Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*
Informed Consent

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*. I understand that I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on October 29, 2012.

2. The interview will be audiotaped. In the interview I may be identified by name, subject to my consent. I may also be identified by name in any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview, subject to my consent.

3. I understand that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that a photograph of me may be taken or borrowed for duplication, and that if I withdraw from the project, the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to Hoboken Historical Museum, and that the information in the interview can be used by Hoboken Historical Museum in any manner it will determine, including, but not limited to, use by researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy will be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript.

6. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript.

7. I understand that at the conclusion of this particular study , the tape(s), photograph, and one copy of the transcript will be kept in the collections department of the Hoboken Historical Museum. All notes and recordings (or other means of recordation of the interview) will be destroyed.

✓ I agree to be identified by name in any transcript or reference to any information contained in this interview.

Interviewer signature _____

Interviewee signature _____

Address Hoboken City Hall
94 Washington Street
Hoboken, NJ 07030

Phone number 201-420-2013

consent date 6/5/13

Archives 2013.039.0001

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: MAYOR DAWN ZIMMER

INTERVIEWER: ALAN SKONTRA

DATE: 18 JUNE 2013

TRACK #2

AS: When did you first hear the words "Hurricane Sandy?"

DZ: Well, it was some days before the storm hit. I don't remember the exact timing, but I do recall that we had the weekend, where we rallied our CERT team and we had volunteers coming around, knocking on doors, we put together fliers in both English and Spanish, so there was the opportunity to really reach out. We were aware of the storm, and there was time to reach out to the community, trying to help them get prepared.

AS: What did you expect the storm would be like, based on what you had heard?

DZ: Well, my approach to every storm is prepare for the worst and hope for the very best, and that was literally the approach we were taking to the community, where we [unclear] these fliers. I was doing press conferences, and trying to make people aware that it could be really bad so take things like -- make sure you go grocery shopping; move your cars; fill all your bathtubs. Actually, that's what we did at my house -- filled up the bathtubs, we filled pots, and tried to get prepared for what happens when you don't have power. Unfortunately, my husband didn't move our car, so we lost our car. But we did do things like before the storm, our municipal garages filled up. We provided transportation over to the Newport Mall, and probably saved about 250 cars just doing that. A lot of people did take us up on it, and moved their cars. We provided transportation down to Shoprite, and were just encouraging people to get out and go shopping, and be prepared before the storm set in.

AS: My next question was, how did the city prepare -- which I believe you've covered a lot -- but anything you'd like to add?

DZ: With every storm [unclear] pre-position [unclear] close down roads, and then trying to get notifications out to the community. Those are the kinds of things. Then we have emergency management meetings, where we kind of activate our emergency management team. So sitting right here in City Hall, bringing everyone together, and talking about what the plan is going to be, and activating the CERT team, as well. So all those things were happening. The "coordination" was also trying to get the community prepared, as well. The city was getting prepared.

AS: And how did you prepare, as mayor?

DZ: Well, I worked to activate our fire chief, the police chief, OEM, getting everyone together and figuring out our action plan. I did make sure to get my family prepared. I brought my bag of -- I planned to stay here, I prepared my clothes, and came back and had a cot set up here in City Hall. Because I live in southwest Hoboken, and I knew I wasn't going to be able to get home. So part of my preparation was, along with preparing a team and the community, also just getting my family prepared,

because we knew I wasn't going to be able to get home. So that was part of all my preparation.

AS: And where were you on Monday, when the power started going out?

DZ: I was here at City Hall.

AS: And what was your reaction when the reports started coming in that the city was starting to go dark?

DZ: Oh, like I said, we were working to [unclear] in any way that we could. We continued to use a lot of social media. We were coordinating, obviously, with the utilities, and coordinating as closely as we could to try and help with the challenging situation I had with our substations -- because they are very exposed. That's why I'm proud that we're working -- we have an energy resiliency plan that we're working on, which I can talk to you more about.

But, yes, it was trying to communicate as much as possible with our residents and, as the flood waters came in, trying to figure out a way to get the

National Guard here as quickly as possible. That's why I worked with the press, ultimately. There was a breakdown in the chain of command, and that's why I worked with the press to try to get the message out that we really needed help.

AS: So when did you first begin to survey the damage? Where did you go, and what were your first impressions?

DZ: Well, I was part of -- when the National Guard came in, I was part of going around with them and looking at the damage and the flooding waters. My biggest concern from the start was the safety of Hoboken residents, making sure that everyone was safe. Until the waters receded, and I knew that everyone trapped in their homes was safe -- I wasn't really that -- I was concerned, but I wasn't thinking about the physical damage; I was thinking about making sure that everyone was safe. That was my entire focus. It wasn't until the water receded, and we were making sure that everyone was safe, and kind of getting through that crisis point of setting up an emergency system of pod-structures at different locations around the city, where volunteers were going. There was

food delivery coordination with the National Guard and the CERT team, making sure that people had their immediate needs met. That was the focus for at least the first week.

AS: Okay. What were the initial challenges that the city faced?

DZ: The challenges were the communications, and really trying to make sure that everyone was safe. The biggest challenge was trying to figure out a way to get to the residents. We were using -- we had to locate a new "payloader." Thankfully [unclear], get that "payloader" purchased. I'm so grateful that we had that "payloader," and we had the old one, and that's what we were using. That's what we were using. So I am extremely hopeful that we can get the council's support, trying to get a high-water vehicle, because the challenge is that it does take time to get the National Guard here. The governor controls the National Guard, and, ultimately, they're looking at the needs of the entire state. I think we need to have some type of, at least one high-water vehicle, where we can absolutely get to residents and rescue those people who have those emergency situations. That's what we were doing. We had people who had really high fevers. We had seniors

who were in emergency situations, and that's how we were rescuing them. In retrospect, it was kind of crazy. It was startling to see. I went out and was part of some of those rescues, and we were using them. We were putting our seniors into the "payloader," into the front bucket. That's how we were rescuing them. When CNN came in, we were going to try to do a rescue of a grandmother, just as we were coming out to do the interview -- came up to me crying, and said, "I really need to get to my grandchildren. I don't know if they have enough food." She was really upset, so I said, "[Unclear] rescue, and there wasn't enough space. We could not get down the street to her grandchildren. Sorry. It was hard for me to say to her, "We can't get there." So that's why I went on the "front loader." That's why I felt it was important. I just turned to the CNN reporter and said, "Let's just get in and let's show the world what's happening to Hoboken." And that's what we did.

AS: So of all the challenges, you said that public safety was the most urgent. Would you say that's correct?

DZ: Yes. Again, now, it's my biggest concern. Using the "payloader' to go and rescue people, and

not knowing really "where or what." As their telephones died, they didn't have a way to communicate with us. So that was my biggest concern: there were people trapped in their homes in emergency situations, and we had no way of knowing whether or not they were okay. Also, another major concern, as we went around knocking on doors, and in Church Towers, [unclear] really nice [unclear] country music singer [unclear] heard about what was happening in Hoboken, and drove in with a truck full of food. So I went around with some volunteers, knocking on doors, just to let people know that this is over at [unclear] park, and [unclear] literally cried in my arms, and said, "They left us in the dark. There's not even [unclear] we can find, there's no light to get down the stairs. We were scared to go downstairs, because we can't see anything." As I went around, I could see that the seniors who were there, their homes are filled -- they're lighting their entire home with candles. To me it's a miracle that we made it through without -- we did have fires, but somehow we were able to get to them and control them, and no one was killed in a fire. Because we had all these buildings, citywide, where people had their homes and apartments filled with candles. But there was no connection -- there was no emergency backup generator, so there was no fire suppression system,

so there's no way to know when that fire starts. So it's just a huge, huge risk.

So these are all things, based on my own personal experience -- the experience of driving through the darkness with the National Guard, believing that we have to have some kind of lighting system where we can see who really needs our help. We have to have a micro-grid system where our seniors and our most vulnerable residents have a place to be safe through the storm -- at least the hallway lights are lit, at least the fire suppression system is hooked up to some kind of backup generator, to keep them safe through the storm.

AS: As the days went on, what new challenges did you discover?

DZ: Well, it kind of went in stages. Obviously, there would be the immediate response of getting in there and getting the National Guard in, and working to rescue people who needed to be rescued out of the flood waters. A lot of people hunkered down, they had made their choice, and we wanted them to know that if they wanted to evacuate there was an option to evacuate. It took five days for the flood waters to recede, so it was a constant

process of going around and making sure that everyone who needed to evacuate was able to evacuate and get them out safely. The first one was looking for the emergency situation, and then it was trying to help those who felt like they wanted to get out and be evacuated. Another challenge we saw was the seniors who were running out of medication. So in the CERT team, we set up a system of literally volunteers taking those prescriptions -- we got CVS to fill the prescriptions, and then the CERT team member volunteers would run them back to the seniors. So we saved, I don't even know how many -- hundreds and hundreds of prescriptions that we filled, and that's another way that we as a community came together to save lives.

AS: Were there any difficulties communicating?

DZ: That was a major challenge -- communications. That's why what we did was we set up a system of -- in my press conferences, we decided we were going to turn it into a daily communication briefing. So every day at 2:00 I was briefing whoever wanted to be there. You could come and hear what was going on. We set up community "boards" around the city, like ten different

"boards" where we would have volunteers [unclear] information and providing updates. Then we had public notices that were pretty much twice a day, once or twice a day, in English and in Spanish, and we had volunteers going around putting them up on [unclear]. So that was another way of trying to communicate with people. Obviously, we're keeping the regular ways of communicating -- through the social media, and email, and talking to the press. So I was on top of that. That was our kind of back-to-the-basics, as far as communications. Kind of a hand-delivered letter is what we were doing. "Office Depot" was amazing. We actually worked to provide them with a backup generator, so that their printers could operate, so they were printing all of our fliers for us.

AS: What did the city need that it did not have?

DZ: High-water vehicles; stronger communications. Fuel was running low, and that was a major challenge, as well. It wasn't so much that fuel was running low, but we couldn't get it out of the ground, out of the gas stations. Those were some of the challenges that we were facing. We probably needed more flashlights, and part

of the outreach was trying to get what flashlights we had, and encouraging people with each storm to have a parking plan. You should go shopping, you should have your water [unclear] flashlights. Trying continue to expand that outreach, for people to be aware of those basics.

AS: And how did you feel about appearing on national television, and what message were you trying to tell people?

DZ: Well, at first I was trying to tell people that we needed help. I was trying to get the message to Governor Christie, and there was an unfortunate breakdown. I knew that once he heard the word that we really needed help that he would be here, and the National Guard was sent in immediately. But it was difficult to get that message through. We focused on trying to get help for Hoboken. That's why I went on national television; because I wanted to help our city.

AS: You also spoke with President Obama. Is that correct?

DZ: I did. I participated in two conference calls, with other elected officials. He was talking about the need to get everyone evacuated. I respectfully pointed out that in Hoboken the challenge was that we were not able to get them evacuated. They were willing to go, and we really needed backup generators. I really respected that he totally listened, and within hours there were backup generators on their way to Hoboken. I do feel like because of the National Guard, because of the attention we received, we were able to mount this entire review of our electrical grid. We had the Department of Energy doing a review within the National Labs, in part because we were cut in that mold of an urban area, a small community, but I'm thinking in part because we got the national attention. We had become higher profile [unclear] our energy resiliency going forward is, I think, one of the biggest challenges. Obviously, addressing the flooding is a major challenge and we're working hard on that, too, but energy resiliency is going to be extremely important. And given where the substations are, it's a challenge we face every single hurricane season.

AS: I just want to get, for the record -- I just want to ask -- identify, to the best of your ability,

the damage the city incurred, in terms of losses to the actual city, losses to the residents, dollar amounts -- things of that CERT.

DZ: Well, we estimated the losses to the residents to be over $100 million in damage, when you calculate our estimates on the number of homes that were eventually destroyed. That doesn't even count the total amount of so many businesses, restaurants where, with the power being out, they lost all their inventory. It's probably a low number. Then the city estimates that we had about $10 million in damage. Then we had fire stations damaged. Our senior center, our midtown garage, hospitals had major damage. Some of our parks on the waterfront were damaged, as well. Our municipal garage was severely damaged. Eighty-percent of our city was underwater for five days, so there was major damage to our city.

AS: What did Hoboken learn about itself?

DZ: I think Hoboken really kind of reaffirmed what a special community we are. I was amazed and then I wasn't amazed. We had over 5,000 volunteers coming in and helping each other, just going around and

knocking on doors. The way we came together as a community was beautiful. So I think there was a reaffirmation of the spirit of Hoboken, and a community spirit that makes our town very, very special.

AS: And what did you learn about yourself?

DZ: [Unclear] that I can get through anything. You've just got to roll up your sleeves, stay calm, stay focused, and just work through it. [Unclear] one of the bigger tasks I've been through -- though I actually think that [unclear] was more stressful than the storm. That's when I thought the entire city was gone. But this was something where we just had to stay at it. It was exhausting. I only got a couple hours of sleep a night, but I was committed to keeping this community safe. Again, that's what we did by having, from our first responders, our CERT team, the Hoboken Volunteer Ambulance Corps, everyone at the county, state, and federal government. It was all of us pulling together. It was definitely a very strong team approach. I was part of it, leading it, pushing it, advocating for it, and making it happen. I'm very, very proud, again, of how we came through it as a community.

AS: Is there anything that you wish you had done differently? Or is there anything that you wish you had had greater foresight about, to be prepared in any different way?

DZ: I wish my husband had moved our car. [Laughs] Yes. I mean, well, I do wish -- I'm joking around about that, but I think it's really important that we move toward energy resiliency. I think it's really important that these properties, especially where there are seniors, and the housing authority -- I know from experience that you're not really going to be able to give them a place to evacuate. We want to give them the option to evacuate, but I recognize that they're not going to. Often they're not going to, and we need to have facilities to keep them safe. So that's why I am very committed to this micro-grid system and figuring out a way where in our senior buildings every hallway is lit, every fire [unclear] is wired into our micro-grid system or backup generator and works. I think what we need to be doing is also figuring out a way to keep the lights on in the community; keep, maybe, a gas stove going in community rooms. What happened was -- I remember when we gathered together every day in a community room, in that community place, where everyone was kind of coming

together -- if there's a way where this micro-grid system could power the elevator. Maybe it goes down once in the morning and once in the evening. That's kind of your process. We can have solar-powered radios on every single floor, so people can have a way of knowing that that's a way they can know what's going on. I think that was the biggest challenge for people -- not really knowing. I think that was very hard for people. They're in the dark, and you don't really know what's happening, when the water is receding, and what is going on. I guess that's one thing I could say we could probably encourage people to have radios, and think about that as a good option for communications. Like I said, there are technologies out there where it could be solar-powered, and those things could be battery-operated. They can last for a long time, and that's an excellent way for people to know what's going on.

AS: Who were some of the unsung heroes?

DZ: Gosh, there were so many heroes -- people from the CERT team, who, like I said, came up with the idea of filling the prescriptions. Police officers who just -- it's really hard for me -- there are so many people

who did an amazing job. Unsung heroes are those people we don't really know about who reached out and helped their neighbor. I heard so many great stories about those people who did have electricity putting out the place where everyone could come in, and making coffee and delivering it to everyone. People who did have power bringing everyone into their homes. The [unclear] did an amazing job, just cooking and cooking and cooking. It was a fantastic place for people to go. The churches that opened up when we had our shelter go down. They opened up their homes and their places of worship for us to have shelter. There are so many. I feel like everyone who participated in made it through, helped a neighbor and helped a friend, was part of the unsung heroes. We're all heroes for making it through Hurricane Sandy.

AS: And as the days went on, did anything surprise you? Whether it was a bad surprise or even a pleasant surprise? Something that caught you off guard.

DZ: I think Leo Pellegrini and I were a little surprised by the amount of debris. It felt a little bit like a war zone, when you went out and the debris was everywhere. He did an amazing job in bringing in the

contractors and coordinating everything, but as soon as we cleaned up it was back out there again. So I was surprised by the amount of debris. That was a challenge, but I think we handled it very, very well.

AS: When did you feel like the worst had passed?

DZ: I think I felt a little sense of relief when the flood waters had receded, and we were able to really get in and make sure that everyone was okay. There was still concern the next morning. We made it through the storm, but there was concern about power lines being down. That was another kind of moment of worry about people possibly being electrocuted. When the flood water receded, I felt a little bit of relief. But it just moved into a different phase.

AS: My last question -- I'll ask it, and then if there's anything that you wanted to add that I didn't ask about, please feel free to include it. Do you feel that Hoboken has recovered in any sense, and if so, was there a moment when you felt that "Hoboken is back?"

DZ: Well, I do feel like Hoboken has recovered. I believe there are still businesses -- sadly, there are businesses that went out of business and won't be coming back. There are still some businesses that are struggling to get back on their feet, and residents who still haven't been able to get back in their homes. But I think for the most part people are back in. But to me the recovery process continues, and we've been working really hard to put together a competent plan to protect the city, and advocating, literally on every level, to get support for comprehensively protecting communities and protecting places like Hoboken. That seems to be a shift in policy and approach. We've applied for funding, and we're advocating as strongly as we can. In fact, we're taking out our own loans to get the first pump -- the next pump down there, because that needs to happen as soon as possible.

The recovery process absolutely continues because we literally -- I'm concerned now, as these flood maps come out -- I'm concerned about protecting Hoboken both from the next flood but also from the financial flood that's going to happen when all our flood-insurance rates go up. Quite frankly, personally knowing that, that the flood insurance program doesn't worth -- it doesn't work for the urban areas, and I feel like we're paying into a

system -- we pay into it, but we don't get any coverage. It feels a little bit like "servitude." In order to get your "mortgage," you have to be part of a national flood-insurance program and now, as a result of Sandy, there are a lot more people who are going to be in that situation. So they, too, are going to be paying into a system that is not going to pay them. That's why I'm advocating so strongly for a comprehensive solution to protect our city. Because I think it's very unfair. I think it's really going to hurt us economically, so I want to figure out a way to protect the entire city. What I'm going for is what's called a "shaded X-zone." I've met with national flood-insurance people who have told me that "if you can demonstrate that you're truly protecting the entire city, Hoboken could be designated as a "shaded X-zone," and we could possibly get out of paying into national flood-insurance programs.

So that's what I'm trying for, because making changes to the national -- I feel like I will succeed in protecting the city, and figuring out a way, either through grants a public/private partnership, to protect the city [unclear] the national flood-insurance program.

AS: I have a couple of more questions I wanted to ask, if there's time --

DZ: Sure.

AS: -- just about you as a resident. How did the hurricane and the days after affect your life in terms of disrupting your routine, and not being able to be home.

DZ: I went home after the waters receded, enough for me to get home. I don't remember how many days I was here. It took me a long time to clean out my car. Things were still happening so quickly that. I had my cot, I had my sleeping bag, my clothes were all over the places. You're still kind of in that crisis mode, working through things. When I did go home, we certainly didn't have -- actually I remember it was kind of funny -- Chief Blohm gave me a ride home, and I tried to ring the buzzer, but there was no power. So, of course, my husband couldn't hear me. His phone had died, so he couldn't answer my calls. So I went around back to try to yell to him, but he couldn't hear me. So Chief Blohm set off this alarm, set off this siren [laughs. So I apologized to my neighbors. It was 2:00

in the morning. But that's how I was able to get into my home.

AS: What did your family do while you were here?

DZ: My family was at home. My mother-in-law was in her apartment and I would stop in and check on her. When the flood waters receded, my husband was going over and checking on her too. My children were at home.

AS: How did they pass the time?

DZ: I think they were playing out in "back" and getting to know the neighbors even more. I do think that's a great thing. People now have Sandy friends, like there were connections made all over the city between neighbors. When I called for the evacuation, that's exactly what -- I wasn't trying to get everybody to be friends, but I was trying to say reach out to your neighbors downstairs, go to your neighbors upstairs, and ask to stay with them. Because I knew, from Hurricane Irene, when I called for that evacuation, I felt like I was sending people into harm's way. People left here and went, like, for example,

up to the Catskills, and then couldn't get back. That's the thing. Everyone scurries -- everyone gets on the road at the same time, and you've got people coming in from New York City, and it's difficult to get out. That's another reason that I feel like shifting the policy approach to shelter-in-place; that we can -- I'm not saying that that's what we do for every -- we always need to be prepared if we really need to get everyone out, that we're prepared to evacuate if that's what we need to do -- but I think for these kinds of storms, if we build stronger -- if we have a micro-grid system, if we have communications, and teamwork and everything in place, that there is a way to shelter safely in place, and that's what I'm advocating for. And that is a different approach. That is a different approach than I've really seen anywhere, but for me it is a recognition that you're just not going to get everyone to evacuate, and I don't want to leave the most vulnerable people left with no resources and no help.

AS: Okay. And my absolute, final question for both of these parts -- how did your family support you or comfort you? Or what did you take from them to encourage you in your other role as the mayor of the city?

DZ: My husband was very supportive, my parents were supportive. I think my dad was a little -- he was the captain of a tugboat, so I was talking to him about different options, trying to figure out our fuel situation. So I think he was a little surprised at that. I was pretty much looking at every single option, but "Mayor Turner" came through for us. But they were very supportive of what I was doing. My husband took care of the boys, so I didn't need to worry about my family so much. Again, I wish he'd moved the car -- but that's okay. [Laughs]

AS: I think that's a light note to end it on.

BF: So did you get a new car?

DZ: Yes, we did get a new car.

BF: I'll just throw in a couple of things. Early on you talked about a breakdown in communications. What were you referring to there, when we first started the interview?

DZ: There was kind of a chain of command as far as if you were making a request to have the National Guard come in. We were trying to go through that chain of command, and to this day I don't understand exactly what happened, but nothing was getting through -- that we needed the National Guard.

