Yeah.

POLLICOFF: We're not in charge.

LANDRUM: It's almost – it was gonna happen anyways, one of these days. And so, yeah, that's just part of faith. You do pray, especially when those storms are coming. You better. (laughs quietly).

POLLICOFF: Right. Ever have any feelings of powerlessness?

LANDRUM: Real fear? No, not really. Just paranoia or anxiety.

POLLICOFF: Which you dealt with, how?

LANDRUM: Bravely! (with humor) Just not panicking. 'Cuz there's nothing you can really do. In that situation, you're just there, so I just try to lay down, and I just went to sleep.

POLLICOFF: Getting ready for the next day. What was your neighborhood like the day after the storm? Or the morning after the storm had broken?

LANDRUM: Oh, actually at my house – I live really close to my parents. I always have lived really close to them. They live off Moffett Lane and Landrum Lane, off McHard. You know, they just built the toll road over there. I live on the other side of the toll road, in Quail Glen. And it just knocked down a fence that wasn't an old fence. My dad put it up with his brother about two or three years ago and it knocked that down. I don't know if that's what knocked my foundation out of whack, but my foundation sure sucks today (both laugh). It might have been because of the droughts we've been having, but I mean, it really feels like if hands were on the house, it just looked like maybe it had been crumpled a little, because the roof had a little place where it would dip.

Thankfully none of the windows broke, but I had to replace the siding where it had blown off, and up on the roof, to this day, there's a small piece I still haven't taken off, where it's got water damage, where it was peeled back and got the moldy look.

POLLICOFF: Right.

LANDRUM: Yeah. Oh, yeah, and the FEMA tarps – everybody had those up back then. (both laugh) We called it the FEMA tarp. It was just a blue tarp.

POLLICOFF: I remember the blue tarps every place. Right.

LANDRUM: At that time I was working at Hollywood Video. People were there spending lots of money with the cards they just got. I remember them buying lots of beer and bicycles. I know they got those cards and they lost their homes. I just remember that specifically.

POLLICOFF: So you're saying that they used their FEMA, their disaster money from the Red Cross, or whatever, to buy - ?

LANDRUM: Whatever they wanted.

POLLICOFF: Beer and bikes? (both laugh)

LANDRUM: Beer and bicycles. I remember that was on the list. Also movies. Our managers told us if they wanted to use those cards to rent movies to go ahead. Tax free.

POLLICOFF: After the storm did you find that neighbors were closer without electricity?

LANDRUM: I didn't hang out at my house at nighttime. It was all locked up and boarded up. And I stayed with my grandparents when Dad wasn't there or I'd take a break and go over and stay with my friends over at Brent's house, 'cuz they had electricity and air conditioning and that was really nice. But, in the neighborhood, right there over at the corner store was where everybody was getting food or ice.

POLLICOFF: So the corner store had electricity?

LANDRUM: Umm, don't remember if they had a generator, but you could still just go inside the store – oh that's right, they had no electricity and the owner – it looked like he had made a deal with some of the other dudes around there to just be security for him because they were running the parking lot outside, telling people, "Okay, you pull in, and you pull out", and you know, directing traffic.

You could be in the store, but the electricity wasn't on and they were just doing it all on paper and you could buy canned soda, dog food, whatever they had that they were selling.

POLLICOFF: Nothing perishable.

LANDRUM: Right. Certainly no freezer food.

POLLICOFF: Right. Did you see neighbors working with neighbors to help clean up things?

LANDRUM: Not specifically, but I still went by my friend's parents' house to take the boards down and look at their place. And took boards down – actually, no, I didn't take the boards down at my place. While I wasn't there – we just left the boards up. And over at Patty Jean's, my dad's girlfriend, we took all that down and we helped them clean up their yard, but other than that I wasn't around my neighborhood to witness too much.

POLLICOFF: So were you working full time, at the time?

LANDRUM: Yes, I was at Hollywood Video over here in the New Territory area.

POLLICOFF: And how long before you were able to go back to work?

LANDRUM: Immediately. As soon as I could, pretty much.

POLLICOFF: So, your store had electricity.

LANDRUM: I couldn't say when exactly they got electricity back. I don't really remember. But I know it was working at the time.

POLLICOFF: But you went back the very next day? Or two days later?

LANDRUM: It's weird, all I remember is before. Before, because they were asking, "Are you leaving? Are you gonna go to Dallas?" And I was sayin' no. And that's the time, specifically, that I remember all the people that were running around out in the parking lots, going in and out and all the stores and stuff.

POLLICOFF: They rented a lot of movies at that time?

LANDRUM: Yes. Actually, when people were coming to get prepared for Ike, they were buying all of our water and soda too. And all of our popcorn. One of our customers, what was it, Hurricane Rita? He was saying he had boards outside of his house – that was a weak storm. And he had boards on his house that said, "I like a little lime with my Rita."

POLLICOFF: (laughs)

LANDRUM: 'Cuz they were having a hurricane party.

POLLICOFF: Anything else that you can think of, about your experiences? Or your feelings about the storms, that you'd like to share?

LANDRUM: Nothing specific, not really too much that I can think of.