BF: And when do you call the National Guard? When do you start that request? Was it right after?

DZ: Oh, yes. We started it right away, trying to ask for the National Guard. But I, as mayor, can't call in the National Guard. It has to be that I'm getting the message to the governor, and the governor is directing the National Guard to come into Hoboken. So it's not like I'm on the phone and I can just call up the colonel of the National Guard and ask him to come in. You almost shift into a military command form -- which I respect and I understand -- but somehow the communication wasn't happening, and they weren't coming in. It was almost two days before the National Guard came in. The word was out as far as what was happening in Hoboken, CNN asked to do an interview, and Rachel Maddow asked to do an interview, and I just made the decision that I just had to

do what I needed to do for my community and ask for help -- and make it very clear that we needed help, and call directly on the governor to send the National Guard in.

BF: And do you get like recommendations from the fire department and the police department, like, "We can't handle this, so we need to go to the National Guard?" Or do you just kind of see it that way?

DZ: I saw it that way. Like I said, everyone gathers in this room and we'd have morning, mid-morning, and late-afternoon and evening meetings here, as emergency situations [unclear]. We'd get everyone together and have this meeting. Everyone discussed it, but I knew when I was starting that process very well that I would try to get the National Guard to come in.

BF: So who would be at the table for that meeting?

DZ: We had Chief Falco, Chief Blohm, and other police officers, and people from the fire department, OEM. My business administrator was here; Juan was here; the communications people; the ambulance corps; sometimes the

utilities were joining us. The [Unclear] Authority was joining us; people from the hospitals; people from the schools. [Unclear] all these people [unclear].

BF: Can you talk about, let's say, the year before? We had Hurricane Irene, in which the residents were warned about the potential but nothing -- not that much damage was incurred. Do you feel that people's guard was down because of the previous year?

DZ: I do think when it comes to being there -- I do think in some ways we expected it to be -- I still thought it was pretty severe. But I think if people didn't have their car damaged, they certainly weren't expecting it to happen this time. It does seem like there were a lot of cars left on the street, or put into garages. They weren't expecting flood waters to fill up their garages. So, yes. Since it wasn't so severe for Hurricane Irene, people weren't quite as prepared. I don't know. But we certainly were out there trying to promote it, doing press conferences, and trying to communicate with them. Again, that's why I tried, with the reverse 911 calls -- if we think there is going to be significant flooding, trying to do the reverse 911, and let people make a parking plan.

Know what your parking plan is going to be, and move your car.

BF: The prediction is that storms -- maybe not of the magnitude we just had -- will become more frequent. But do you feel that if there are no storms, all this will be for naught? All this planning? Do you think people will go back to their old ways, in a sense?

DZ: If we were not to have any major storms for a couple of years, then yes, probably people would just go back to their old ways. But the reality is that we seem to be having increasingly more intense storms. We've had three major flood events since Hurricane Sandy, so whether you believe in climate change or you don't believe in climate change (I personally do), we're dealing with whatever it is -- the results -- and we've got to deal with it. So from my standpoint, we need to focus on layers of protection. The first layer, obviously, is people doing their own, personal preparedness, making sure that they do what they need to do to be prepared for when that storm hits -- the absolute basic things. But there are also things -- you know, there is grant money out there now and we're trying to do a major push, where people could

[unclear] up the mechanicals in their homes. There are things that people can do to reduce the amount of physical damage. They can move their cars. If they get that word -- yes, it's a pain to move your car. But, on the other hand, it's really a pain to have your car totaled.

So those are kind of some initial layers of protection. But then it's also, like I said, trying to have pumps along the waterfront; buy more land on the western side of the city; have large detention bases. The reality is, the more we can do to capture the rainwater and prevent the rainwater from going into the sewer system -- Hurricane Sandy -- if we had had more pumps, it would have helped to take away the flooding a little bit faster, but we really can't prevent that from happening. But we are trying to -- I mean, the waters came in from the south and the north, and if we were to figure out a protective barrier, we might be able to prevent the waters from coming in. We're looking at redesigning Hoboken Cove a little bit, to try to prevent those flood waters. And we're looking at how can we incorporate some different designs, "harden" the existing buildings, and potentially build on future buildings, and have a series of protections along the south and the north, to actually protect from possible future storm surges. The biggest challenge we face is heavy rainfall, high tide that

results in a lot of flooding. This is the first time that the Hudson River breached the city of Hoboken, so, hopefully, that won't happen for a very long time, but it could. At this point, now, it has happened, and it could happen sooner than expected. So that's why we're looking at these layers of protection where the individual home and a comprehensive approach to protecting Hoboken -- I am also an advocate for a regional approach, and I've seen some concepts for a regional approach where you essentially provide a protective barrier for the entire area. That might be a cheaper alternative than some of the [unclear]. If the city does everything they're proposing, that's going to be one heck of a lot of money -- $5 to $6 billion for some of the other regional solutions might actually be quite cost-effective.

BF: Then it's a question of for-how-long, I guess, things go, though.

DZ: That's the challenge. I certainly hope that a regional approach will ultimately be implemented, but that could take twenty years and you can't wait twenty years. That's why we're moving ahead. We've already put in our application for the next pump, and pushing hard on

getting the grant money for another pump. These are things that we know can help. You can speak to business owners and home owners who have the experience of having their home flood or their business flood five or six times a year, pre-pump. Post-pump, there was just Hurricane Sandy.

BF: Is there anything that really gave you strength during that week? I'm not sure if I'm repeating a question. A person -- that person that you helped rescue -- I'm sure adrenalin kicks in and gives you a real purpose with an individual. But I was just wondering if with the team, a particular person go into action that you might not expect, or a book you were reading, or just anything that would have given you inspiration.

DZ: I would say that there were two experiences that definitely kept me going. There was a resident who reached out to be from [Unclear] Towers. He came home early, and he was kind of panic stricken. I went over myself, and I was part of convincing his mom -- we arranged to get her evacuated and to a shelter because she was on oxygen. The power had gone out, and we just weren't sure how long the generator was going to last. It was a dangerous situation. So I was part of convincing her to

evacuate. Her son later came to me and said, "You saved my mother's life." She was short of breath, and getting into a very dangerous situation by the time we got her to the hospital.

So things like that definitely gave me strength. I felt really good when we were all out there. For that one incident, there were, across the board -- that was happening across the city, where lives were being saved, but that kind of my -- between that and this other senior -- to literally just hold her and comfort her. I think of her when I think of this energy resiliency plan that we're doing, and all of our seniors. They don't have the resources, necessarily, to evacuate, or the family to evacuate, and we need to help them. That's kind of driving me forward, and I'm trying to make sure that our city is even safer for future storms.

BF: Any real fearful moments that you want to reveal? I mean, it was a scary week.

DZ: Yes. I was really nervous about -- I didn't want anyone to get electrocuted. So when the flood waters were happening, and the power lines were down, and communication was really difficult -- I know with Hurricane

Irene that exact situation happened, where -- it didn't happen in Hoboken, but it happened in other communities, where the power line was down, someone went in to rescue someone in their car, and they were electrocuted. So that was a real, major concern. It started to get a little bit nice and everyone was like, "It's fine," kind of thing. That was a major concern, as we figured out how to work with "PSE&G" to take care of those wires, and make sure that everyone was going to be safe.

BF: Could you talk a little bit about the hospital evacuation?

DZ: Yes. I felt bad for the new CEO. I think he'd only been on the job for three weeks. I called him and said -- he was debating whether or not to evacuate, and I said, because we had done it for Hurricane Irene -- I was on the board, and I was the one who really advocated and got the board to -- every board supported it, but we had made a decision, with Hurricane Irene, to evacuate and evacuate early. So what I said to the CEO was that if you're going to do it, do it now. Don't wait, because if you're waiting, and we're trying to evacuate you in the middle of the storm, it's going to be really dangerous for

you and your patients, and also dangerous for the rest of Hoboken, because I can't have all my resources focused on the hospital, when I'm going to be needing to rescue many other residents throughout the city. So please, if you're going to make this choice, make it now. This is my advice," and he said, "I appreciate that." He did tell me that that was one of the more difficult calls. He had to call up the owners and say, "I'm new on the job, but I need to evacuate the hospital." But that's what he did, and obviously it needed to happen. For him, he said he'd never seen anything like that. It was ike a river running through the hospital.

BF: And do you know how many fire companies, or towns participated in that evacuation? I was just riding my bike around that night, and I remember just seeing --

DZ: It was incredible.

BF: -- it was amazing. There might have been fifty fire trucks. It was like two blocks of fire trucks.

DZ: It was incredible teamwork. I don't know the exact number, but it was a lot of different communities coming together to help with that evacuation, line up all

the ambulances, and take them over to Bayonne or Christ Hospital, and made sure they were safe. I will say, that was another amazing thing. We used social media to communicate with people. As the trucks came in, with the MREs -- meals ready to eat -- we put out a tweet like, "Come to the high school and help unload the trucks," and 200 people showed up at 9:00 at night. You had this line of people passing food, piling it up and -- it was amazing.

BF: That's a pretty good way to end, I think.

DZ: Okay.

BF: Any other last thoughts you want to tell, to share, that we might have missed?

DZ: I think we've covered a lot of ground. Staying in focus, for me -- it's not a crisis, but it's something I'm very focused on, trying to make sure that I continue to advocate, continue to plan, continue to do the outreach, continue this process. I'm trying to get Hoboken to shift a little bit. It is about the emergency response, but our focus has to be on resiliency, and being resilient

as a community, and figuring out ways that we're just going to automatically implement the system and know what we have to do. So we're kind of shifting and expanding that outreach, going forward.

BF: Thank you. That was great. We will get a transcription of this forty-nine minutes and thirty-four seconds.

END OF INTERVIEW

HOBOKEN
HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, Richard B Lohm, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*. I understand that I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on October 29, 2012.

2. The interview will be audiotaped. In the interview I may be identified by name, subject to my consent. I may also be identified by name in any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview, subject to my consent.

3. I understand that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that a photograph of me may be taken or borrowed for duplication, and that if I withdraw from the project, the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to Hoboken Historical Museum, and that the information in the interview can be used by Hoboken Historical Museum in any manner it will determine, including, but not limited to, use by researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy will be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript.

6. I understand that at the conclusion of this particular study, the tape(s), photograph, and one copy of the transcript will be kept in the collections department of the Hoboken Historical Museum.

Interviewee Name: Richard B Lohm

Interviewee Signature Richard B Lohm

Address 384 Burlington Road Paramus, N.J.

Telephone number: 201-906-3324

Date: 8 / 19 /2013

Archives 2013.039.0002

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: FIRE CHIEF RICHARD BLOHM

INTERVIEWER: CHRISTINA ZIEGLER-McPHERSON

DATE: 19 AUGUST 2013

CZ: This is Richard Blohm, Fire Chief, Hoboken Fire Department, August 19, 2013, and the interviewer is Christina Ziegler-McPherson. Chief, thank you so much for your time.

RB: You're very welcome.

CZ: Just some background -- if you could tell me how long you've been the fire chief; what you did before you got this position; how long you've been in Hoboken.

RB: Well, I wear a multitude of hats. I've been the fire chief, officially sworn in as the fire chief, in 2009, and was the acting fire chief in 2008. I've been a

deputy fire chief since 1992, and I've been on the fire department since 1977 -- over thirty-five years. I'm also an instructor for the International Association of Firefighters. They fly me around the country on federal grant monies. I take vacation from here to do that. And I train firefighters in hazard-material response, weapons of mass destruction. I'm also a part-time instructor up at the Bergen County Law & Public Safety Institute, training recruit firefighters up there, as well.

CZ: The other thing I was wondering is, how many full-time fire personnel does Hoboken have?

RB: Currently we have a table of organization that, if it were full (it's not; we're short a couple of people at the moment) would be 105 personnel, in uniform.

CZ: Is that full-time?

RB: Yes.

CZ: And part-time?

RB: We have no part-time uniform people. We have some civilians who are part-time fire prevention inspectors. Two of those. Then we have non-uniformed civilian fire dispatchers, and two administrative assistants -- one you met outside -- and one that works up in fire prevention, as well,

CZ: Great. So the purpose of this interview is to recollect your memories of Hurricane Sandy, since the anniversary is coming up. I wanted to ask you when you first heard about Hurricane Sandy, when that term first came to you; when you first heard it.

RB: I'm not quite sure what you mean by the question.

CZ: When did you first hear that the hurricane was coming?

RB: Well, we'd gotten a number of updated reports from the state's emergency management center. Additionally, there were some folks up at Stevens Institute who measure the tidal basin on a regular basis, and they were giving the mayor and key folks in both emergency and

non-emergency capacities that information, on more than a daily basis. Probably hourly, sometimes.

CZ: So where did you first hear that this big storm was coming? Was it from the mayor's office? Was it from Stevens? Some other weather service somewhere else?

RB: Well, the weather service, the State Office of Emergency Management, the governor -- just about every entity in not only the state, but on a federal level in some instances, were making everybody aware that this storm was going to be one of those perfect storms, so to speak. The mayor called for an emergency meeting of the police chief; myself; the business administrator; the assistant business administrator; all the directors, to kind of start to formulate a plan on what we would do.

You have to remember that a year before that we had Hurricane Irene, which was almost a non-event. But based upon that year before emergency, we started to take the same precautionary measures, to gear up the individuals who would be necessary in the event that we did have this storm.

CZ: About when was that? Was that two days before? A week before?

RB: I would say within the first seven days prior to that event is when we started to get some semblance of an idea that there was going to be a storm that had the potential to hit right into New Jersey. At that point in time, it was even difficult for the forecasters to determine exactly where it was going to cause the most damage.

CZ: What was your expectation that last week of October, before the storm arrived? Did you have any thoughts about what you could expect the storm would look like?

RB: Well, I was running through my head some of the things that we had done in the previous year, as I said. For Hurricane Irene, we had gotten a couple of buses, at 11:30 at night, for Hurricane Irene, and started going around with public-address systems, asking people who wanted to voluntarily evacuate, that these buses were here. We went block by block, trying to get some folks to leave their homes, just in the event that it was a very severe

storm. There weren't many people who left their homes. I guess they were afraid to do so.

So I started kind of a Rolodex in your head, thinking of some of the precautionary things that needed to be done, which included our firefighters and fire officers making sure they had spare radio batteries; their chargers; make sure our emergency backup generators were working. They had all their bedding and everything if, indeed, we have to evacuate. It was ready to go within a twenty-minute time frame. That was the benchmark I thought we would get, a twenty-minute -- "Hey, you have to get out of your firehouse now." Unfortunately, that's not how it turned out, but that's what we were thinking at the time.

CZ: I'm curious, because you mentioned Hurricane Irene, about the planning that the fire department had done for a major storm, before October 29, 2012. If you could tell me some of the things you guys have done, besides checking equipment and things; other kinds of plans that you've done.

RB: Sure. We were discussing exactly what our manpower needs would be. In any emergency, you’re going to need additional manpower; plus, you have to be concerned

about -- you can't wait until the last minute to call those folks in, because maybe they can't get in. So we were thinking about what, in terms of overtime, what those costs would be, based upon my estimations with regard to what I thought would be an appropriate amount of personnel that would already be here when that emergency occurred. We also looked -- in Hurricane Irene, we purchased five inflatable Zodiac boats that weren't needed then, but, certainly, they were used during Hurricane Sandy, so we made sure they were working properly, as well. Because even though our fire apparatus are fairly large pieces of apparatus -- even the National Guard, when they were in -- once the water got over thirty-six inches, the water would go into the exhaust pipes of those vehicles -- because they're side-mounted, instead of vertically-mounted, like trucks would be. If water got in there, the engines basically drowned. So even the National Guard vehicles couldn't get anywhere over thirty-six inches of standing water, and we had quite a bit more than that.

I'll give you an example of one. They had a medical call down at the Housing Authority. It was a woman in a wheelchair. They went in behind a National Guard vehicle. When they couldn't go any further, they got out of the fire engine, threw the Zodiac boat into -- they call it

the "doose and a half," the truck that the National Guard was using -- and they got into that. They went a little bit further; they couldn't go anymore. The firefighters got out of the truck, put the boat in the water; they rowed -- because the water kept getting deeper; then the water got shallow again, and they had to get out of the boat, drag the boat behind them; the water got deep again; they had to get back in the boat and row to this woman who was waiting to be evacuated, for medical reasons.

They put her in the boat; they put her wheelchair in the boat; they got in the boat; turned around; started rowing out; when the water got too shallow, they carried her; carried her wheelchair; dragged the boat. When the water got deeper again, they put her back in the boat, her wheelchair back in the boat. They got back in the boat, and rowed the rest of the way out, to the National Guard. That was one call. We had 938 calls in ten days.

CZ: So what kind of drills or simulations do you do at the fire department, to prepare for these kinds of events?

RB: We train every day. In the morning, between either 10:00 to 11:30 or 12:00, or 10:30 to 12:30.

Then they go back for lunch, to get a little bit of a break. Then about 1:00 to 3:00, or 1:30 to 3:30 in the afternoon. Then they're required, for eight hours at a minimum, to do night training, as well, in the course of a year. Each individual.

So we're constantly training. Every opportunity we get, we send our firefighters to go get trained at academies, or we bring instructors into the town. For example, we're going to be doing that -- I wrote a grant for training eighty of our firefighters to become what they call safety officers, and eighty of them to be trained as emergency vehicle driver/operators, according to the National Fire Protection Association standards. That was all through a federal grant. We're going to bring those instructors here.

CZ: I'm wondering about the coordination between the fire department and City Hall, when Hurricane Sandy started to happen, basically that Monday afternoon and night -- if you could tell me about how you [unclear] City Hall. How did that work?

RB: Well, every several hours the mayor would call for an emergency meeting. In some instances, we

had conference calls with the folks up at Stevens -- what their latest projections were going to be with regard to the storm surge -- which is kind of different than the storm itself. We also had all the different agencies there, whether it was the police department liaison folks; whether it was Chief Falco or one of his representatives. We had Director Pellegrini, who was there; Quentin Wiest. Literally, we all slept -- I slept in my car, outside City Hall, for three days, just to get a couple of hours sleep. I put an extra eighty hours in that one week, in addition to my normal hours. There was just no sense going anywhere; you couldn't get anywhere, anyway, and the community needed us. In thirty-five years, that was probably the worst emergency I've ever encountered, whether it came to blizzards or anything else. It literally paralyzed this community, and there was just no way that I could leave. There were just too many demands, not only on the fire department -- the police department, public works folks were tremendous in the aftermath, cleaning up all that garbage that people were throwing out. My god! There was just so much. And the mayor was kind of the fiduciary head, if you will, or titular head, of the organization. At one point I brought to their attention that there is something called an Incident Management System, that really should be

put into effect. There are two different ways to do that. You can have single command or unified command, where you have a representative from every agency, that has the authority to act for that agency. For example, it wouldn't make any sense if I had to ask for two dump trucks of sand, of the representative from Environmental Services there, if that individual said, "Well, I'll have to call Director Pellegrini." Well, then we don't need you there; we need Director Pellegrini there, who can make that decision in the moment.

And based upon the weather reports, based upon the conditions in the town, we kept having these meetings for several days, literally. The mayor was even [unclear] in some instances, where she didn't get back home until 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning. We had to literally raid the Shoprite, because in the first two or three days, even people who had volunteered their time -- and let's not let those folks go unsung. The CERT team was absolutely essential to this community. They did a tremendous job in alleviating some of the lesser tasks from emergency services, so we could be out there, trying to get to the folks; and the volunteering of walking up cases of water into senior-citizen buildings. It's one thing to have emergency power, but it doesn't provide elevator power. So

in senior buildings, they can't walk down fifteen flights of stairs, and then they're going to carry up a case of water? So the CERT teams were absolutely essential in assisting this community, and I don't think they get enough accolades for what they did.

But there was no food. All the restaurants were closed. We were keeping people over. We had no way of feeding them. So I sent a couple of fire engines down to the Shoprite, and the manager was in there trying to keep the water out. Well, we had a meeting of the minds, and he said, "Just come in and take whatever you need." We literally -- granola bars; juices; canned goods; soup and beans; you name it; packaged goods. We'd throw it up on top of the fire engines. He was keeping track, as we left [unclear], of course. But it was amazing how the community came together in its time of need.

One of the trepidations I had through that whole event was I was deathly afraid we were going to find there were some people who had died, that we just hadn't gotten to. Luckily, that was not the case. We were very, very fortunate. Think about the magnitude of that emergency, the magnitude of that emergency, and nobody lost their life. And how the community came together with pizza pies, and cooking, when they finally got some power back.

"Bring it to the fire stations." People were donating clothes. The doctors were doing a great job, making sure that prescriptions were being taken care of. They did a great job.

CZ: I was wondering where were you Monday night, when the storm happened, and the water really started to come in.

RB: That's a funny story. As I mentioned earlier, we had made a decision. I told all the folks who were on duty, "I want you to have everything ready to go," so if we had to abandon any of our fire stations, within a twenty-minute notice, you didn’t have to be thinking about what you needed -- including our dispatchers, who are located on the third floor, here. We made arrangements to forward all our emergency calls to North Hudson. Fire and Rescue -- they were very, very helpful. Eventually, we sent a couple of our dispatchers up there, and they actually dispatched our fire companies from North Hudson. It was strictly just one phone call to take care of that.

But I'll never forget -- I was getting ready to walk back into fire headquarters here -- the same door you came in -- and Director "Took," [phonetic] the public

safety director, called me up and he said, "Chief, we're getting some reports of water down in your area. I think it's time to think about evacuating the firehouses down there." I looked down at the ground, and I said, "Director, there's not a drop of water in the street. I'm literally standing outside of fire headquarters." He goes, "Well, okay."

Now, in a light rain, in this area, we get some flooding. There wasn't a drop of water. I walked in the door, I walked up five of the same steps you came up, and the phone rang again. It was Mayor Zimmer. She said, "Chief, the water has come over the sea wall. You need to think about getting your firefighters out of there." I said, "Mayor, I just got off the phone with the public safety director, and there isn't a drop of water outside." And I looked out the window, on the set of stairs, and the water was about a foot deep -- in literally ten seconds. I said, "Mayor, I have to go." I hung up, I ran upstairs to the third floor, I told the dispatchers, "Get all the paperwork and books you need, and get out of the building now." I went over to fire prevention, I told them the same thing. By the time I ran backstairs to get my vehicle, the water was up over my calves.

I went down Second Street, west, away from the firehouse, and came up against the traffic and went down Jefferson Street. I waited, and I watched as our other guys got out. My fire marshal, instead of following the same direction I did -- he made a left onto Jefferson Street, he got halfway down the block, and then the vehicle lost traction in the ground and it was floating in the water. This is in a *minute*. A fire truck came by, and on the radio said to him, "Cap, get out of the vehicle now; otherwise, we're going to have to leave you, because we're going to stall out." He opened the door, and the entire vehicle flooded with water. He waded from his hips over to that truck, and got out. While I was out in front of Jefferson Street, I started to see the water on Third Street starting to fill in down there. I had to pull out, and I drove up Third.

So I would say that in a matter of five minutes, max, this fire house here on Second and Jefferson Street, and the one on Observer Highway -- and it was appropriately called that "lull before the storm" -- it's called "the Island," is the nickname -- and if you see some of the photos (I can show you one of them), it literally looks like an island a couple of days after the storm surge, surrounded by water.

So in five minutes we lost two of our firehouses, including our backup generators in both of these fire stations. Now our repeater, which is our communications capability -- when you see a firefighter or a fire officer key their microphone, on their walkie-talkie, it sends a signal up to Stevens Institute, picks that up, amplifies it, and sends it back through the town. Because it's the highest point in town.

Well, when the power went out their backup generator didn't come on. We had no power. I could not communicate with one fire truck in the town. None. We had to send our fire-prevention folks, who ran out of this building and went up to City Hall, literally looking in the streets to see where the fire trucks were, to get them to come to City Hall and stay out there, where we would stage them and send them verbally to different calls that were necessary.

CZ: So what time of day or night was this, when the water -- ?

RB: I want to say it's about between 8:00 and 9:00 in the evening. Somewhere around there was when it really got dicey, and we had to get out of here.

CZ: So it was already dark, and hard to see.

RB: Oh, yes. But even if we could see, with the water at the height that it was, our vehicles couldn't get around town. It was just a terrible, terrible day here.

CZ: So how many stations were affected?

RB: Well, we have four in town. Two of them were affected. At one point in time, ultimately what we did, even on Eighth and Clinton Street, by the high school -- the water -- they had kept it out of the building, and the backup generator in that building was on the roof, so it wasn't in jeopardy. They still had power. So we had pumps that were working, to pump the water back outside. But it's like trying to empty out a leaky rowboat; no matter how much water you throw out, more comes back in. Ultimately, I made the decision to abandon that firehouse, and that fire company (the double companies there), everybody was out of the Fourteenth Street firehouse, which was the high point in town. So they really didn't have a big water issue, and their backup generator was working. So all our fire companies were working out of there.

CZ: Yes, I remember seeing all the trucks.

RB: Yes. Lined up outside.

CZ: I was wondering when you were able to get out into the city and see the damage, either Monday night, Tuesday morning.

RB: Every single day. The only limitations for us to get around were based upon where the water had come in, that prevented vehicles from moving around the town. We lost quite a number of vehicles, not only the fire department but the city in and of itself. Nobody ever expected something to be in a five-minute time frame. It was almost like Chicken Little. "The sky is falling. The sky is falling." That's what happened in Hurricane Irene, and it was a non-event. They kept saying all day that we were going to get this rain; this surge was going to come. First, it was 1:00 in the afternoon; then it was 3:00; then it was 5:00. Finally, everybody kind of believed, I guess, or hoped, that we were going to be missed by this, and it was going to be another Hurricane Irene. Unfortunately, that was not the case; it caught everybody by surprise.

CZ: I was wondering, with the initial problems that you had during the storm -- were you able to solve them during the week after the storm? Or did they have to be addressed later?

RB: No, we had to stay out of these two fire stations for almost two weeks. There was raw sewage in the building. We had fuel oil coming up out of the boilers, in people's homes, and that oil just coated everything. We lost hundreds of thousands of dollars of equipment that was stored here. We had to wait for the water to recede. All the firefighters who were not on duty, their gear was contaminated so we had to arrange for a company to come in, and they could only take thirty suits at a time; thirty sets at a time. They literally hand-washed these things. Then bring them back, and then we'd give them another thirty sets. So it was time-consuming for them to get their gear back. But then the fire stations were a health hazard, as well, so we had to get companies to come in and decontaminate the fire stations. That took several days, because they had to spray it, to prevent black mold from growing inside the wood, and all the areas where water can

find its way. The firehouse here probably had, let's say, four feet of water on the ground floor.

CZ: The number of Hoboken fire personnel who live in town -- if you know that, and if you have an idea of how many of them were personally affected, and [unclear].

RB: I would say approximately 50% of the department still lives in Hoboken. Everybody was affected. The power was out in the entire town. That meant that if you didn't have a way to charge your cellphone (which became an issue), there were challenges with that; we couldn't even reach them by phone, to call them in. They would have to walk around to a firehouse, or walk to the Fourteenth Street firehouse, which seemed to be like a nerve center -- even though the emergency operations center was in the basement of City Hall.

At one point -- well, not at one point -- in the beginning, there was only one landline that was working in the emergency operations center. So battalion chief Feeney, who's working today -- he had gotten me a phone number for Verizon, and I spoke to a supervisor there who said if we could get them some space outside of City Hall,

they could bring a trailer in that had a small gas-powered generator, and inside that trailer they would have five stations with flat-screen TVs, internet capability, and phones that we could make available for the public -- because there were a lot of folks from out of the area who couldn't get in touch with their loved ones. We probably had thousands of goodwill phone calls: "Could you please check on my aunt? Could you check on my grandmother. I can't get a hold of her." It wasn't that they were in jeopardy, but there was no way to reach them. Their cellphones were dead, there was no power. They called it a recharging station. It was heated (because it was cool around then, the end of October), and they actually set that up for us, with five stations.

Then an idea came to me and I asked the supervisor, "Is there any way for you to set up more landlines in our emergency operations center?" He said, "I can micro-beam into the command post there, if you give me a couple hours and let me do what I have to do." I sad, "Done. Do it." So they micro-beamed in -- and I'll tell you a funny story about that. You asked me what were some of the things that we had to take care of, in order to get the firehouses back in. And I mentioned to you that one of them was getting the station decontaminated. Well, after they

set up the micro-beam, we had five phones in the emergency operations center. We gave one to the National Guard, one to EMS, and three that the civilian emergency response team members were manning, to field all the phone calls that were coming in from everywhere.

So I was using one of those phones, and that was the morning that the mayor was going to be on the phone with President Obama. Her chief of staff came down -- I'm talking to this guy (well, woman) on the phone, asking for her boss, about coming in to decontaminate the firehouse. All of a sudden, Dan Bryan, who's the mayor's aide, and he's hopping from one foot to another, and he starts to write on a piece of paper, "Washington, D.C. President Obama." I finished my conversation, I hung up, and he goes, "Oh, Chief, thank you very much." I said, "What's the matter?" I thought maybe they wanted me to come up and be in the room for that phone call, for some reason. He said, "Chief, I don't know what's going on, but the mayor's on the phone with President Obama, and they're hearing your voice on the phone call, talking about decontaminating the firehouses." The signal that was coming in overpowered the landline that the mayor had, and the signal was bleeding into their conversation. So he ran down -- she's saying to Dan Bryan, "Why am I hearing Chief Blohm's voice on there?"

So he ran down to get me off the phone, but I had concluded the conversation anyway.

So there were a bunch of anecdotal things like that, that went on throughout this unfortunate emergency that we had. But I have to say that, all in all, all the difference agencies -- the health department; our business administrator; our deputy business administrator; environmental services -- I don't think the law department was active. They weren't in town at the time, and I don't think they could get into town, either. But it was a state of emergency, and the mayor and all of us just did what we needed to do, and worried about making it right afterwards, because we were worried about the life safety of this community. Nothing like that has ever happened before.

CZ: I'm wondering -- since the storm, the kinds of things that you and the department have done to prepare for another major event. What kind of reflection you've done on that experience, and [unclear] "I really would have done that differently." Things you've changed, or policies you've tried to enact, in reaction to this storm.

RB: Well, you know, the old saying is, "First time something bad happens it's shame on you. If I allow it to happen a second time, it's shame on me." So some of the things that we've taken into consideration is that, initially, we never gave much thought to our backup generators, that are powered by natural gas. When the utility company goes out, they're automatically supposed to kick in, and each firehouse would be considered a safe haven, depending on the environmental extremes. If it's ninety-five degrees out, if we had air-conditioning, certainly, elderly people who would otherwise be in trouble can come to the firehouse. Conversely, in the winter time, if it's twenty degrees out, and you wanted to get some people to get some warmth -- so we never really gave much thought to or concern about our backup generators being submerged under water.

Now, when we get these replaced, they're going to be at a minimum of three- to four-feet off the ground, the stand, and they'll be up that much higher. One of the other things we're talking about is to concern ourselves with having a faster response time with regard to making alternative arrangements, if we had to abandon our dispatch center, where we call our fire companies out; a better understanding of our storage facilities for

equipment. We have sealant containers that are sitting in our back yard here, in our parking lot. All of them were under three or four feet of water, so all that equipment in there sat in that water for over a week -- raw sewage and fuel oil -- not good for any kind of equipment, especially power equipment. Now some of that stuff can be decontaminated, but others can't.

So again, I think part of the agreement with FEMA is for reimbursement, that they would only reimburse us this time provided that we present some sort of a plan on how, in the event of something like this occurring again, that we wouldn't have the same kind of damage. So that constitutes us having everything brought up by three or four feet, so that, in the event that we have some kind of a water emergency again -- which could happen. It's not a 100-year storm; it could be a one-year to the next-year storm, for all we know -- but we need to be prepared for that. Our boats -- obviously we make sure they're up and running all the time. We had the forethought of taking our fireboat out of the water, prior to that storm surge. Thank god for that. We stored that in the marina over in Edgewater, on land, so that didn't sustain any damage whatsoever -- which was good. We're not going to put that boat out in that kind of a weather emergency anyway.

So those are some of the things we thought about. We need a better way of communications. We're doing more and more training on how to switch over from what we call our repeater frequency, to what is called "talk around," which is point-to-point -- which is only good for about three or four blocks of each other. If you have one walkie-talkie and I have another, you have to know how to switch to that particular channel, so you're no longer using the repeater, if and when it goes down. It's basically based on the power-outage of your walkie-talkie, and whether you can reach somebody within two or three blocks -- which is better than having dead noise coming out of your radio, when you're looking for fire companies and you can't send them anywhere.

CZ: I was wondering how it was working with the National Guard and the governor's office -- what kind of coordination did you do with them, both before and after the storm?

RB: Well, the mayor handled working with the governor's office. She was the point-of-contact in talking to them, and expressing what our needs were. She literally got a lot of powerful people into this town. We had, I

think, the Deputy Secretary for Energy, who was in town, and we drove him around, to show him our substations that were underwater, that had to be shut down before they fried. We had the Deputy Director for FEMA Response and Recovery here. He's a former battalion chief from emergency services in Boston. We had some mutual friends. As I was driving him around I said, "You're from the Boston area?" and he said yes. I said, "Do you know Such-and-Such," and he said, "Yeah, I know them." So it was funny that we happened to know the same people.

But the mayor was the key to that. She was constantly, constantly expressing the need of Hoboken, to the point where we got a lot more, I think, of a response than we might have normally gotten, under different circumstances.

With regard to working with the National Guard, it was day-to-day, shoulder-to-shoulder. They were in the command post. We made sure they had food. They helped us. Every time one of their trucks or vehicles was going to be sent out (it was called a mission), our folks would go with them on these missions; or, the CERT team (the Civilian Emergency Response Team folks) would go on the mission with them. They were just tremendous. They had their folks there at the command post; anything we needed,

we would ask that person who was manning that desk, he would call a couple of their folks in, and they would get it done. It was a very well-run way to do things, under extremely adverse conditions.

CZ: I was wondering if you were personally affected by the storm. Do you live here in town?

RB: No, I live in Paramus, New Jersey, but we were still affected. There was no power at my home for seven days. Here my wife was, alone at home, while I'm spending days sleeping in my car, in Hoboken, because the need was here. Of course, we spoke occasionally on the phone. She finally found a girlfriend who had power, and she ended up staying there for a couple of days. But it was a very depressing time, and most of the firefighters, I would suspect, who were in town for more than twenty-four hours at a clip -- everybody has their personal families that they're concerned about. I think it was admirable and worth mentioning the courage, and the determination, and the self-sacrifice of the men and women of the Hoboken Fire Department; that when the chips were down, they outperformed my expectations. They were literally super-people, supermen, with what they did, with the adverse

conditions that they had; with the limited equipment that we had; with the breakdowns -- our fire apparatus broke down. We borrowed trucks from other fire departments. We had an engine in from North Hudson. We weren't familiar with their equipment, and they brought in a person on overtime to man that fire apparatus; then our firefighters rode on it, as well. We had a fire the very first night of the storm surge, on Park Avenue. It was in the walls of a five-story building. It took almost two hours to get that out. We had quite a bit of stuff going on. Secaucus came in after the storm was over. They brought in two fire apparatuses to help pump out basements -- because all the panels had to be pulled; the gas meters had to be pulled in thousands of people's homes, before they could get their power back on. So in order to pull those panels, the basements had to be pumped. We couldn't remove our assets, our fire companies to do it, so Secaucus, which wasn't adversely affected like we were, had the resources and brought two of their fire companies in, much to the forethought of Mayor Zimmer, in speaking to Mayor Gonnelli, in Secaucus. They were here for two or three days -- I mean, Black Hawk helicopters were landing up on the waterfront. The vice-president was in town. I had an

opportunity to meet him. He sounds like your favorite uncle in five minutes, when you're talking to him.

It was funny. When we met him at the train station, where he came into town, he took pictures with us and everything; stood with us for twenty minutes, speaking. He was going to make a speech outside, and as he passed me by -- I had forgotten. I have what's called "challenge coins," for the fire department. I grabbed him by the elbow and I said, "Mr. Vice-President," and I had two of them, I said, "I would be honored if you would take these 'challenge coins,' one for you and one for President Obama." And he said, "Ooh, thank you very much." He goes, "You going to be outside when I speak?" I said yes. He goes, "I'm going to have something for you." I said, "Okay. Thank you very much Mr. Vice-President." As I'm walking through the doors, to go outside, I'm going, "Yeah. Right. He's going to have something for me."

I was outside ten seconds. The doors opened up, two secret-service agents came out, and said, "Chief, Chief Blohm." I said, "Yes?" "The Vice-President wants you back inside." Okay. I go back inside. He sent somebody out to one of his vehicles -- he had Challenge Coins there, and he gave me two Challenge Coins. I couldn't believe it. I went back outside, and I said to the police chief, I said,

"You're going to owe me big-time now." He goes, "What do you mean?" I said, "Here's a Challenge Coin from the vice-president. He says, "Wow, this is great."

After that, weeks later, I mentioned something like that to the mayor, and she said, "Yeah, I was so jealous that you got one. I didn't get one of those." But we all got to take pictures with him, and it was a memorable experience. I thought it was tremendous that he came to Hoboken, and took that much time to speak to people. I watched him talk to an elderly Italian woman who still wasn't in her home, when he showed up in Hoboken. And I mentioned to you about the Deputy Director for Cost & Recovery from FEMA. Well, he was there, as well. So she's talking to the vice-president, and he waves over these two big guys. He said, "You see these guys? They work for me. They're going to help you out. Don't you worry about anything." Then he went to move to the next person. She grabbed him and goes, "Mr. Vice-President, do you have my phone number, to call me?" He goes, "Don't worry about that. These folks are going to take care of you."

So they sat there with her, they took all her information down, and I understand that it was expedited for her. So it was nice that the Vice-President of the United States came into Hoboken because of the

magnitude of the emergency. I think a lot of that is because of the way the mayor broadcast that every day, relentlessly, on the phone: "I have to get this electric back in town." Or, "We have no way of knowing what shape our senior citizens are in."

HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, John P. Carey, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I agree to participate in an audiotaped interview by the Hoboken Historical Museum ("HHM" or the "Museum") in connection with its oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy* (the "Project"). I understand that during the interview I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on or about October 29, 2012, and that the interview will last approximately one to two hours.

2. I consent to the use of my name in the audiotape and any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview in connection with the Project.

3. I consent to my photograph being taken and used by HHM in connection with the Project. If I withdraw from participation in the Project, I understand that the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I agree that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview as well as the photograph belong to the Museum, and that all ownership rights vest exclusively in the Museum. The Museum may use and store such materials and content in any manner it shall determine including but not limited to, use by any third parties such as researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy may be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript by HHM.

6. I agree that my participation in the interview, use of my name and photograph are being permitted without any compensation to me and without any ownership rights being vested in me. Accordingly, I fully release the Museum, its trustees, employees, volunteers, and representatives from and against all claims now existing or claims which hereafter may arise, relating directly or indirectly from my participation in the Project.

Interviewee Name: JOHN P. CAREY

Interviewee Signature: John P. Carey

Address: 209 13TH ST. HOBOKEN, NJ.

Telephone Number: 609 335 0884

Date: Sept 12TH, 2013

Archives 2013.039.0003

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: JOHN CAREY

INTERVIEWER: ALAN SKONTRA

LOCATION: HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM

DATE: 12 SEPTEMBER 2013

Track #1

AS: What is your connection to Hoboken? How long have you lived in the city? Approximately where in the city do you live? Who do you live with, if anyone, and what is your professional background?

JC: I moved to Hoboken in 1987. I came here because it was convenient to work. At the time I was working as a construction superintendent at Ellis Island. For twenty years, I've lived very near the library on Park Avenue, in the middle of town, and for the last six years I've been living on Thirteenth Street. I've only been married the last six years. We got married after spending time as a bachelor. My wife, Sandy O'Conner and I, and my

step-daughter, Rhiannon, live at our home on Thirteenth Street, 209 Thirteenth Street, between Park and Garden.

AS: When did you first hear the words, Hurricane Sandy?

JC: Being a weather geek of sorts, and having taken climatology and meteorology classes, I probably had that on my radar screen at least a week before, maybe farther, before it actually hit here in Hoboken. I was following it regularly on the internet and the weather channel, and in the news.

AS: What did you expect the storm to be?

JC: Well, three or four days out I expected it to be pretty bad. I had, at the time of Hurricane Irene -- we had kind of a precursor to what could potentially happened. That storm didn't pan out the way it might have, the scenarios. I can remember (and these are things I'm interested in, having taken a lot of physical sciences) watching a History Channel or something -- the Discovery Channel -- within the last few years, well before Sandy, I had seen a story about ultimate disasters or something in

the United States. There were things like the giant earthquake off of Puget Sound, or the Columbia River Gorge, that would send tsunami waves out, and fires in different places, and various things and other earthquakes, but one of them was the hurricane that hit New York. The scenario which they portrayed at that point was very much in line with exactly what happened here, at Hurricane Sandy -- an extreme low-pressure storm, even though this was only marginally a Category #1, coming up the East Coast, hitting New Jersey, with its counter-clockwise wind, and a huge wind field. I was well aware that, even without somebody telling me, this was the scenario in which a huge amount of water would get pushed in between Sandy Hook and Long Island, and push into New York Harbor. All that combined -- which became evident when people were talking about you had high-tide cycles; you had a full moon -- these were all scenarios for disaster. Which panned out.

So what did I expect? Two days out, I thought it was going to be really bad. I had prepared, personally, and I had talked to my family and some of our neighbors. I was lucky enough to have a generator at my home, that isn't normally hooked up. A friend who lives across the street is a contractor, and he was leaving town with his three young girls. He asked me if I ran a

generator at my house, whether I would back-feed his sump pump in his basement, if power were to go out. We had a similar arrangement during Hurricane Irene. We had heavy rain during Irene. We didn't have the surge the way we did for this, and I don't think anyone expected to have a scenario where all three PS&G -- the power grid would basically go down.

So I had prepared in that I had a generator, with Mike's help. I drew out $500 in cash -- because I expected that, if the power went down, the cash machines would be out. I had twenty gallons of gasoline. I had emergency supplies. I had a crank radio. I had taken several cases of bottled water and put them in my freezer. So I had a huge thermal mass to keep things cold, in coolers. I had brought some food in, not particularly -- I made sure we had bread and butter and things like that. But that was reasonably assured. I had some canned goods. There was a question as to whether we would leave town. We were fortunate enough to have a cabin out in the Poconos, which is at 1,700 feet, so I didn't think that would flood. But there was the potential, obviously, for heavy rainfall out there, and losing electricity. So that had its own scenario; that you might get out there and have trees down, and not be able to get back and forth. So my wife and I,

Sandy, made a decision that we would all stay in Hoboken. I thought about where parking cars -- and having been a geography and cartography guy in college, and a construction guy in my present-day life -- I was well aware of what the grades in town were, and what the elevations were. I had moved our cars to, I think it was, the intersection of Thirteenth and Bloomfield, because it's about as high an intersection as you can get at our end of town, without being too far to walk, and try not to park them under a tree, where branches might come down. Things like that.

So I think I was reasonably keyed in, as far as preparation goes.

AS: What did you do on that Monday, before the storm hit?

JC: The weather forecast for the storm indicated that it was going to be severe. I had thought about the surge, but I didn't think it would be quite what they predicted. I expected heavy rain, but understood -- because maybe we were far enough away from [Unclear] that we wouldn't get as much as we might. We're also on a street that, historically, we don’t have flooding issues. We had

some people with wet basements, but I wasn't concerned the way someone might be who was back on First and Harrison, or over by Shoprite, or some of the places down on Garden and Second, or other places that we all know flood.

I'm sorry -- what did I -- ?

AS: What did you do on that Monday, before the storm?

JC: I had gotten some supplies together. We had set the generator up. That had been done largely with my buddy, Mike, his people. I think I had gone out and purchased some extension cords. I made sure we had supplies where we needed them -- candles. I had already made sure that I had an extra bottle of propane, in case we were going to barbecue and somehow the stove was out. I was going through, in my mind, what the utility situations might be. I'm an old Boy Scout: I'm prepared for certain things.

So I was trying to look at that. I did make a point of taking my wife and daughter out, at the morning high-tide cycle. As I do even now, I'm often on a website that will indicate some of the meteorlogic issues. I'm also on the Stevens Institute website for the buoy that's off of

Castle Point, I was looking at, and I had the weather channel on. We went out in the morning, the three of us, about 9:00 I the morning -- so twelve hours before the storm hit -- and we went behind the Tea building. At that point -- and it was right about the morning high-tide -- the water was right at the lip of the concrete, coming over to the walkway. I knew it was going to go back down, but I also knew, from indications and from conversations, that the evening high-tide was going to be substantially worse. I believe I'd heard that it was going to be at least six feet higher, or some order of magnitude along that, and I just said -- I knew, and I told my wife, "This is going to be bad. This is really going to be bad. Water is going to come into the city horribly," and I wasn't talking about rain water. I suspected (as did happen) that the river was going to come up, and it was going to push over our higher ground, that's adjacent to the river, and into the back of the city.

So I did that, and I talked to Sandy and Rhiannon, my step-daughter, about those things, and I let them know that this could be severe. Also, later in the day, we took a ride around town. One of the -- I don't know if it's amusing, but interesting things -- is my wife's named Sandy. All over town people had boarded up, and there

were big signs saying things like, "Sandy go away," "Don't come here," and I have a few photos someplace (maybe I've lost them, I'm not quite sure) of my wife standing in front of all sorts of establishments with signs. One of them, amusingly -- I think it was the Wilton House -- actually had a sign that said, "Sandy, go away," in spray paint over their windows. Then, in small writing, adjoining it, it said, "And take John with you." I don't know where that came from, but we were both howling.

I also went up to Stevens Point, and was up there sometime mid-morning. This was before Sandy. My wife and I had driven around later in the day. I stood there and was looking at the chop on the river, and how high it was. You could see the water was coming way up over. I guess this was later in the morning, after we'd been out behind the Tea building. But it was coming way up over, into the park -- Maxwell Park -- and the trees were blowing heavy. There were two, huge Army Corps of Engineers ships that were just blowing around in the middle of the river. There was very little other river traffic. I also saw things that I started to suspect (and did come to pass). The docks here at the marina, on Thirteenth Street, the floating docks that are anchored with vertical pilings -- I suspected that they were going to float over the top of that, and later

that did happen. So I was thinking things that were going to happen that pretty much did. [Unclear]

So we prepped, and then I don't know if we had a meal. We made some family phone calls. People were calling us. We listened to the radio and the TV, and we kind of hunkered down.

AS: And as the storm hit, where were you, and what were you doing?

JC: Sandy, Rhiannon, and I were home with our dog. As I said, we decided that we weren't going to leave town. In Irene, Sandy and Rhiannon felt we didn’t need to. We had supplies. The worst-case scenario -- I always said, because of where we were -- I said if it really did get bad, we were going to make it to a point where we're going to make it to the Fourteenth Street viaduct. That's the way out of town. You walk up the hill.

But we were there. At 6:00 -- we weren't to be out after 6:00. I was. A friend of mine who lives on Fourteenth Street -- he and his wife are near Baja, on up the third or fourth floor, and the power has gone off. He is a chef in Manhattan, and he needed to be at work. His wife, Susan [unclear] Sandy -- my friend the chief, Sandy,

was in working at the hotel and his wife was here in Hoboken. They had only moved back here from Hawaii, actually, a few months before. So we were concerned about Susan. The power went off over there. I talked to my buddy. I knew that between some friends that we'd make sure Susan was okay. So I went over to her place -- well, first, actually, at about 6:00 -- about 5:30-quarter of 6:00 I was behind the T-building. It was at 5:30 I was behind the T-building. The water was as high at 5:30, against the wall behind the T-building, and was starting to come over the top of the wall -- as it was at the high-tide in the morning. And we were three and a half full hours before the high-tide. With that, it seemed like this was going to be really severe, because, basically, the water hadn't receded from New York harbor and the Hudson River.

So from there, there was a 6:00 moratorium, and I ended up going over -- having had a phone call from Susan -- over no Fourteenth Street, and went and helped her out of her building, in the dark. Their power went off a few hours before a lot of other people. Then I walked over here to the shipyard, and dropped her off with a couple I know here, where Susan could stay through the storm. It was just easier for her to be over here, than to come over to our house.

So I did that. I stayed here -- I stayed in the shipyard. I think we had to drink Irish whiskey, and I called another friend who was upstairs, on the fourteenth floor, and I was looking out at the marina, and wondering when the water was going to breach the sea wall here. It was over the dock, I think, at that point, at the Thirteenth Street pier. It was about to crest over it. The waves were pretty heavy. The boats were bouncing around in the marina, and the wind was howling from the northeast, and it was really coming around the edge of the building, bad. I had seen a couple other heavy-wind situations, but this was all funnels. I probably left here, in the shipyard, about 7:15 or so -- I'm not sure exactly -- and then headed home. My wife and daughter were there and the lights were on. They were watching TV.

What happened then? I went back out. My wife was on the phone with a family relative here in town -- my stepdaughter's grandma -- and also, we went over to -- I can't remember the sequence exactly. Rhiannon was playing some electronic games. About 8:00 or so -- maybe it was later, 8:30 -- I went out, not having been out for quite a while, and walked around the corner, on Garden Street, and went up by Gino & Harry's. I could see at that point that the water had come southbound on Garden, by the new parking

garage. At that point, the old parking garage was still there. We were still an hour or so before high-tide, and the wind was blowing to push the water up on our side of the river. I walked back on the cobbled area, where the Farmer's Market now is, and then went around the corner by CVS. There were some other neighbors who were out. I was there by CBS, looking over toward the diner, and the water was already pushing up on the front of the Malibu diner. I was concerned that the water would come higher. I knew, at that point, that this was really severe, because I knew that that was relatively high ground. I could see the water flowing over toward Willow. I suspected it was probably flowing from the south end of town, where, earlier in the day, I had been down at the rail yard. The television cameras had been there, and there had been live broadcasts and things, showing it come up by the train yard. But I suspected, at 8:30 at night, that not only was the back of town going to get severely, severely, severely flooded, but it might hit our house.

So I ran back to the house, got over there, and very abruptly -- in my way -- went in and told my wife to get the hell off the phone (not in the nicest manner), and Rhiannon, I told her, "Come downstairs, put your shoes on. This is serious. Something big's going on." I realized,

in a bit -- I went back out -- I kept saying that high-tide was at 9:06. I guess that's something I knew from the Stevens website. The water, in my mind, could come up -- that was the peak -- or it would be slightly thereafter, because of the way the wind was blowing, and things pushing into the harbor. But basically, that was going to be the peak of the surge. So I kind of had in my head that within an hour the worst of the water that was getting in was going to get in, then it was going hit us -- my house -- it was going to be sometime before that. Then, in going back and looking, the water line that was intruding was kind of stable. It wasn’t coming southbound on Park beyond the Malibu. I walked over by the Sunoco station -- Dean Marchetto's office -- and it was flowing past there. It wasn't coming farther, it wasn't coming closer to our home. But I knew -- that was fine for us, but it had to be absolutely horrible elsewhere, and I was going through these scenarios in my brain: "If the water is in front of the Malibu, it must be all the way to the bridges by Weehawken, and the south end of town has got to be absolutely inundated. That appears to be what happened.

So that was kind of up to the peak. Then the power went out.

AS: Did your generator work when the power went out?

JC: It was a 5,000-watt generator. It had to be manually started. I could have turned it on right away, but, frankly, I didn't want to. I didn't need to.

Track #2

JC: I was saying about the power going out. So the power went out. I had a generator. Now probably -- I don't know exactly what time -- because time was a bit of a blur, and it wasn't pre-eminent; it was just what was going on. So I could have turned the generator on; I didn't need to. I ended up -- I had set up extension cords. The generator was directly in front of our house. We've got a piece of property that is twenty feet wide. I had four foot to the gate. I had a generator underneath a little shed there. I had my gasoline and what not. I didn't need to turn the lights on. I had flashlights, I had flashlight batteries. The refrigerator wasn't going cold. I also, frankly, didn't want everybody -- for me to be sitting there with lights on, going, "I'm okay." There was no need to. I kind of got to a point where, after it appeared that the worst of it was over, it wasn't going to get any worse,

and the power was out, it was kind of time to go to bed. We were tired. I don't remember exactly. I may have been up the whole night before, in my hyper state or something, but we were tired. I suspected it was going to be a long day the next day. I didn't know how long the power was going to be out. I didn't know that the power was out through the city, totally. We didn't have internet. We had cellphones. I think some people were calling in. I don't know. It was just kind of like, "Get up in the morning and see what's going on."

I did have a conversation, I guess, with my buddy, Mike, who was out -- I know I did. I had a conversation with him. He was out in Warren County, where they were staying with his family, and I said, "Hey, the power's gone out. Do you want me to turn --" I asked him if he wanted me to turn the generator on. I was going to back-feed -- take his sump pumps off his house power and use the extension cord that we'd draped across the street, in the trees and into his basement, and change that cord around so his sump-pump would run automatically when the power was on. We decided, no, we didn't need to do it that night; that I'd get up and I'd get over there by 7:00 in the morning, or something, to check it out when the sun was up. So that's where that was left

The next morning --

AS: Yes. What did you do the next morning?

JC: The next morning I did get up, and I was all wired up. I can't remember if I had the radio on or whatever, and I didn't turn the generator on right away. There was enough light to get around the house. It was going to be light. I'd read the riot act to my daughter -- "Don't open the refrigerator." We had water. We had gas in the stove. We even had hot water. I wasn't quite sure if that was going to work. I should know this, as a construction guy, but I knew there were certain things that weren't going to work. The heat wasn't going to work, even though it was gas, because the fan wouldn't push the air around. There were various things that I knew wouldn't work. I also had a lot of firewood. I think I got that a couple days before.

Oh, yeah. We'd been away all the weekend before. I'd forgotten about that. So we were coming back from Connecticut, at a family event, so basically I rolled -- to go back -- we had been away, and had just come back from a few days away. We didn't get back until late on Sunday, and I knew that there were things to do, but some

of them I've already done already. So let me get back to -- what were we saying, Alan?

AS: The next morning. Tuesday morning.

JC: Okay. So Tuesday morning. So I got up, had my flashlight, had all my spare batteries and stuff. I went across the street into my buddies house; went down to the sub-basement, and it was like, "Oh, shit!" Excuse my expletives. There was water in his basement. There had not been any water on our street. There hadn't been any water within, oh, 200 feet, probably, and there was only a slight grade. But the ground water had come up into his basement. Mike had installed a really great under-drainage system and had a couple of sub-pumps, but the water had come up. He had, I think it is, a Pergola-like wood floor, and the floor was floating above the concrete slab. Basically, I knew it was ruined, and I was kicking myself. We had made a decision not to turn the sump-pump on the night before -- waste gasoline; you'd need it for lights; save all of that. So it just was a lesson. It was the first time I was going to go turn his sump on. I didn't know what the normal cycle of it was. I understand these things, but -- so, immediately, I went up from his sub-basement, into his

basement and up to -- and ran across the street, with everything quiet in the neighborhood. I didn't care if I disturbed anything; I started the generator up. It was all ready to go. I hooked up the electric, and just started pumping.

So the water was drained off of his floor. Consequently, then, I back-fed things. I went over to my house, which wasn't critical, and I said, "Okay, let me plug their refrigerator in for a little while." I think we were trying things, to see if the TV worked. I didn't have any rabbit ears with the new-style TV sets. Anyhow, I couldn't get any information, and I don't have a Smart Phone so I was kind of scraping by on what info I could get.

With that, basically, the days all blend in. That first day, I think it was everybody getting out, seeing the neighbors. People knew I had a generator. It was making noise. I had it on for a couple hours in the morning, when the pump had to go down. I wasn't quite sure how often you have to turn it back on. I wasn't particularly looking out, or doing anything outside of our immediate home. I don't believe we were supposed to be riding around town at that point, and I wasn't. I did, shortly after I turned the generator on -- I met some other

neighbors, including some firemen who live on our block. I'm sure he was on the job. But his wife was coming out, and we ran down, up to the end of Garden Street, by the waterfront, to see what was going on, and lo and behold, there was that sailboat there, so I saw that for the first time. That kind of, in my head, gave an order of magnitude how bad it was. Because if that boat, that probably draws four or five feet with its keel -- even if it was pushed up and forced up under the water, the water had to be pretty heavy and thick, deep over the walkway.

Then I didn't want to stay out long. We weren't supposed to be -- the cops had their job to do. I understand that. But in some ways I guess we all had a need to understand what was going on, or wasn't going to be going on. I guess they were concerned, later on, about anybody looting and things like this. But it was basically neighbors trying to figure out what was going on.

Later in the day I know there were some issues that I was helping some neighbors out. In fact, this same friend who's a fireman -- he was off on duty -- he checked her pump in the basement, and it wasn't working. I had some roofing material that I patched a pipe in his basement, so they could at least make sure water didn't

collect. There were a couple of things that I was going around, doing.

AS: When did you leave your immediate neighborhood and start venturing out into the city? Was it the next day?

JC: Here again, a bit of a blur. I could probably go back and look at some things, but I think most of Tuesday -- I believe I pretty much stayed nearby. We heard conversations from different people, and understood that power was out all over. I'm not sure if, on that day, I went down to City Hall. I don't believe we were supposed to be using our cars. I had my bicycle. I knew that was a great way to get around. I used it extensively later on. Later on, when we could use our cars, it was a different thing. But it was just a good way to go around and see what was going on. I think I might have gone down as far as Eleventh Street. People were out on their stoops. Different people were talking: "Did you get water? How's this? What did you see?" I started to understand that some places, some of the high-rises might have had emergency generators. Also, with my construction background -- and I was Facilities Manager, Assistant Facilities Manager to

Guggenheim Museum for nine years; I've worked with emergency power systems; I've worked with fire alarms; I've built elevators; I've built sea walls; I've put up steel; I've poured concrete; I've done marine construction; all sorts of other things -- so many of the issues, emergency issues and things I was familiar with -- understanding that if you don't have a generator, the potential is the fire alarm didn't work, or that the water pumps weren't pumping water up to the upper floors, or to a tank that might help; that there were going to start to be sanitary problems. It was also just, with flushing -- it was also obvious -- I didn't know for a fact that -- I assumed that the sewer plant wasn't functioning, and I was well familiar with the inherent drainage problems here in Hoboken, with the combined storm and sanitary, and that basically everything that was in and stuck -- the water that was in the city, that hadn't gone, that was stuck, had to go out -- it wasn't going flow out to the river on its own; it had to be pumped out, or it had to go out through the sewers, and this was going to be the big issue.

My stepdaughter's grandmother lives over on Thirteenth and Grand, and she has a corner apartment, a corner condo, that had quite a view. We had been talking to her on the phone. I knew, initially, she couldn't get out

of her building. I think we also knew, shortly thereafter, that her car was flooded. She was concerned about her dog being there in the house. I believe it was later that day that the water got to a point where, from the south end of that building, the southeast corner, that she could walk across Twelfth Street -- because it's a little higher -- and she was able to get over to our house. With that, we knew that she'd be staying with us, and it would be our dog and her dog. I also knew we had a generator, that kind of sat back. Okay. We've got so much gasoline. I didn't know how fast it would be used. The primary reason for running the generator was so that Mike's sump-pump could de-water his basement, because the groundwater would probably continue to get up, and we benefited from that because we could charge things. I could power the refrigerator, and just make sure it would get colder. And a couple other things that we used.

I guess within a day many -- being who I am, and many people knowing me, a lot of my friends knew that if they needed something they could come over, or we were having people over, at least probably the second evening, and I had the generator running for a while. We started to cook food, and just people's freezers were -- they couldn't keep the food, and they brought it over to our house, and

we made big meals. So that was kind of the first day. I guess I had a feeling that a huge part of the city was flooded, and there were a lot of people who were really in a bad way, and that we were really, really lucky. I mean, I was prepared, but we were very lucky, and it was a matter of only being a foot or two higher than some people who were a block or two away. I also suspected that people who were traditionally -- that apocrypha is low; that they were hit really bad. Horribly. I thought -- I mean, there would be five feet of water in big parts of town, and I guess there was. Well, I know there was, now.

I guess the next night some people came over, and people were asking questions and stuff. Then, I guess, Wednesday I kind of set it up where, "Okay, now's my day to go out and explore, and see what's really going on."

AS: And when you went out to explore, where did you go, what did you see, and what was your response?

JC: On Wednesday, at that point -- immediately after the storm, at the Fourteenth Street viaduct, the water had receded, and you could go up that viaduct. It was -- oh, I remember what happened. I'm confusing the days. My buddy who lives over here in the

Constitution [unclear] -- it might have been the next day. He had parked his car where he assumed it was safe. It was "away from the river," quote/unquote. He had parked his car on Fifteenth -- no, Sixteenth -- north of the Burlington Coat Factory, just adjacent the kidney dialysis place. In retrospect, that seemed to be the sluiceway, where a big chunk of water was going cross-town. That might have been on that Wednesday. But the bottom line is, Rick and I hopped on a couple of bikes, and we were riding around. His car was over there. He had known it was flooded, but he didn't know how bad. We cycled up Willow Avenue in about a foot of water, beyond the north of the Hess gas station. He wasn't too sure how deep it was going to get. By where the Macy's studio was, nearby Burlington, there were police officers preventing April from going -- the water was much deeper at the base there, to go up and over to Weehawken.

But we got to the bridge, and there was some gas leak or something going on over by the Shades so we weren't going over there. But he could see his car, that was there on Fifteenth, right immediately east, or west of Willow. He could see how the water had gotten in; it was almost up to the interior ceiling. So I think that was his confirmation, not the assumption that he had to write his car off. So there was a bit of that.

On Wednesday -- it was Wednesday -- when the water did recede, for whatever reason, going back in the [Unclear] with the sump-pump online -- of course, nobody had power. I had sump-pumps. I had one installed in my house. I had another one that I bought. I think for Irene I'd gone out to an industrial supply house and gotten some things. So I kind of knew that I was okay, and I was thinking, "Okay, who can I help?" But on that Wednesday morning, I took my car, and I could see, Tuesday night, that there were lights up in Union City, up by the Yardley plant. With that, I said, "Okay. They've got electricity. Maybe they have gas, maybe they have food. Not that I necessarily need this stuff, but let me find out what's going on." So I drove out of town. I think I did it by way of the viaduct, the Fourteenth Street viaduct. I got up there, and I went around to a variety of places. I found a Walgreen's that was open, over by Schuetzen Park. It was kind of spotty, where the power was on and where it was off. I was asking people about gasoline -- not that I desperately needed it, but everybody was in a tizzy about that. Somebody said there was one at JFK Boulevard, down a couple of blocks. They went down there, and that had been pumped out and was gone. Somebody said there was someplace

else, and I could see that there were major lines, and everybody was running around.

I ended up coming back. Oh. I went and got a gasoline siphon at an auto-parts store, that I thought would be helpful, independent of whether I needed it or not. Then I ended up coming back, and I stopped at a little bodega that was at the northbound leg of the Fourteenth Street viaduct, and I bought some potatoes and rice, and I bought just some other, basic staples -- again, not because I needed it, but I thought somebody, someplace could use this, and if I can grab it, I'm not going to hoard it or waste it, but maybe I can help somebody.

I proceeded from there to drive back down into Hoboken, at which time there was a van across the street, at the top of the hill, still in Union City. I went around it, and I started to go down the hill. I wasn't driving aggressively, and the police officer told me I couldn't go down -- a county police officer (it's a county road). I ended up turning around and saying that I live in Hoboken, and I'm just trying to get back home. I have some food and things, and I'm trying to get back home. "You can't come down here, sir. I'm sorry." It appeared to me that this guy was very, very tired, and he'd been working extremely long hours. I don't doubt that he'd been on for

the better part of a day and a half, two days, at that point. I was trying to get home. I'm saying, "Hey, listen. See, right down there by the Rite Aid? I just have to go -- my house is right around the corner from the Sunoco station." He wouldn't let me down.

So I pushed him a little farther. He proceeded to tell me he was going to arrest me. I thought this wasn't a route I wanted to take. He was on foot; I could have driven by him. I didn't think I wanted to do that. Maybe I'm a little crazy, but I figured if I got down -- even if I got by him, I'd get to the bottom of the hill, and obviously he had a radio. Again, undoubtedly, yes, he was incorrect in handling it the way he was. He kept telling me I had to go back around, and go down through Weehawken, by the Lincoln Tunnel. I'm looking down, and realizing it's all grid-locked down there, and I don't see any cars -- and there were also cars that were passing me, going down the hill, that he didn't appear to be stopping. And there were people coming *up* the hill. And I was like, "Why is this guy doing -- ? Why can't I go [unclear]." "Sir, you have to leave right now," very forcefully, and almost hit my chest.

So I finally left, and I went around by Gregory Common, and came down the hill there. That was all at a

standstill. I turned around and went up by the Lincoln Tunnel, and came down another way. I finally ended up weaseling my way around by the Lincoln Tunnel. Police officers went around the dock, by Lincoln Harbor. I was trying to get in. We were sitting, standing still, over by Lincoln Harbor. I got out of the car. It was obvious nobody was going anyplace. It looked like there were a lot of flashing lights over by Dykes Lumber. I finally said, "Fine. I'm not going anyplace," and decided, even with -- I guess I had some milk or something. I was trying to get home, and I had things I wanted to drive home. I ended up driving -- parking my car in Lincoln Harbor and walking home, along the new walkway to Weehawken.

So I was home. Of course, I'd disappeared -- I was only going to be gone for an hour, and this was several hours later, when I got back. There were some discussions about that, at home. Later on, I knew I needed to go back to get to my car; that the parking lot attendant was nice enough -- at Lincoln -- to let me leave it at Lincoln Harbor, on the second floor. I hopped on my bike. This was late in the afternoon, on Wednesday. I hopped on my bike, and I was going over to Weehawken to get my car back. It seemed at that point the traffic was going in and out of town, but it was heavily, heavily regulated. There

were county police officers, being county roads, at Fourteenth Street, and Willow, and Park, at the bottom of the viaduct, and it was getting a bit gridlocked. It seemed that everybody was trying to go out and see what was going on. The gasoline stations -- the Hess gasoline station, the BP stations, the Sunoco station -- were all weren't functioning. There was no electricity. There wasn't any fuel. People were driving up -- two days after the event, they were trying to figure out what was going on. People were trying to hold it together. There weren't a lot of answers. Communication was poor.

But, in any case, I hopped on my bicycle, and I got all of about a hundred yards, next to the Malibu Diner, and I see a big van, like a UPS-sized van, with a trailer behind it. There's a guy there with big construction lights, and he's got things that I know from the construction business; he'd got four-inch "mud suckers"; big, six-inch pumps; he's got a "quad," like a little four-wheel drive thing; he's got carts; he's got all sorts of things -- generators, blah, blah, blah. I'm looking at this guy; this guy's loaded for bear. Then I turned around -- I didn't turn around -- I got off my bike and yelled over to him, "Hey, what you got there?" There were all these boxes, and I realized -- I'm certainly

nearsighted but -- that these were generators. He said, "I've got generators." I said, "Well, what are you doing with them?" He said, "Well, there was a guy down at the shore that was looking to [unclear] bring these two, but he backed out." I said, "Where you from?" and he said, "Pennsylvania." "What the hell are you doing here?"

They'd come in from someplace out in some town near the Susquehanna River that had been hit by a hurricane before. This guy had a business where he sold "quads." He knew there probably would be a need. Obviously, he was trying to make some money, but I think he was honestly trying to do some good things. He had four or five guys with him, that had left out there. They'd loaded up, and they'd come this way to get some work and help out. So I get off, and I ask him, "So what are these generators?" He had ten 5,000-watt Briggs & Stratton generators, in boxes. They didn't look like they fell off a truck; he looked like he was honest. Having worked in the South Bronx and in Harlem, I know how these things go, if some things suddenly appear to be purchased. I said, "How much do you want for them?" He said, "Fifteen-hundred dollars." I didn't know how much a generator cost. I assumed it was several hundred. I wasn't quite sure. Briggs & Stratton is a good name. I turned to him and said, "That sounds a

little high." "Well, I'll give you a deal, if you get more than one." I said, "Really." To which he turned around and -- I asked him if he'd sell all of them, and he looked at me like, "Who are you?" I said I knew the mayor, and that I thought I could get the city to buy them. I knew there was a need. I'd been around town, and I'd seen that there was very little electricity anyplace other than that weird thing with Eleventh Street, and cross-town, and going down River Street had some power. I guess I knew at this point that City Hall was without power, and everybody was trying to figure things out. So I told him to wait there.

Oh. I guess to backtrack -- I had been over to the Sunoco Station. We'd been trying to get, through this friend, get the power to the Sunoco station, to get gasoline pumped. But there was somebody else that I'd met through that situation, and he happened to be walking down the street by the Malibu. I can't remember his name now. But I said, "Listen, wait here with this guy. Don't let him sell these pumps. Don't let him sell these generators." It ended up that I got on my bicycle. I didn't go to Weehawken, as I'd told my family I was going to. I proceeded to try to find the mayor. I had been told by somebody that she was over at Tea building. I went over there and talked to the desk. She wasn't there. I turned

around from there and went down to the Eleventh Street Fire House, the Thirteenth Street Firehouse, and they told me that they thought she'd gone down to City Hall. I went down to City Hall, and she was there. The National Guard was already there. I really wasn't aware of all the city's operations at that point. I went up to her. (She knows me for a variety of reasons, including being a trustee here in the museum, and my wife knew her because my stepdaughter and her son had been at school together, at one point -- and for other reasons that I'll leave.) I went up and I go, "Mayor, Mayor," and she looked at me and said, "Yes, John?" And I go, "I've got something to tell you." She broke off her conversation from the Army Reserve guys, and I said to her, "There's a guy at the Malibu Diner who's selling generators." To which she said, "Oh, that's good." To which I said (I think I'm quoting this right) -- the question was, "Well, what will we do?" and I'm like, "Get 'em. Do whatever you have to. You have the money to do this, Mayor -- Dawn." And she ended up grabbing somebody I came to know a little better -- Jon, who's the head of public safety here in town, and I think we talked to one of the city business managers at that point. I left my bike at City Hall, we got in a squad car, with no traffic lights, with the party-hat lights on. We drove up to Fourteenth Street,

and then went around the corner to the Malibu. Jon was trying to get onto his Blackberry and find out how much things are worth, but basically we got there and we cut a deal. We bought the all -- which was great -- for $1,100 each. So the city had ten generators.

From there, Jon drove back in the squad car, and I actually hopped in the truck with the guy who was selling these things. He hadn't been to town. I said, "Come on, I'll direct you down. We're going to take them down to City Hall." We did that, and the National Guard took them off. They proceeded to be given out that night to a variety of places, including, I'm told -- I know one of them went to the Elks, which was needed for the soup kitchen. There were generators that went to some of the schools that were in need, some of the senior centers, but they were needed desperately. We weren't prepared, and the generators were important. I was glad I could help with that. They could have gone to private owners and other people, but it was more important that the community have them.

That night I think I went home -- came home -- and I get the look again, "Where have you been?" and rightly so. And it was, "Well, I did this and this." "So you never got your car." "No, I didn't." I'm not sure if I got it that night. I think I did. Parking wasn't

particularly a problem at that point. Some people had left town, and obviously there were a lot of cars. I wasn't going to go park in a flood-prone area. I assume -- and it gets to be a blur -- but we started to have friends over. I let people know in the neighborhood that if they needed to charge their cellphone -- because people's cellphones were dying -- that they could use power strips at our house. I had my daughter taking people in, and I said, "If people come in with their phone and they're going to leave it, that's fine. But they need to mark their phone with their name, as well as their charger; otherwise, they'll never get them back. Because there were too many things going on. So she kind of helped orchestrate that.

There were a lot of people in and out of our house that we only casually knew, or never met before. There was a great sense of community in that. They brought food, and we cooked it and ate it.

AS: In what other ways did you get involved with the relief and recovery effort?

JC: Well, after I got home that night -- and I had more of a perspective on what was going on in the city -- and I'm a guy who gets involved, maybe overly

involved, in things, at times -- I ended up talking to my wife and just saying -- and I was between jobs -- not that anybody was going to work at different places -- but I've got a set of skills, from my construction and facilities management; from my knowledge of engineering and other things -- I just turned and said, "I can do something. I can help." I wasn't part of the CERT team. I knew there were things that I could do. We were okay at our house. I wasn't worried about water. I wasn't worried about food. We had electricity for a couple hours a day. I had to mind, making sure -- as I'd promised my neighbor -- that I would keep the sump-pump going, so he didn't get water backed up in his house. I was specifically involved.

The next morning I ended up down at City Hall, and I talked to somebody I came to know pretty well (he's a great guy), Steve Marks, who's the assistant business manager. I didn't know Steve's background. I'd never met him before. I think I met him briefly the night before. I proceeded to go up -- I guess they had known I'd help with the generators. I went and introduced myself, and basically gave them the line, "Hi. I'm John Carey. I've got a construction background. I've lived in town for twenty-seven years. I'm a trustee of the museum. I know a lot of people. I've done sea walls; I've put up steel; I can put

up a crane. I understand emergency generators. I've built elevators. I understand concrete -- boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. I was the Assistant Facilities Manager at the Guggenheim Museum. This and that, blah, blah, blah. What do you want me to do?" And Steve, as I recall, kind of looked at me, he sized me up, and he said, "Go find out how much gasoline is in town." I said, "Fine."

So I left City Hall. I said I'd be back in an hour or two, and I proceeded to drive around. The flooding had by and large receded. I guess this was Thursday. At least, where I was. I knew there was still water entrapped in the back part of town. I hadn't really ventured back there. I knew it was difficult to get out of town at the southern border, going across Jersey Avenue -- the way we go to the Holland Tunnel and Jersey City -- and I knew you couldn't get over to Paterson Plank Road, and I knew we could get out at the north end of town, but there were bottlenecks all over.

So I proceeded to go -- I went down to the [Unclear] Station at Observer Highway. It looked like the pumps were destroyed. It wasn't worth it even to ask. Nobody was there. I went up to the Sunoco Station and talked to Meer -- whom I've known because he's in our neighborhood, and he's also done work on our cars. We've

bought gasoline there. I went in and said hi. I told him that the city had asked me to find out how much gasoline he had, and what did he need? He said he had 12,000 gallons of gasoline; he had 20,000 gallons capacity, but he didn't have electricity. I think I'm confusing the sequence. The other individual I talked to about the night before, the generator actually was -- that happened I got to know -- when we were trying to get electricity, he said, "I'll go."

So I knew that's where he was at. He basically had gasoline in the ground. He told me it would be good. Although I've built some of these things, I wasn't quite sure whether water would get into the tank. (Salt water would be a problem.) But he said it would be fine. But it's just that his electronics, his pump and his controls were out. I went over to the Hess gas station, where I occasionally buy gasoline. I went in and introduced myself. The guys knew me from my face, just having been in the neighborhood, buying gasoline. I went in and introduced myself. I said, "I'm John Carey. I've been asked by the city to find out how much gasoline you have. What's the story?" They were completely pump-dry. They had been pumped dry before the storm. They have 30,000 gallons capacity, and they expected a delivery, he told me, within an hour or two. And they were also getting a generator. It sounded

great. I found out later that the gasoline didn't come for a couple days, and when they got a generator, they turned all their lights on and everybody swarmed there, but there was no gas. I went over to the BP station and did the same thing. They had 20,000 gallons capacity. I think he had about 10,000 or 12,000 in the ground. He couldn't get it out. And he was asking me when I was going to get him electricity. I couldn't do that. With that information, I went back to City Hall. I told Steve. I think he was happy to know that. This was all part of them figuring out what was going on in town.

Subsequent to that, I know Mike Griesbauer and some other people were trying -- Mike, who's my neighbor, who helped me with the generator -- he got back into town after a few days. It was difficult for him to get in -- but he had some connections, and he was trying to see if we could get electricity to the Sunoco station. But there were some voltage problems, with the amperage and stuff.

Bottom line is, I showed up at City Hall, and I had some skills that I could help out. I kind of was in a position where, because I wasn't attached to anybody, and was kind of a flying-bunko squad, and I'd go ask Steve what he wanted, or I'd be down at the command center, and

the first floor that I started to walk in and people knew me -- I got to know the people who were manning the desks. I started to have conversations with a variety of people. People were asking me what I'd seen, and I was trying to feed that stuff back. Also, a day or two after being down there -- because I started to go down every day -- talking to Juan Melli, who was in charge of communications for the city -- I pointed out to him -- they had stuff up on a website -- which is great, but most of us, especially -- I didn't have a Smart Phone at that point. Most of us couldn't get the internet, so that wasn't particularly helping a lot of people, as far as communication goes. I had a conversation, I remember, with Juan (and maybe it was in his head before I said it), "Throw out the fact that you're in 2012. You've got to go back to the time when I was a kid, and everything's got to be in print. They had put the white board up with information, in front of City Hall -- which was certainly helpful -- but the fact was, if you were sitting up in my neighborhood (which wasn't in a bad way, compared to a lot of other people), most people, a lot of people, weren't going to walk ten, twelve, fifteen blocks, to the far end of town -- because that's where City Hall is -- to get information. You needed to get information out.

I suggested that you needed print. And because of the fact that City Hall (and this threw me a bit, and I know they've worked on it subsequently), the emergency power situation at City Hall was not great. They were running extension cords. They had very poor lights, much worse than I was used to on a construction site. I'd worked on emergency plans and things, for there and, as I said, at the Guggenheim. I was taken that we weren't operating at a level that I had hoped my city would, and I believe they will in the future. I'm getting sidetracked here, Alan. Redirect me.

So the printing. They had one low-capacity, relatively low-capacity, printer that they were working out of the emergency command system, and there was no volume you could get out of it. At one point I was standing in front of City Hall, a couple days into it, and I pointed to Juan, I said, "What you've got to do is you've got to get that building --" and I was pointing to the Office Depot across the street -- "functioning, and get electricity to it. Because they can print there. Because that's what you need. You need a high-speed printer. You've got to be able to put out a newspaper, essentially." We didn't have that capacity at City Hall -- not that we necessarily have to -- but that was our fallback. It was amazing to see all the

volunteers, a couple days into it, helping bring food and clothes and things.

But it just seemed like things weren't as directed as they might be -- and I'm kind of a logistics guy, and I've worked on huge construction sites, where the budgets are tens of millions of dollars -- $100 million plus -- and I was taken by the fact (and I commented to some people) that we were bringing in -- food and clothing was coming from all over, wonderfully, but it was in black, plastic bags, and this stuff would get dragged up the steps of City Hall and put in the City Council room -- which, I'm like, this is the last place you want it. You've got to carry it up and down stairs. You need to mass handle this stuff; where are you going to do this? I knew there were people working on this, obviously, and it worked out well, over at the high school, when they got it. There were some great people working over there. But initially, to see plastic bags of clothing that was unmarked and you didn't know what it was, just dumped in between seats, in the City Council office -- it was like the act of handling it was next to impossible, and you couldn't get to what you needed.

So we were talking about that with some people. This printing thing -- I suggested to "Warren" that

-- well, they didn't have electricity in that part of town, and I remember sitting there going -- at that point PSE&G had set up a tent in the parking lot, immediately adjoining Office Depot, and my comment was something to the effect that if you can't get damned PSE&G to get power through a wall that's six inches thick, into Office Depot, what the hell are we doing? Because all you needed to get was 40 amps inside the building and get it to the printer. I proceeded with, maybe it was Steve, or other people at City Hall, and maybe Juan gave me a number, and I was trying to chase down the manager -- Larry Schwalb -- and corporately, some people were trying to help out, going up to get Office Depot open -- and somehow I just said, "You've got to get electricity in there, even if it's not on the grid. Just get electricity there." And there was electricity, from a huge generator that PSE&G had, in a tent, right next door, so there's no -- in my construction background, there's no problem. Get the damn store open, start printing stuff, and hand it out.

I'm not saying I did that, but it did -- I think Juan and other people did an admirable job. They had a lot of volunteers, and they handed out all sorts of information in the next couple days. And I know, having talked to people -- the first couple days, just driving

around town -- the first day was talking to your neighbors; the next day, "What's going on?"; the third day I heard people on Thirteenth Street saying they might be out of food, is the A&P open? This and that. I'm like, "Whoa, hold on a second. It's bad, but we've got it pretty good up here. Calm down. The city's doing what they can. There are people in the back of town who are in a bad way." But the communication wasn't there. It eventually got to a point where -- I think on the first day they might have gotten like 8,000 or 10,000 8.5" X 11"s out, handed them out, and they didn't need so many subsequently. They were going out daily, and the mayor was having a daily briefing, and some of that was going on the TV. So people far away knew what was going on, but we didn't all know it here. Then you'd get phone calls if your phone was charged, so the information was eventually getting around. I'm sure all sorts of people are looking at those things now to make it better, so we don't have this situation in the future.

AS: When did you think the worst had ended?

JC: What do you mean by "the worst?"

AS: In terms of -- in the aftermath.

JC: Well, the damage that was done was done. I knew, having cleaned up contaminated buildings, there was mold contaminated, and asbestos, and other things; that it was going to be a long process. The construction here in Hoboken, in buildings -- I didn't have a perspective on what it was like regionally. I suspected certain things. We could come down here to the river, look across, and you'd see all of lower Manhattan, south of 34th Street, or 38th Street, or whatever it was -- there was no power on, with the exception of a few places. What media we did here -- there was some big fire out in the Rockaways that we heard about. There were towns that were wiped away down at the shore. But that was all in passing, and those would be huge news issues, normally, but it was just kind of like a total peripheral, just getting by here, and trying to help out.

The worst of it -- the longer it went on, it made it worse. There were things -- I'd be down at City Hall on some days. I know the fire chief (Blohm, is it?) had asked me at one point -- and we'd had some conversations -- they had an emergency generator at City Hall, but it was being run off extension cords. There was one extension cord that was running up to the conference room on the third floor, and most of the other power was

just being used on the first floor, but it wasn't being distributed well. Every late afternoon and evening, it was like you were going into the dark; you couldn't even get around, where we were, across from the emergency command room there, the small conference room on the ground floor, over to the bathroom, over by the Parking Authority, because it was in the dark. So I thought, "Okay, we've got to get more lights here," and I had this conversation. Of course, if you could do anything, you'd go do it. I think I talked to the chief about this, and he said, "Can you get me some lights?" I said, "I'll do what I can do." I realized again, sitting, I think it was over by Office Depot, or PSE&G, that you could see lights -- I could see the light at Target, across the rail yards, and the water had receded. Because I could see that, I assumed there was power (which there was) over in that part of Jersey City, and I assumed Home Depot and Target were open (which they were). So, with that -- I don't know what we -- "There are types of things that we need. Let me go see what I can get."

So, with my Amex card (and the chief assured me I would get reimbursed), I drove over to Target, and I bought extension cords. And I went to Home Depot. I went in and I bought squiggies, and I bought what they call

temporary construction lights -- we call them birdcages, on a construction site -- and I started to buy things that I thought were important. I bought some mops and some other things -- several hundred dollars worth of things -- some construction lights. I spent a few hundred dollars. I didn't want to spend too much. I could have bought more. I didn't want to wipe things out, because there was somebody else who had some needs, But I knew that even City Hall alone, or up at the Elks, or someplace else -- the Elks, I knew, were starting to crank food out -- that there was a need.

So I ended up grabbing what I could, and I brought them back. The chief was very helpful -- thankful, I should say -- in that. I put the receipts aside and tried to make sure I didn't lose them, which I gladly didn't. I started actually stringing some lights myself around, with some extension cords, around the lower floor of City Hall, and I felt there was a need, at least, to run some temporary lights up through the central stairway, so people could walk up to the upper floors -- which they couldn't. I took a construction light, a halogen light, and bounced it up into the stairway.

While I was doing this -- it was strange -- because I was taken by the fact that it was so poorly lit.

I was trying to figure this out. I guess we got some basic stuff out. I don't know if it was that day or the next day (and the days are a bit of a blur, and I was in a bit of a whirlwind, and [unclear], to make sure my neighbor was pumped out, checking in with my family. We had friends in, and there was a lot of congestion in the house). But a few days into it, I'm at City Hall, I worked around the corner, and the main electric panel that I came to know, was at the base of the stairway at the first floor, between the Parking Authority and the place you pay your tickets, your traffic tickets. The electric panel was wide open. This is something you don't normally see, because if it's "hot," somebody can get electrocuted. There are busbars. [Phonetic] How many amperage of electricity going through there is probably thousands -- I don't know what the voltage is and all this kind of stuff. I'm not an electrician. But I see in the floor -- there are big rolls of wire, and there's copper that's maybe three quarters of an inch across, and somebody clipped this stuff. And I'm looking like, "Who's doing this?" I'm riding around, putting little extension cords, and there's somebody really doing something here. I was thrown by the fact that this hadn't happened before. We weren't prepared for it, but

that aside, there was somebody working on this, and I was thinking it was great.

The next thing I know, this shorter guy than me, this little ball of energy -- he's coming through with a miner's hat and a little spotlight, and he's inside the panel, and he's throwing it around, and he's cutting wires, and I'm like, "Who are you?" And he's looking at me like, "Who are you?" And I tell him, "You're exactly the guy who needs to be here." And within a couple of hours, he had back-fed the generator that had a lot of capacity, that was being run by really light-gauge extension cords, and he back-fed the power into critical lighting systems. Certain things we decided you didn't need to power up, but just get lights in the building, and so the copiers could work again, and the communications system, and some other things. So I got involved in that.

Another thing I got involved with was April Harris, over at In Jesus' Name, which is the food bank, the food kitchen here in town. I guess I had started to drive around and find out where water was a problem. It was evident that there was a lot -- because we didn't have power -- it was only starting to come on slowly in different parts of town. There was standing water in the streets, but because there was no power, even when the

water receded, everybody's basements were flooded. That caused problems with the electrical circuits and panels, your utilities being ruined. We've seen this before, but not on this scale.

So I went over to Our Lady of Grace, the old school building, which is the Mustard Seed School now, where my daughter was in school, and found out that the basement had flooded. When we started to look around -- yes, of course it flooded; it was on the west side of Church Square Park. I knew shortly thereafter that the library got some stuff [unclear] next door, where the food kitchen is. Oh, wow. The food kitchen. That's really going to be needed now. You started to find out a few days into this, that this was an amazing group of volunteers who were around. There were people who were pulling all sorts of garbage and stuff out of the basement. April -- whom I had only met in passing, my wife knew, because the school had done some things with the food pantry before -- I ended up going in there. I could see they were cleaning stuff out in the basement, and she was very much in a bad way. Her operation had shut down and wasn't functioning. It was critical that it needed to. You would assume that there was food coming in and stuff, but she wasn't aware of clothing

and things, and she could obviously be a key distribution point, using her network and her knowledge and stuff.

So I, along with running around and doing other things, started to stop in there. It ended up that the Convent building, which was historically the convent -- she'd been in the basement. She had permission to move up to the first floor -- which didn't get any water. They started out in a room or two. It was all in a jumble. She had some older women who were trying to organize things. Things were in plastic bags again, and they weren't stacked well, and there was no shelving and what not. I ended up in there with some other people, in helping to organize her, and get it so it's functional. I felt good about that. I felt good. She runs an amazing organization, and I realized that she had this network of people, many of them minority, Hispanic; some of them speak poor English, live back in the projects, and these aren't people that maybe a lot of people in town know do such wonderful things. But the way that April could make sure she had supplies, that people who were in real need in the projects -- I started to hear from these women -- sometimes in poor English or translated -- just how bad things were in the projects. I believe there are about fifteen buildings there. Having worked in construction in the South Bronx and in Harlem, I wasn't

thrown going back and seeing -- maybe I have more insight than some other people have. I also, from a construction point of view, and an operations point of view, understood that if you've got -- I think the tallest building is a twelve-story -- if you didn't have water in upper floors, if you didn't have emergency power in the hallways, seniors, and people who didn't have the means -- that some people in my neighborhood might have -- there were going to be real problems. I shouldn't say "problems," but they were going to have some hardships that were going to be challenges for them as individuals, and also our community.

I think I had a sheet. I knew what every address was, in the Housing Authority -- and I'm doing this in an official capacity -- knowing what the building numbers were; knowing how tall they were; knowing whether they or not they had electricity. I was getting this information from some of these women who were going and taking food from April directly to individuals they knew -- pregnant women, mothers who were in need -- but there was always the issue: You had to walk up and down stairs, sometimes in the dark. Of course, we know there are some issues with crime and things back there. It was a tough thing. But some of these wonderful women were making sure, taking things where they were really in need.

So I tried to help April out in that. There were times I'd make sure that she knew how to get food from what was a central distribution point, up at the high school, and that they were feeding her food and blankets, and she would say things that she needed: She needed diapers, she needed baby food, things like that. I'd go tell people, and I can't remember the woman's name, who was doing a great job at the high school, making sure that some of that got down to April, so she could distribute it. I also, on my own -- another thing -- I ended up -- I was over at the projects a couple times, a few days, and the Red Cross was there and the Salvation Army. I came to know some of the people who were working for them, and there were some amazing people who came in from faraway places -- Tennessee, Kentucky, and had been at Katrina and things like this. I know a couple times I found that there were Red Cross trucks distributing food up here near the museum. I was a bit thrown, because whatever flooding we had basically receded back into the river. Not that there was a lot of economic activity in town, but I assumed that, by and large, most people up this way were okay. We had some of the bodegas have flooding issues and things, and lack of heat a couple days into it, when that storm came and stuff. There was a need for blankets; there was a need for

clothing; people had lost some stuff. Maybe some of it wasn't distributed as well as it might have been. But this was, again -- people at City Hall asked if I could help out on that. I made some calls to the Red Cross and to the Salvation Army, and told them that they could probably do the best work they could do and get to the most people if they were back in places like Sixth and Jackson, or Second and Harrison, and some places that maybe some people in town weren't venturing back to. Then there was a lot of good -- there was an amazing amount of good work being done.

But I remember, in the dark, being back by the Jubilee Center, handing out, with a Red Cross truck -- I wasn't handing out sandwiches, but there with my Ford Explorer, with the headlights on, and with some signal flares, and they handed out, in a matter of a couple hours, I think, 1,000-2,000 hot meals, that were really needed. These people didn't know anything about Hoboken. They just showed up. That was good. I was happy I could see that done.

And I tried to get a hold of the police, because -- not that we were necessarily going to get jumped or something, but it would have been good to have a police officer -- and eventually there were some police officers

who came along, and they were very helpful. We went down and we parked at, I think, Third and Harrison, in the middle of the projects. A few of the officers knew people down that way, and they called people down. I think a lot of people got food that might not have otherwise. So anything I could do to help that was good. People were scared to come out. There weren't any lights. They eventually got some generators in the projects, where they had some construction lights -- you see highway construction at night -- and a few things like that, but that was few and far between.

I babble here. Another thing -- and this was six days into it, I think. Sunday morning -- I know I'd make a point -- there were different things and different people I was catching. In some ways, if April was doing okay at In Jesus Cares [sic], I didn't feel I needed to go back there. She had my phone, she could call or something, and I had a cellphone that I could -- things at home -- people were coming by. They were cooking, and there were people staying with us that we didn't know, or people stopping in or staying late. So there was kind of a home base for a variety of people.

I'd make a point of, early in the day, like before dawn, I'd get up (and I was getting by on very

little sleep, as sometimes I do), I'd drive around town, and I'd see where there were lights on. I'd understand where power was, and some of that information I was feeding back to City Hall. And other people -- it wasn't just that they didn't know, but it was helpful for people to understand what was going on. I'm sure the police and the fire departments knew a lot of this stuff; and, certainly, PSE&G. I'd go by the sub-stations and I'd see the guys working. I had in my head that the Thirteenth Street substation was in better shape than the one by Shoprite, and the worst of them all was the one down at First Street, Second Street and Harrison, because it was under much more water. There were crews in from all over.

But I was driving around this one morning, and I guess the water had receded back by the Jubilee Center. I was familiar with the Jubilee Center from some things my wife had done, and involvement I had had, on a variety of things. It's a great organization, and they do an amazing job of reaching out and connecting people within the community, with people who have some resources, with people who have some needs. I went back and the door was locked. It was very early in the morning, but I realized that they didn't have any water damage, particularly, except for the entry, because the first-floor slab is

elevated. So, with that, I decided I'm going to go over to the Episcopal church -- the All Saints -- that is instrumental in organizing what. It was All Saints Day, so I'm over at the church, at about 8:00 in the morning or something, and Reverend Curtiss and his wife, Linda, were there. They knew me, for various reasons. I went in and I asked -- I said, "Can you open the Jubilee Center?" They said, "We don't have any electricity." I said, "Well, the water's gone down. I have a generator." I had a generator, not the ones they got for the city, but a friend of mine from Syracuse had actually driven one down and left it off at our house the night before, because he wanted to help out. He said, "If anybody needs this, give it out. Let them use it." So somebody upstate New York was thinking of us down here.

So I ended up telling them that if you open it up, I can get you electricity. With that, Linda and I went over to the Jubilee Center. She opened it up. They've got gas stoves. The gas was working. I said, "Just start boiling water, so we've got water." And they have a fully-equipped kitchen, which is great. And I've worked a lot in the food business and the restaurants, so it was just like -- start boiling water. I knew at that time that the Elks were doing stuff. They were feeding a lot of people, and

there were some other places in town to get food. But it would seem that, because of the proximity of the Jubilee Center to the Housing Authority buildings, that it would be really helpful to get that going. So some of the parishioners who were getting set up for All Saints Day -- with no electricity, I think. Or maybe there was electricity. Our power in our house came back on, on Saturday night at a quarter to 11:00, and it was starting to come on in bits and pieces in town, initially around the hospital and some other places. So I had power at home. I'm not sure if they had power at All Saints Church. I think they had candles out. They didn't have power at the Jubilee Center, but I could get them a generator. I asked them to start boiling water, and I went over to the A&P -- that I don't believe had electricity at that point -- and went in and bought as much oatmeal as I could, and just started, with the assumption that we're just going to start cooking oatmeal. (The old Boy Scout in me.)

So we went back, and some of the parishioners came over. They just started cooking, and they made cheap oatmeal with cinnamon and some sugar. We had Styrofoam bowls, and within two hours some parishioners and some other people in the neighborhood were there, handing out, going around -- nobody came -- they put out a sign,

initially, "Everybody's probably wondering who are the crazy people at the Jubilee Center and that guy running around?" -- being me -- and I was calling up and saying, "Hey, there's hot food down here." People started to come down, walk across the street, walk a block or two. It was a slow process. I think initially it was tough to give the stuff away, but I think within a day or two -- within a day -- staff was back there, we could run electricity, and I plugged in a refrigerator. I also made my first run for them up to the high school. I went in and grabbed some juice and things, then went back sometime later that day, with one of the staff member (I can't remember his name, again), went up to the high school and introduced the person from the Jubilee Center to the people giving out food [at the] distribution point, and just said, "This is legit; make sure he's got everything he needs." I think the first delivery was we had a laundry basket full of chicken soup. I can remember some young kids who had come over after church were opening up regular-sized cans and just dumping them into a five-gallon pot, and heating up soup that was very appreciated by people who were walking in -- just to come in and say they were happy to sit down and have -- it wasn't cold in there. We didn’t have heat but it was dry -- a place to socialize and sit at a table. I think

we had a radio on, with some music. It was nice. It was nice. It was helpful. Again, over there, I knew that was going, and there were a couple of people who were keeping it going. I didn't feel a need, after that, to get back to the Jubilee Center, necessarily. I'd stop in occasionally. I'd go back a day or two later, and they had the internet going. That, for all sorts of people -- somebody who was some IT guy figured out how to get that going, and that was very helpful. They were already starting to do FEMA forms, and I was getting some information from City Hall, and being able to bring it over to the Jubilee Center, and maybe some of those newsletters and things. Just doing whatever I could to kind of facilitate whatever help I might. So. What other babble do I have?

AS: Well, my last question -- which I've been asking everybody -- do you feel as if Hoboken has recovered, and if so, was there a moment that made you think, "Hoboken is back?"

JC: I think Hoboken is an amazingly vibrant city. There is so much economic vitality here. There is so much street life. It was a gradual process. It's not completed. It's not as obvious what the damages are now.

There are other communities where there was -- I'm told we lost 4,000 cars. I'm told 1,750 apartments -- low-level basements, ground-floor units were damaged. Subsequent to the storm, I got back involved and I've steered myself toward learning more about flood-plan management, which is a certification program that I've gotten. I've been to some FEMA conferences. I've been to things with the Army Corps of Engineers. I've been involved in a lot of great conversations, that are really needed.

We all need to understand what happened. It appears we are historically on an island. The peak of the island is where the Stevens family house was; but, basically, we all know now that Washington Street is high, and there's a topographic line that runs around at about ten feet, and below that, in a storm such as this, you're liable to get flooded. We have to fix that. We have to figure out what the smart thing to do is. There are 53,000 people in town. We have too much exposure. We have old buildings. Have we recovered? The fact is, it's not like we're down at the shore and your house got picked out and floated into the bay. We're not in a bad way, the way some other places are. But there are all sorts of people -- there are businesses that were really horribly hurt. We're a community that is transient, somewhat. There are people

who move in and out, particularly young people, as we've gentrified. Some of what we need to do -- big things we need to do -- kind of macro-engineering -- to keep the water out, so the surge doesn't come in. We've got to fix our combined storm and sanitaries, and we need to build better. We need to think about what we can put on ground-level floors. Should we have a furnace down there? We lost 4,000 cars. That was -- I won't use the word "stupid," but in some cases we should have been smarter. It seemed that there were a lot of other cars -- during Irene, people moved their cars, more so than they did for this one, because they saw Irene, and they decided it wasn't going to flood, and they left it. But where do you put 4,000 cars? You can't drive them all up to Stevens and put them on the football field.

So we've got to figure this stuff out. Have we recovered? I'm sure there are some places -- I've had a lot of conversations with people -- I look down at the -- what's the coffee place that's down at Second and Garden? He took six feet of water. He's, amazingly, rebuilt. How many times can a business do that? What's the value of a building that's been in the family for years, that has a rental apartment on the first floor, that now isn't as economically viable to rent? Can an elderly, senior citizen

who owns the building -- that's reportedly worth a lot of money -- afford to live there anymore, because they don't have a rental income, because they can't rent out the first floor? There are things we've got to do. We've got to have emergency systems. We have to be smart about generators. The initiatives that the city is taking, as far as micro-grids on our electrical system is smart. We need to upgrade our storm and sanitary. People need to understand what the exposure is; to understand the basic -- we live in this great city. Many of the buildings are 100 years old, and we're not smart about understanding what damages we can have. You ask somebody, "Did you protect your house?" "Oh, I did something up two feet." "Well, what's the elevation?" People don't know what the elevation is -- the elevation being off of sea level. People don't know that stuff. We need to understand that stuff. It's really important. I know that, because of who I am, that I'm in much better shape, because my front stoop, I believe, is at about twelve-foot. Somebody who lives back on Monroe Street, it's a five. People need to understand that information. So.

AS: Is there anything you'd like to add, that I didn't already ask about?

JC: We live in a wonderful city. I'd hate to think we'd have to retreat from the water. We live on the edge of the Hudson River. But it's not just the edge of the Hudson River, or upper New York harbor; we live on the edge of the Atlantic. It appears, you know, that sea level is rising. That can be documented. Whether you believe in global warming or not, the fact is, the expectation is, that water levels are going to be higher. A city like ours -- the chances of something like this happening again are much greater than they probably were in the past. We have to be smart about it, and we haven't been. We've really been kind of naïve. We have a natural topography that can work for us in protecting ourselves, with our old island, with our palisades behind us. What serves to trap the water in Hoboken is the water basically -- we only have to keep the water out for a couple hours during the high-tide cycle. If the Atlantic Ocean comes up ten feet because all the glaciers melt, we've got a much bigger problem. But if we're only talking about if we have a Sandy-type storm, and a storm surge every couple of years, we have to be able to build walls, have edges that we can protect ourselves. We have to have a pumping system. We have to have sanitary systems. We can only build the sewer plant so big. We have to have places to hold water until it can get pumped out

into the river, because the sanitary plant is lower in elevation than the high-tide line.

We can do these things, but we have to focus ourselves. We have to be smart about it. It isn't a political fight, it's a practical fight.

And I'm amazed at our community. I was really taken by all the volunteers, across the board, and some of our public servants. There have been good discussions since the storm; there has to be more. We can't forget what happens. We've got to focus ourselves, now that it's in our collective memories, what happened, and we shouldn't be waiting. We can't wait five years to figure this out. We need to focus ourselves now, and do some more things. We've very lucky to have people -- the governor, the mayor, other people -- people in the federal government, in HUD, have pointed out that Hoboken has some unique issues, and work with FEMA out of the box; work with the Army Corps of Engineers, figuring out what we have to do. We have Stevens here, which has amazing resources. We're very lucky to have that. They've looked at some of the flood control issues, with their oceanography people, with their marine systems. We should be taking advantage of that; have a public/private collaboration. We should be using any resource we have, to figure this out. People have

done it in the past, people have done it in Holland. A lot of our issues, if we can figure them out here, in our square-mile city of 50,000 people -- I've told people that I know from FEMA and other people that if you can figure it out in Hoboken, this will transpose to being able to work problems out to their potential in New York, in Boston, in Philly, and the low-lying areas of Washington, Savannah, and Charleston. All these things. I want us to see us move forward. I want to see us smart about it. We shouldn't leave a few hundred rail cars in our train yard. We need to be smart about understanding that water is going to go down (and I trust they're doing this), that water is going to go down to the entry level of the PATH train. All these things.

Recovery -- you said when did the city feel like it got back? I think the real milestone for many of us was when the PATH train got back. I don't use it extensively, because I'm up at the north end of town, and I don’t go into Manhattan regularly. But that ended up -- having that kind of connectivity with Manhattan again was critical to us being where we are, and the fact that we're such a heavily mass-transit city. It didn't mean that we had to rely on the buses so much. We were lucky we had the ferries.

There's a lot of be done.

AS: Thank you.

JC: You're welcome, Alan.

HOBOKEN
HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, Lou Cascio, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I agree to participate in an audiotaped interview by the Hoboken Historical Museum ("HHM" or the "Museum") in connection with its oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy* (the "Project"). I understand that during the interview I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on or about October 29, 2012, and that the interview will last approximately one to two hours.

2. I consent to the use of my name in the audiotape and any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview in connection with the Project.

3. I consent to my photograph being taken and used by HHM in connection with the Project. If I withdraw from participation in the Project, I understand that the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I agree that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview as well as the photograph belong to the Museum, and that all ownership rights vest exclusively in the Museum. The Museum may use and store such materials and content in any manner it shall determine including but not limited to, use by any third parties such as researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy may be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript by HHM.

6. I agree that my participation in the interview, use of my name and photograph are being permitted without any compensation to me and without any ownership rights being vested in me. Accordingly, I fully release the Museum, its trustees, employees, volunteers, and representatives from and against all claims now existing or claims which hereafter may arise, relating directly or indirectly from my participation in the Project.

Interviewee Name: Lou Cascio

Interviewee Signature: L C

Address: 1139 Park Ave
Hoboken NJ

Telephone Number: 201-538-4856

Date: 8/2, 2013

Interviewer name: Alan Skontra

Interviewer signature: Alan Skontra

Archives 2013.039.0004

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: LOU CASCIANO

INTERVIEWER: ALAN SKONTRA

DATE: 2 AUGUST 2013

AS: What is your connection to Hoboken? How long have you lived here? Who do you live with? And what is your profession?

LC: I have been in Hoboken since 2001. I moved to Hoboken from Summit, New Jersey. I met my wife -- my future wife, I should say, at the time -- in 1995. She lived in Hoboken. Obviously, we started dating, and we purchased the house in 2001. Her name is Lisa Biase.

AS: And what is your profession?

LC: My profession is, I'm an auto physical damage adjustor for New Jersey Manufacturer's Insurance Company.

AS: And what is a CERT team?

LC: The Community Emergency Response Team is a group of individuals who are volunteers. It's a totally volunteer organization that helps the community out in times of disaster, when public safety is so far taxed that they need additional resources to help mitigate the problems that we have. We help support the police, the fire, EMS (Office of Emergency Management). There is just a whole variety of roles we play, to help everybody in the community out.

AS: And what sort of things do CERT teams do?

LC: We do almost anything. We can run emergency operation centers. We can answer call centers. We can run shelters. We can fix communication grids when they're down; as simplistic as providing security checkpoints for the Macy's fourth of July. We can run or establish pharmacy chains-of-command to help the community out. There are so many things that we do. We fall under the

umbrella of the Office of Emergency Management, but we do a lot of the grunt work.

AS: What kind of training do the volunteers get?

LC: It's an eight-week mandatory course of different aspects of all of the public-safety requirements. They have medical training. They have fire-suppression training. They have disaster psychology training. They have the CERT organization training. We have supplemental training on top of that, which is optional to them. They can learn as much as they want. We have Red Cross disaster shelter management training. We have weapons of mass destruction training. There is just so much.

AS: And how was the CERT team in Hoboken formed?

LC: The CERT team in Hoboken was formed in 2007. It was primarily a group that was made up of parking utility attendants who were CERT trained. Then in 2010 Mayor Zimmer actually -- what she did was, she made it available to the citizens -- which it should be. We started

off as a small team in 21010. I think we had fifteen graduates. We went through the blizzard of 2011 (I'll have to check on that). We went through Hurricane Irene; then when Irene hit, we really recognized that we needed a lot more people to help out, because if there was a hurricane, it would really be taxing on us. Then what we did was we put information out, and we graduated another class in 2012. We started our classes in 2012, a week before Hurricane Sandy hit.

AS: And how many volunteers were on the team when the hurricane hit?

LC: When the hurricane hit, there were fifteen volunteers who helped out. Actually, fifteen volunteers managed over 5,000 people.

AS: And what is your role on the team, and why did you join?

LC: My role right now is I'm the CERT coordinator for the city of Hoboken. I joined because I wanted to help the community out, and I found a need. There was a real void in emergency services. I'm not saying that

the paid services have issues; it's just that there are just so many -- they need a lot of help. There are just so little public safety officials, or public safety firefighters, that I felt that it might be beneficial to help out the community.

AS: Did you have any previous experience?

LC: I ran an emergency repair facility for nine years, where I repaired emergency vehicles. So not really, per se, in treating people or anything like that. But I had a feel for emergency services.

AS: And how does the Hoboken CERT team get its funding?

LC: Right now we get minimal funding from the city. We have a 501(c)3 under the Hoboken Emergency Response Team. That's our name. We primarily get it from private donors, and some corporations are starting to kick in right now. We're starting a program to educate corporations for a small donation.

AS: When did you first hear the words "Hurricane Sandy?"

LC: I first heard the words "Hurricane Sandy" a week prior to our deployment. I was teaching the first course of the new CERT team with Tom Molta, the president of the Hoboken Ambulance Corps, and I had on my Smart phone a warning, an alert come through from the Regional Operations Intelligence Center with the New Jersey State Police, saying, "Hurricane Warning." It was one of those warnings that came across that was very urgent, so I turned it over to Tom, and I said, "Look at this, Tom. We have an issue on our hands." And we had all these other CERT members who were not fully trained yet, but they actually played a vital role because we recruited them. It was sort of a baptism by fire. The twenty-seven people who were in the class actually helped out tremendously.

I should go back and say, technically, they weren't graduated, but we had about thirty-five CERT members working through Hurricane Sandy.

AS: Based on the warnings of the storm, what did you expect it to be like?

LC: Exactly what we encountered. I knew that people didn't take Irene seriously, but I knew from weather reports, and from our ham radio network of friends that we listened to, down South, that we were monitoring the situation on a real-time basis, and we were just hearing the devastation that was going on down South. We took it very seriously. The city took it very seriously, and we did. We were out very early, trying to get the word out to everybody.

AS: And what did the team do to prepare for the storm?

LC: The team prepared by deploying our CERT disaster trailer; getting the emergency operation center up and running; locking down frequencies on our ham repeater system, so we'd have communications; buying batteries. We put every contingency plan in place. We work under the system called the Incident Command System, and we started to apply that knowledge to our response. We had adequate time. We have five-six-seven days, and we also worked in concert with the mayor to get the word out. We were down at the Housing Authority, sending out fliers. Most importantly, our members became prepared before they had to

come out and help, and that's the whole thing about service. Make sure you have a plan, and make sure you're ready, your family is ready, before you can go out and help others. So what I did was I put an all-call out to all the members that Tuesday, and I said, "Listen, we have a hurricane, a possible hurricane coming down the pike. Get your families in order. This is going to be a doozy."

AS: And as the storm was hitting, where was the CERT team?

LC: The CERT team primarily, in the beginning, when the storm was hitting was in the emergency operation center, answering phone calls. That was one of the many tasks that we had that we deployed upon, but that was primarily where everybody was, because it was just not safe enough to go out. We did have some members going out, doing field checks and doing surveys around the city. Then it just became too dangerous for anybody to be out.

AS: After the storm broke -- what did the CERT team do immediately after that?

LC: After the storm broke, we started the recovery of everything. We repaired communications equipment for the fire department. We started a pharmacy chain of command because the senior citizens were trapped in these high-rise buildings. We did grid searches of every block. We knocked on every door, in conjunction with the volunteers who came through from Stevens. We distributed MREs (meals ready to eat). We set up the high school -- I called it the mother ship, the mother hub -- and we made that a major distribution center. Then what we did was we created points of distribution throughout the city, so we were able to drop food, water, diapers -- all the essential needs -- to each individual point of distribution, so that the citizens would be taken care of. We distributed lights. We had over 23,000 meals ready to eat that we distributed. It was a major, Herculean task. We would be here for three hours if I told you what we did.

AS: When did you first survey the damage? Where did you go, and what was your initial reaction?

LC: I actually surveyed the damage -- I would go out -- in fact, it's a funny story -- with Tom Molta, the president of the Hoboken Ambulance Corps. The

only time we would see each other, because he was so busy and I was so busy, was when we did surveys. I remember the morning after the storm hit -- it's pitch dark; he's driving down the road; I'm driving down the road; his truck was tattered. The light was broken off of it, and we both didn't get any sleep. He goes, "How you doin'?" I said, "I'm doin' pretty good. How are you doing?" We were like two ships passing in the wind.

But that's when it was real to me, what really happened. Then after that I saw the damage, and we had to react immediately. I had to establish a plan for the team members, and, actually, in conjunction with the Office of Emergency Management. We had to get a plan ready immediately, to start the recovery of it.

AS: And what things did the CERT team do in the days after the storm?

LC: As I said before, we started a pharmacy chain of command. We did grid searchers. We went to each individual home. The pharmacy chain of command was a system in council chambers where I recruited doctors, pharmacists, nurse practitioners to establish this chain, so they could actually write prescriptions in council chambers. What I

did was I got permission from CVS Pharmacy for us to end runners up to these high-rise buildings, to fill prescriptions for seniors. They were going up to the top floor; they were getting the prescription bottle; bringing it down to council chambers; they were writing the prescription; they were bringing it to CVS; waiting for the prescription; and going back up to the senior buildings. And, like I said, the points of distribution -- fixing communication hubs. There was so much. In fact, if you read the thing I gave you, it goes into a lot more. We also ran and manned three shelters in the city, for almost thirteen days. So our deployment was really vital the day after the storm, and most of us didn't go home until thirteen days afterwards. The power went on in about ten days. We were responsible for setting up the emergency operation center, actually managing the emergency operations center, making tough calls on where fire trucks were going to go; where ambulances had to go; what was priority; what wasn't priority; what phone lines were down; giving general information out to the public, like if the commuter rails were up, when the power was going to go back on. We were interacting with FEMA, getting logistics, getting equipment for the city.

AS: What were some of the challenges that the CERT team faced, and among those, was there one that was most urgent?

LC: Communications. We didn't have the ability, really, to communicate too much. Probably, you could say this about everybody: Phones were down. We were fortunate enough to have two ham repeaters that were installed, and they worked flawlessly throughout the whole tour, the whole storm. But, for the most part, we didn't have enough handy-talkies to give out to everybody. Lack of equipment that we had: We didn't have the equipment we really needed. We're working on that now, to establish more equipment.

AS: And of that equipment, what does that contain? What sort of resources did you need, and did you feel like you had enough?

LC: No, we did not have enough. Still, to this day, we're not 100% up-to-snuff, but we're a lot better now than we were back pre-Sandy. We need cash. I hate to say it, but we need in-kind donations from communications companies, or whatever, or public donations,

to afford this equipment. It's kind of expensive. Well, in the grand scheme of things it's expensive to us, but to other people it may not be. It's somewhere along the lines of $20-25,000 that we need to raise, to make us more viable.

AS: When did you consider the emergency phase of the storm to be over?

LC: The emergency phase was when the power went back on and people were starting to restore. That's very hard to say, because it was kind of a blur. I'm going to say nine days afterwards.

AS: Were there any unsung heroes, or people you would like to cite for their work during the storm?

LC: Absolutely. I would like to cite Maggie Shields, who's my captain. There are just so many that I cannot leave out, who were there throughout the whole storm. I would be here for an hour. Alison Atwater; Carlie Ringer; Rich Tremiditi.I can change this as I go -- right? -- in the future. That would be off the top of my head, immediately. There are going to be more.

AS: What did the CERT team learn from this storm and this experience?

LC: What did we learn? There's this big conception about "we are stronger than the storm." I think that's a great slogan, but I don't think it's truthful, by any means. I think the storms *are* stronger than us, and the problem is that we've become complacent. I think we really have to be educated on what could be coming down the road. We live in this fantasyland that, "Oh, it's a 100-year-storm," or whatever. But we have to be prepared, and we have to harden our infrastructure, and really think about what's going on. We have to think about it now, we can't think about it ten years from now.

AS: And how many members, or volunteers, does the team have now? Are you still looking for new volunteers? And how can one join?

LC: Okay. We have sixty-five members right now, which is outstanding. We had a huge influx of members through Hurricane Sandy. We are, right now, soliciting members for the new class. The new class starts in

November. We have forty-five applicants already signed up; our limit is sixty-five. I have probably twenty promises, but I don't have the applications in hand right now. We have a website. You can go to the city's website, look up Hoboken CERT -- Hoboken CERT.org -- and you can fill out an application and send it in, accordingly. The class, this time around, is probably going to be full, but look for future updates. You can go to our Facebook page. We have a Hoboken CERT Facebook page. We're working to update our website, to make it a little more professional.

AS: How did you balance your role as a CERT volunteer with also being a resident, who was also affected by the storm?

LC: Luckily, my power did not go out in my house, so my wife was very comfortable. It didn't go out the whole time. We're on the Union City grid, so that made it a lot easier. We even had our television working properly. So I felt that I was very fortunate that we had the necessities, and we were comfortable. My wife was helping out the community. I felt it was my duty to go out and help others who were trapped on the thirteenth floor, who had issues.

AS: Do you feel that Hoboken has recovered? And if so, was there a moment when you thought "Hoboken is back?"

LC: Yes. I had a false sense of -- I can "false," because one can never be 100% that it's not going to happen again -- but when all the garbage was off the street -- because we saw terror for so many days, and we saw the destruction and everything -- when the parks started opening back up, and people were swinging on the swings -- the kids started to play again -- that kind of gave me a little bit of hope, I should say. As for us being ready -- we're more ready than we were last year, I can promise you that, but we still need a lot more education. We still need people. It's people's complacency. That's the problem. They don't fully understand it; they don't take the warnings. They just don't. It's hard to pound something into somebody's head. I hate to say it that way, but that's the truth.

AS: Is there anything you'd like to add, that I didn't already ask about?

LC: I would just say, if anybody can join the Community Emergency Response Team, do so. It's great for the community. We absolutely need more members. Get out; educate yourself; listen to people; if you get a flier in your hand that says, "Heed the warnings," or if you get a flier in your hand that says, "Be prepared and do this," read it, please. Don't throw it in the garbage. Listen to what the officials have to say, because it's very important. It could save your life some day.

AS: Okay. I think that's everything I have.

LC: Okay.

HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, Krishnette Echevarria, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*. I understand that I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on October 29, 2012.

2. The interview will be audiotaped. In the interview I may be identified by name, subject to my consent. I may also be identified by name in any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview, subject to my consent.

3. I understand that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that a photograph of me may be taken or borrowed for duplication, and that if I withdraw from the project, the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to Hoboken Historical Museum, and that the information in the interview can be used by Hoboken Historical Museum in any manner it will determine, including, but not limited to, use by researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy will be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript.

6. I understand that at the conclusion of this particular study, the tape(s), photograph, and one copy of the transcript will be kept in the collections department of the Hoboken Historical Museum.

Interviewee Name: Krishnette Echevarria

Interviewee Signature K Echevarria

Address 320 Marshall Drive Apt 7A

Telephone number: 201-682-2409

Date: 8 / 30 2013

Archives 2013.039.0005

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: KRISHNETTE ECHEVARRIA

INTERVIEWER: EILEEN LYNCH

LOCATION: JUBILEE CENTER, HOBOKEN, NJ

DATE: August 30, 2013

EL: This is Eileen, and I'm here with Krishnette. Krish, when did you first hear about the storm and say to yourself, "Wow. This could be big." Or did you even think that? Or did you just think, "Oh, it's just another storm, and it always floods."

KE: No. What I was assuming (which is bad to do) was that we wouldn't have gotten affected as bad as we did. I said, "Oh, flooding is nothing. We're going to still be able to do our regular, daily activities, or our daily routine." Well, it wasn't that way at all.

EL: Had you taken preparations? Had you done anything?

KE: I did. I didn't do enough of it. Like I went and stocked up on canned goods, water, flashlights and batteries. I went and bought some candles. I considered, actually, leaving my apartment. The day I did decide to leave was the day the storm started, so everything was shut down. There were detours everywhere. So we stayed home.

EL: And who was in the apartment?

KE: Myself --

EL: You stayed in your own apartment.

KE: Yes. Myself, my husband, and my three children.

EL: How big is your building? How many people live in your building?

KE: There are seven apartments on my floor. I'm on the seventh floor.

EL: Oh. So it's one of the big buildings.

KE: Yes. I'm in one of the bigger buildings, on the back of Marshall Drive.

EL: Did your elevators go out?

KE: Yes. I would say the third day of the storm, the elevator went out. It didn't go out because of the generator; it went out because, in the elevators, there's an outlet that you can use to plug in, to charge, like a wall socket. It was being used. People had extension cords plugged in so they could charge their phones, their candles -- it was ridiculous. It really was. So all that power shut down the elevator.

EL: So for the first couple of days, how bad was the water?

KE: You couldn't walk out of the building. I would say -- I didn't come down until maybe the third day of the storm.

EL: Had the water gone by then?

KE: On the staircase, in front of the building, there are four steps to actually come into the building. It wasn't there, it was by the curb. So you could walk out to the front of my building, but if you decided to cross the street, you couldn't; it was already flooded.

EL: And this was three days afterward.

KE: Yes.

EL: So the water actually came into the lobby of the building.

KE: No, no. There are steps. There is the main entrance, and then there are steps. So the front, the actual outside, the front of the building has four steps. It came up to the second step there, and then it started receding to the curb, like the sidewalk. It was like a big puddle in the front of the building; you could walk through it, but you couldn't cross the street to get to any -- the cars were destroyed. It was really, really bad.

EL: Were there a lot of people in your building? Or a lot of people left?

KE: I'm not sure. I know everybody on my floor happened to stay home. So we were like a little colony, and that's how we survived.

EL: You had pooled your resources.

KE: Yes. My neighbor, for some reason, remembered that on the roof there's a generator, also, so we connected a power cord, one of the strong ones, to the outlet, to the socket. We put it all the way down to the hallway. On top of the exit signs, there is another socket, so we had tools. We opened it up, and used that, also, to be able to get energy.

EL: But you couldn't run the refrigerator or run the TV.

KE: We did.

EL: You were able to do that?

KE: Yes. That's how we were able to survive. My neighbor had a freezer. He had his regular refrigerator,

and a freezer. All of us took our meat and put it in his freezer, and we all took turns going -- like they said, "Oh, the Red Cross is here." We all took turns -- the adults took turns saying, "Okay, today is your day. You're going to go down in the morning, go and get some ice, go and get the heated meals that they were giving." So everybody was taking a turn. In the morning, everybody made their own breakfast. By 11:00, all the doors were open, and everybody was in the hallway, talking, and deciding what was going to be for lunch, and what we were going to be having for dinner.

EL: Did you have heat?

KE: No. I had -- I don't even know what they're called -- a little gas pilot that you buy when you're having a cookout.

EL: Like a camper stove?

KE: A camper stove, yes. I had like fifteen of them, thank god. Because --

EL: [Unclear] heat?

KE: Yes. They give off more heat than a candle. Yes. Me, myself, I said, "Oh, my stove is not electric, it's gas," so I was using my stove. What else? So, yes. We all took turns. My apartment -- myself -- I had the biggest TV, so I had the TV with the cable, for the kids. It was my three kids -- two and two, that's four -- so that's already seven, plus four more. Eleven kids.

EL: And what did you do with the kids all week?

KE: Because I had the TV on -- as soon as you go into my apartment, it's my living room. I didn’t have a wall, or the kitchen, or anything. It's just my living room. So all the kids were in my living room, watching Disney movies, a TV show -- whatever it was. I had the living room -- the family center, like I called it.

So the children were there. My neighbor had the freezer with all the meat. My other neighbor had the responsibility -- because she had the most coolers -- so her and her husband went down to get the ice, took trips to the store to get juice and everything. The other neighbor went and got the blankets and the meals.

EL: Were those the blankets that the Red Cross brought?

KE: Yes. Then once we were able to find a shortcut -- which wasn't even that great of a shortcut, either --

EL: Shortcut to what?

KE: To get to a store.

EL: You mean to find a shortcut around the water.

KE: A shortcut around the water, yes. We had a gate that [unclear] rail, train tracks. Somebody made a hole through the gate, and people were making their way through, to get to Jersey City, up to the Heights. That was the only Stop 'n Shop. We used to walk to Stop 'n Shop, to get necessities. Sometimes they wouldn't even have it, because everybody else was there. It was tough, but we made it.

EL: You weren't working here at Jubilee. What was it like around here?

KE: It was all flooded. I wouldn't know exactly how it was in front of the Jubilee, until I heard that the Jubilee was open.

EL: When did they open it? It must have been a week after.

KE: Yes. They made it like a resource center. They were giving out [unclear] once the water went away. But the water went away here before it went away where I live. I live on the back of Fourth Street and Harrison, so all that was still flooded.

EL: And it was what? About how high would you say it was?

KE: I would say over three feet. Like, walking, it came quite literally to my crotch -- and I'm 5'2".

EL: That's a good three feet.

KE: That's a good three feet of water. And the streets here aren't straight and narrow, so there's potholes as you're walking. You're sinking. Yeah. It was a lot. A lot.

EL: So how do you think the kids made it through? They must have got bored after a while.

KE: I don't know. I've never really talked to my kids about it, because of the fact that they all -- well, I had my three. I had two older children -- I have a seventeen-year-old, a fifteen-year-old, and a four-year-old. So my two older children have Smart Phones. As long as they were able to charge their phone, they were able to be on their social networks. Now my four-year-old needed that TV on. He was very easily distracted. He played with his toys and with the neighbors' kids about an hour, and hour and a half after that he wanted to watch cartoons, or watch a movie.

EL: Was he scared? Do you think the kids were scared?

KE: Some were. Because it got dark, all of a sudden, earlier. By 5:00 it looked like midnight. So yes.

EL: Yes, that's what Maria was saying -- that she had to make sure that she cooked while it was daylight, because you couldn't see.

KE: Because you couldn't see. A lot of the people out here -- I say it was bad, but the community itself made it worse than it really was, because they were taking things that they didn't really need. Then the people that needed it -- they wanted to sell stuff to them. How do you do that? Nobody had any type of money. We couldn't get out of where we were.

EL: [Unclear] ATM.

KE: You couldn't. They were all down, because the service providers were down, because of the weather. So yes, while people were getting free ice, the ones who felt they had too much ice were trying to sell the ice to other neighbors. Even candles, diapers -- why? We're all together in this, trying to survive the same situation.

EL: So who were some of the agencies you saw around here? I know the Red Cross was around.

KE: I saw the Red Cross, I think, twice, and the Army trucks. Besides that, I don't know. I don't know who else.

EL: What were the Red Cross giving out?

KE: They were giving out lunch, and they gave out the blankets. Yes.

EL: Who came around with the water?

KE: The military trucks. Yes. They came out with the water. They came out with the meals -- and they weren't just giving two or three, they were giving away boxes, like unopened boxes here, for your family. That really helped out.

EL: Did you see any politicians? No. Did you see anybody from the Hoboken Housing Authority?

KE: Yes. I think I saw Carmelo [Garcia] twice, and he looked very distraught; like he was trying to process the way it was.

EL: Did you see any mayors or council people?

KE: I saw the Hoboken reporter people. They came down here. I don't know how they made it, but they did. They took pictures, and they interviewed residents, to see how everything was going.

EL: When did your lights come on? It was at least a week, right?

KE: More.

EL: Really.

KE: Yes. Because everything was wet. So they had to do like new wiring or something.

EL: Did you have a car?

KE: Yes.

EL: What happened to your car?

KE: My car, thankfully, was not in Hoboken. The same night that the same started, we parked it in Jersey City Heights. Yes.

EL: Or you wouldn't have a car.

KE: Or I wouldn't have a car, no. There would have been total damage. The insurance wouldn't have covered it, because I didn't have flood insurance. [Cross talk] You don't think of that. You think of flood insurance for property, but not vehicles. But now it's an option, whether you put insurance on your car.

EL: Because that whole -- we've got that north parking lot. So did the cars in there get -- ?

KE: Some were literally underwater. Like the little Toyotas, the [unclear] ones? Done. Done. It was done. I made it all the way to Fourteenth Street and Rite Aid to get water. I did. But I had to come through the

back, like walking up the stairs to the elevator, because the elevator on Ninth and Congress was shut down.

EL: Oh, really.

KE: Yes. It was not working.

EL: So you could go up. How did you go up? How did you get up there? [Cross talk]

KE: So we walked all the way to Fourteenth Street. Once we were coming down the viaduct, we actually got to see Clinton, and Adams, and Garden, where the Academy buses and everything are parked. That was super-duper flooded.

EL: [Unclear]

KE: Yes.

EL: And what day was that? Was that the third day, the second day, the fourth day?

KE: I would say it was more like the fifth or sixth day, that we made it all the way to Fourteenth Street, through the viaduct.

EL: And you went to what, the Stop n' Shop?

KE: On Manhattan and Central. Yes.

EL: And what did you get there?

KE: We got bread; we got powdered juice; toothpaste; soap.

EL: And then you walked it back.

KE: And we walked it back, yes. And what is it -- Paterson Avenue? [Unclear] Right there, where the bus stop is, at "87" and Mojica, the taxi service. You couldn't walk through there. There was no way anybody was getting through that.

EL: Flooded.

KE: Flooded, yes. So it was going through the light rail tracks, all the way to -- I don't know the name of the new building there -- by the [Unclear]. The new building on Paterson [Unclear].

EL: I don't know what the name of that building is.

KE: Well, it was cutting through that "sink hole" to get up to Franklin, and just walking straight up to Central, to get to the Stop 'n Shop.

EL: Oh, you went up like Ravine, that back --

KE: No, Ravine was flooded. We call it the "snake roll," before you just see [unclear], all the way to Congress [unclear] all the way up, and it leaves you right on Franklin.

EL: [Unclear]

KE: Yes. It leaves you there. And we just went straight up Franklin to Shop 'n Shop, and the same way

back, through the little hole on the gate, to get back to the building.

EL: What does your husband do for a living?

KE: My husband is permanently disabled.

EL: Does he need medication?

KE: No.

EL: Was he okay during the storm?

KE: He was.

EL: Was there anybody in your building or on your floor who had to be evacuated? [Unclear, cross talk] How tall is your building? How many floors in your building?

KE: Seven.

EL: Oh, you're on the top.

KE: I'm on the last level.

EL: So you weren't able to go up and own. You had to go up and down --

KE: -- up and down the stairs, with a laundry cart. Yes. Thank god, my son was no longer in his stroller. And I didn't really have to take him anywhere. But that's how we were able to get the necessities -- like when they were giving away the ice. Somebody would go down very early, find their way to the nearest corner, and they would say, "Okay, the truck is coming. Be here." Then we would find a way for four or five of us to take turns, to bring the stuff upstairs.

EL: Had you been friendly with your neighbors before this happened?

KE: I would say -- I knew my neighbors' children because I work at the Jubilee Center. But I wasn't too familiar with the parents, my actual neighbors. I was familiar with maybe three out of seven, and it was more just being courteous to one another in the elevator. "Good morning. Good evening. How was work? Okay. Tell the kids I

said Hi." Or the parents would say, "Oh, my child had fun today with you guys at the center." But besides that, everybody would do their work activity, come home, have dinner, get ready for the next day.

EL: Is it different now?

KE: Yes. Now we knock on each other door if we need anything. It was more like, "Hey," and door shut. Everybody kept to themselves. But now we communicate more. If anybody needs anything, we know, "Okay. I can knock on this neighbor's door, and it won't be a problem." Before, I felt like everybody was afraid.

EL: So if you knew you were going to go through this again, what would you do differently?

KE: I would listen, really listen, when they say the best thing is to just leave. Leave. Find someplace safe. Stay with a family member, or close friend. I think that the whole situation was a rude awakening. So we can appreciate what we do have, and not take things for granted. Because sometimes -- especially when it came time to having a meal -- when Sandy came, there were no

leftovers. There were no leftovers. On a regular day in a household, you have leftovers, and what do you do? If you don't want to save them for the next day, you throw them in the garbage. That really affected us. We were like, "Oh, no. We cannot waste this. We have to find somebody else to give it to." So we were sharing with all the neighbors on the lower levels. "Listen. We made this. If you guys are interested, we're going to leave it there. It's fresh. If you guys don't want it [unclear], knock on your neighbor's door. If they don't want it, if nobody on the floor wants it, take it to the next floor." And everybody was able to eat something warm. Then it became like a routine with everybody. People would come upstairs, "Hey, are you guys ready to have lunch? Well, this is what I have. I can contribute this. What do you have? Okay. You know what? If we're missing water, or we're missing soda, or juice, or [unclear] for the kids," somebody would say, "Okay. I'm going to take a trip, and this is what I'll get. While you guys do this, we'll do that." So it became like unity, like a commune yes.

EL: That is so cool.

KE: Yes. We would have dinner. After dinner, we would take out like dominoes, "uno" cards, Connect Four, Play [Unclear] -- talk about regular stuff.

EL: You almost make it sound kind of nice.

KE: Well, I don't know anybody else's experience for it, but I'm thankful that I had neighbors who were willing to actually open the door and say, "You know what? Hey. I may not have a hammer, but I have an extension cord. You can use my extension cord to make it longer." And say, "Okay, yeah, I do have a baby, and my baby has to have asthma treatment three times a day. Can I plug in my baby's machine?"

EL: Was there someone like that?

KE: Yes.

EL: Wow. So you really did need electricity.

KE: Yes. I don't know, myself, personally, anybody who had any medical equipment in the building. But

those who did needed medical evacuation -- like oxygen tanks.

EL: Were people in your building evacuated?

KE: Some. [Cross talk] We had one [unclear], may she rest in peace -- she didn't pass away because of Sandy, she just passed away because she was terminally ill.

EL: She was in her apartment in Sandy?

KE: Yes, and they had to come in and evacuate her, because she was in a wheelchair.

EL: And that was the National Guard who evacuated her?

KE: Yes. I saw them, too. I couldn't remember who it was. But the National Guard -- yes. They really helped, also.

EL: And how did they get her out? Did they physically walk up there and take her in the wheelchair?

KE: She was actually on the main floor.

EL: Right. Because she was in a wheelchair.

KE: Right. So she was on the lower level.

EL: That's almost scarier, in a way, because what if the water had just been a little higher?

KE: Yes. Her family members really tried, but they lived, I think, in south Jersey -- Camden, Rahway, somewhere out there -- and to get from there up here, everything was blocked off. They couldn't get to her. But they kept on trying to, like with the landlines, trying to reach out and say, "Listen, I have this person -- can you please go and check on her? I haven't been able to get in contact with her for so many days."

EL: Was she elderly?

KE: Yes.

EL: So what do you think you would do differently? You would leave, you said.

KE: I would leave, but I would really prepare myself as far as knowing how to stay warm. Because, god forbid, if it does happen again, nobody can get to us. So knowing how to stay warm, having the proper utensils -- you know, one of my neighbors had a lot of canned goods, but she couldn't open up a can. They didn't have a can opener. For some reason, she went into a state of panic, and her mind went blank. She didn't know that she had knives. She said, "Oh, I didn't know you could do that with a [unclear]." Because you're so used to a regular outlet, utilities.

EL: Yes, that's kind of amazing. You forget, you just get so overwhelmed [cross talk].

KE: So when I bought batteries, I bought rechargeable batteries. How was I going to recharge rechargeable batteries, if there was no electricity. So that was a problem that I had. I think communication is always key in any type of situation.

EL: You mean communication with each other, and also between what's going on out there.

KE: Yes. Out there. Yes. And that's it. I'm thankful to be here today, because a lot of people didn’t make it. We lost a lot of people due to that storm.

EL: Well, Krish, thank you so much for sharing your story with us.

HOBOKEN
HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, ANTHONY FALCO, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I agree to participate in an audiotaped interview by the Hoboken Historical Museum ("HHM" or the "Museum") in connection with its oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy* (the "Project"). I understand that during the interview I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on or about October 29, 2012, and that the interview will last approximately one to two hours.

2. I consent to the use of my name in the audiotape and any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview in connection with the Project.

3. I consent to my photograph being taken and used by HHM in connection with the Project. If I withdraw from participation in the Project, I understand that the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I agree that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview as well as the photograph belong to the Museum, and that all ownership rights vest exclusively in the Museum. The Museum may use and store such materials and content in any manner it shall determine including but not limited to, use by any third parties such as researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy may be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript by HHM.

6. I agree that my participation in the interview, use of my name and photograph are being permitted without any compensation to me and without any ownership rights being vested in me. Accordingly, I fully release the Museum, its trustees, employees, volunteers, and representatives from and against all claims now existing or claims which hereafter may arise, relating directly or indirectly from my participation in the Project.

Interviewee Name: ANTHONY FALCO

Interviewee Signature: [signature]

Address: HOBOKEN NJ 07030

Telephone Number: 201-420-2002

Date: August 14, 2013

Archives 2013.039.0006

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: POLICE CHIEF ANTHONY FALCO

INTERVIEWER: ALAN SKONTRA

DATE: 14 AUGUST 2013

Track #1

AS: First question: tell us about your connection to Hoboken? How long have you lived here? Approximately where in the city do you live? And who do you live with?

AF: I've lived in this city my entire life, sixty-four years. I'm in the [unclear], on Grant Street, and I live there with my wife.

AS: How long have you been with the Hoboken Police Department?

AF: Forty-two years.

AS: When did you first hear the words "Hurricane Sandy?"

AF: Well, we heard approximately three to four days prior to, that we were going to probably be hit with a storm. We didn't know the extent of it at the time, but as it got closer to the day, we were told that it might be a storm like we've never seen before.

AS: What did you expect would happen?

AF: Expectation wise -- the devastation that I saw, that day and into the week following it -- I never expected anything as I have ever witnessed before.

AS: How did the Hoboken Police Department prepare for the storm?

AF: Well, preparation -- we had meetings with the mayor, I guess it was a few days prior to. There were a number of meetings over the weekend. There were a number of meetings over the weekend. [Interruption]

AS: How did the Hoboken Police Department prepare?

AF: Prior to the storm, maybe two days prior to, there were meetings held up in the mayor's office. Present were members of the emergency services; also utility companies; OEM; and anyone who would be in the entire plan, coordinating of the plan, and carrying it out. As far as our police department, we made sure that all our equipment was operable -- flashlights, and our vehicles, and any other equipment that would be needed, as far as effecting the entire process, in getting people through this storm.

AS: Did you feel like you had enough equipment, or the right equipment?

AF: No. I don't think anyone was prepared for what we witnessed. As far as equipment, now we know what we might need to prepare in the future. Hopefully, we'll never see a storm like this again.

AS: Was the department fully staffed? Did you feel that you had enough personnel? And how and where did you deploy the personnel?

AF: My entire department was called in. Anyone who did show up for work -- naturally, we had people who were out, injured, at the time. But anyone on furlough, vacation time, they were called back into duty. They reported at 8:00 in the morning, prior to the storm, the day the storm hit. We put them on four-hour shifts on and four-hour shifts off, their downtime. Cots were set up here, in the lobby. We also made some accommodation at the hospital, and also up at Stevens, where we can house men and have them bedded, decentralized to respond to any calls we might have received.

AS: Where were you when the storm hit?

AF: I was here in the department. With our plan, our emergency plan, we were instructing all our personnel what we expected of them; where they were going to be deployed; and reminded them of the different agencies that we had at a command center in City Hall, that they would be able to contact, if need be.

AS: When did you first get out to survey the damage? Where did you go? And what was your reaction?

AF: Well, actually, I got out on the street immediately after my men were deployed, and as the day went on we started to feel the effects. I guess my first stop would be up along the Hudson River, to see if there was any rise in the tide. As the day went on, and as evening hit and the storm hit us full force, what we were getting were panic calls that the river was overflowing. Water was coming down the street. Offices that were in line of the water coming down the street had to pull out their vehicles in time not to float away. Once the river breached, all hell broke loose.

AS: Do you know how many calls the department received?

AF: There were 1000-some-odd calls.

AS: What were the challenges during the storm, and then the aftermath. And of those, was there one that was the most urgent?

AF: Well, at approximately 10:00, the evening of the storm, our electricity went out. The generator kicked in, but unfortunately it only supplied power to the first floor. Up on the top floor, the heartbeat of this department, the lights were completely out for approximately two days. The most challenging moment is when our communications went out for approximately forty-five minutes to an hour. I had to deploy men approximately one to two blocks apart, and we used our handy-talkies to communicate. Also, at the same time, our telephones went out. Our telephones were out for approximately a week or better; the only line we had coming in was one line, a main line, into the desk area.

AS: Were there any operational problems behind the scenes?

AF: The operational problems were communications, when the radios went down and our telephones went down. That would be our only operational problems. Loss of vehicles would be another operational problem, because at that point we did lose some vehicles,

because we were not equipped with a vehicle that was able to navigate the water.

AS: Did the department headquarters suffer any long-term or structural damage?

AF: No.

AS: So you mentioned the problems with communication during the storm. What about the days after the storm was over, with disseminating information.

AF: After the storm, as I stated, our telephone lines were still out. We were having trouble -- no cell-phone communication. It was sporadic -- and we had some trouble with our communications. As far as what we were supposed to do in the aftermath -- everyone performed in a manner in which I would have believed they would, and we just got the task done. With traffic, the next day, you had people who were coming into the city, on-lookers -- rubber-neckers, if you will -- and they caused traffic jams. Mind you, we didn't have electricity for many days. Our traffic lights were out, so we had to maintain officers

at key traffic points, to have a continuous and safe flow of traffic.

AS: With so much of the city being out of power, were you worried about any looting, or any other crime happening?

AF: Well, what we did -- we planned for this -- was to deploy our officers in certain areas of businesses and homes that were left evacuated. I'm happy to say that I think during the entire period there were only three break-ins at that time, and arrests were made at two of those break-ins.

AS: Who are some of the unsung heroes of the department?

AF: One that stands out in my mind is Leo Colon. You saw his picture on national news, rescuing two people from the high waters -- an older woman, throwing her over her shoulder.

Track #2

AS: Who were some of the department's unsung heroes?

AF: One that stands out in my mind is Officer Leo Colon. I believe people saw his picture on national news -- CNN -- rescuing a woman out of a vehicle that was overcome with the flood waters. Then, also, an old man. As you can see, as he bent down, he took a mouthful of water. He just threw the people over his shoulder, and saved them. There was also an Officer Dristi, and Lulaj, who had the forethought to take up a surveillance point on a business that the window was broken, sensing that the burglar would come back in a while -- which two of them did, the burglar and his accomplice -- and they effected the arrest. But I think, collectively, the unsung heroes were the men and women of this police department, and also all our emergency-service workers, and anyone who spent the time in the command center, and all the days that it took to get this city up and running again.

AS: What kind of a toll did dealing with the storm take on you, in terms of physically, mentally, emotionally?

AF: Well, I'm a Type-A personality, very active. I worked with little sleep, and spent my time with the officers. I don't think I realized how drained I was, both mentally and physically, until maybe a week after the storm hit. With that, looking back on it, I wonder where the people who were involved in this rescue mission, and dealing with the city -- where we all had the energy to just keep going, sometimes with one to two hours' sleep.

AS: What did the department learn about handling the next disaster?

AF: well, we learned that we don't have the equipment needed to deal with this type of disaster. My officers are well trained. I have a need for a high-water vehicle, that hopefully I'm going to get. The city does flood, not even during a storm, but if we have heavy rains, we're not able to reach certain people. We've talked about this, we've had discussions about it, and I think our main problem is having the proper vehicles to navigate the flood waters in this city.

Also, we need a generator. Most recently, I know, the mayor had requested of the council -- and that just passed the first reading. Hopefully, by the end of

September we may have a generator that would fire up this entire building.

AS: What did Hoboken learn about itself, whether as a city or the people of Hoboken?

AF: We learned that, at times of catastrophe, or an event such as this, that we all pull together as one. It was almost a seamless transition from prior to the storm, when the storm hit -- how everyone coordinated their efforts. A lot of it was on the fly, but it worked. The sad part is, weeks after, or months after, when everyone forgets, and that feeling isn't there.

AS: Do you feel as if Hoboken has recovered, and if so, was there a moment that made you think, "Hoboken is back."

AF: Hoboken is back -- I would say 99% of Hoboken is back. There's still a lot of work to be done. People still have damage to their homes. People have mold. There is psychological damage. People who lost everything have to get started again. Getting back to equipment -- when I get what I need, to have my officers have that

equipment and be able to deal with an event such as Sandy, I think we'll be back 100%.

AS: Is there anything you'd like to add that I didn't ask about?

AF: Well, what I would like to say is that in my entire life in this city, I've never seen such devastation. Hopefully, I'll never see it again. I'd like to thank the citizens of Hoboken. I'd like to thank the Emergency Service and the National Guard for the efforts that they put into helping this city.

AS: Thank you.

HOBOKEN
HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, Hank Forrest, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I agree to participate in an audiotaped interview by the Hoboken Historical Museum ("HHM" or the "Museum") in connection with its oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy* (the "Project"). I understand that during the interview I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on or about October 29, 2012, and that the interview will last approximately one to two hours.

2. I consent to the use of my name in the audiotape and any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview in connection with the Project.

3. I consent to my photograph being taken and used by HHM in connection with the Project. If I withdraw from participation in the Project, I understand that the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I agree that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview as well as the photograph belong to the Museum, and that all ownership rights vest exclusively in the Museum. The Museum may use and store such materials and content in any manner it shall determine including but not limited to, use by any third parties such as researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy may be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript by HHM.

6. I agree that my participation in the interview, use of my name and photograph are being permitted without any compensation to me and without any ownership rights being vested in me. Accordingly, I fully release the Museum, its trustees, employees, volunteers, and representatives from and against all claims now existing or claims which hereafter may arise, relating directly or indirectly from my participation in the Project.

Interviewee Name: H. Forrest

Interviewee Signature: [signature]

Address: 518 Jefferson St.
Hoboken

Telephone Number: 201-798-5660

Date: 9 August, 2013

Archives 2013.039.0007

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: HANK FORREST

INTERVIEWER: ALAN SKONTRA

DATE: 9 AUGUST 2013

AS: What is your background in Hoboken? How long have you lived here? Where do you live, approximately? Who do you live with, and what is your profession?

HF: My wife and I moved to Hoboken in the summer of '87. We spent our first six years on Madison Street -- Third and Madison -- which was still a pretty dicey area when we first moved in. Six years later, we moved here, on Jefferson Street, only a few blocks away but it's a different ward and a different world, here on Jefferson.

I am an architectural lighting designer. I work in the city. So Hoboken has always been -- we fit the pattern of being a bedroom community. We don't have kids. I think that's it.

AS: When did you first hear the words "Hurricane Sandy?"

HF: I believe it was weeks before. It was well before the event. I guess at that time of year it seems that weather has started to dominate the news, in a way that it hadn't a few years ago. And I guess maybe with Irene, the year before, it put hurricanes on our collective map. So it seemed like, I guess, there were always hurricanes going on in the news; finally, there was this one, that everyone was talking about, that was going to actually hit us and impact us. So a few weeks.

AS: Based on that, what did you expect Hurricane Sandy to be?

HF: I automatically went back to Irene. I mean, Irene -- I couldn't help but keep thinking of Irene. Irene was the first hurricane, I think, since -- I remember I had a hurricane my first day of first grade. It was more the way everybody was acting about it -- but that was kind of my context for hurricanes, until Irene came. With Irene, there was a lot of prep, a lot of thought about it, then it kind of blew through. So when Sandy started to come in, I

just automatically started to think of Irene, and like, "Okay. This is something to take seriously," but I didn't take it *that* seriously, because Irene -- we did not lose power in Irene, as opposed to Sandy; the streets got flooded in Sandy, and in Irene they didn't. So my whole context was really driven by us being spared, I think, during Irene, and not having it prove to be as bad as everybody was predicting. Of course, with Sandy -- what Sandy brought with it, which I didn't think about at all, was storm surge. In the aftermath, I had no idea what storm surge was. I really didn't think about that at all. I just thought of the Hudson rising, with all the water coming down from above, and the water levels would rise. But with Irene, Jefferson Street was completely dry. The only places that flooded, in my context, seemed to be the places that often flooded in bad rainstorms, at the south end of town, and the far west part of town. Things like that. But Sandy turned out to be something completely different.

AS: How did you prepare for the storm?

HF: Again, for Irene, I had these large, 10-12"-wide scaffolding planks that are really heavy and long. I stood them on their ends, and created kind of a damn in

front of my garage door. We have a wide, 14'-wide garage door in the front, and a front door. So, essentially, I set up these planks, I covered them in tarps, and I weighed them down with concrete blocks, for Irene, thinking that the garage door did not come tight to the ground, and would keep any water from trickling in. It turns out, I didn't need to do anything. None of that was necessary.

So, in this storm, I just decided not to do that. So, effectively, I think my honest answer is -- other than we did fill up our bathtubs with water; we filled up our sinks with water; we had water on hand -- but that was probably the limit to what we did for Sandy. We didn't buy extra food. We didn't try to create any sort of dams or water protection around the doors of our building. That was it.

AS: What were you doing as the storm hit? And what did you do after losing power?

HF: What were we doing when the storm hit? Monday morning -- we had already decided we were going to ride it out and not leave town. We rode out Irene, even though, again, in Irene, there was a terrific amount of outreach by the city -- city volunteers going around town.

Of course, Irene was in August, and on the weekend, and the storm was going to hit that night, just like with Sandy. But in Irene, by that afternoon, it was kind of ominous. There was no real rain, but the city had turned into a ghost town. All the cars had been cleared off the streets. There was no one around. For Sandy, it was already windy, and I believe it was somewhat rainy but not really hard. But it was getting windy. We walked down to the waterfront at 9:00 that morning, to just go for a walk, figuring we were going to be stuck inside that evening, for a while, so we'd just go for a walk. We went down to the waterfront and we saw that there was -- Lackawanna Plaza was already filled up with water, and there were cops standing between Lackawanna Plaza and Pier A. That was roughly where the water was starting to lap up onto the land. They were more or less looking at each other, and wondering, "Well, all right, maybe -- what will we do?" There was that verbal, like, "Should we stop people from walking past a certain point?"

We went up to Pier A. We could see that the water level at Pier A was pretty high. But, basically, we just went for a walk around town, and then just came back. Funny. With Irene, in the hours before the storm, there were fire trucks driving around, making announcements:

"Last chance to get out of town." What started as ground-floor apartments should be evacuated. They started announcing that first-floor apartments should be evacuated. There was a real kind of fear, I thought, instilled -- not inappropriately -- but they were scaring people into leaving town.

Which turned out to be a good thing, but in Sandy there was nothing. There was nobody making these announcements. The streets were filled with cars, and it was clear that it didn't seem like, really, almost anybody had left town. Everybody was still here. So there wasn't so much of that ominous feeling as there was for Irene. So I think all of us -- I sensed -- felt like, "Well, all right. We've been through this before." With Irene, I was always thinking that the worst thing that would happen was that we would lose power, and would be stuck in the house, stuck in some hot house without air-conditioning, without TV or lights. But, again, we just carried on. We just figured, "All right. We're just going to have to wait this out."

So that's it. We really didn't do anything out of the ordinary.

AS: Did you home suffer any damage?

HF: No. Not really. Our back yard was filled with water and it came right up to -- we have a deck, and some steps from the deck up into the house. That was all covered in water. But by the time the water drained out -- realistically, and even this spring -- we lost very few plants in the back yard. That's the level. The back yard was fine, other than it needed to be cleaned. And our garage, we lost -- I didn't really have anything of value stored in the garage, on the ground. We lost some things you store in the garage, but in terms of the house itself, no. It was just really just cleaning things. I think we were really fortunate in terms of actual, structural damage. This house is a concrete block house. We have no basement. The house was built in '84. So we were fortunate in that regard. It was really just a clean-up act, afterwards.

AS: Were you able to get out onto the street and survey the scene?

HF: No. We lost power at 9:30 Monday night. We were watching TV and the power went out, and I said to my wife, "Okay. Let's go to sleep. There's nothing else we can do." But it was pretty loud outside, in terms of the

wind. There wasn't that much rain, but the wind was still making things pretty loud. My wife couldn't sleep, so she just started pacing around the house, until finally I heard her yell, from downstairs, something like, "Oh, no!" So I knew she was seeing water in the garage. The water was coming into the garage.

So at that point, I just stood up on my bed and looked out. There's an alley next to us, so I looked out the alley and I could see Jefferson Street, looking down the alley, and I could see the water covering the sidewalk, and start to come into the alley. I guess between 10:00 and 10:30 it seemed like the water in the garage went from three to six inches, up to a foot and a half or two feet. The water rose very quickly, in maybe a half-hour period. So when we stood at the door of our garage, looking out into the dark garage, with the water out there, we would hear noises outside, and water kind of splashing up against the garage door. We had no idea what was going on outside, but we were too scared to open the doors and see what was going on. I think the next day we realized what it was; it was vehicles driving down the street, throwing waves of water up against the house.

When we got up the next day, the water level in the garage had gone down to about six inches, something

like that. So that's the garage, and like the front vestibule down our stairs. At that point, we opened up our front door, just to look out, and we could see that there was just water from our bottom step, right across the street, to the house across the street. So we put on the tallest boots we had -- and we could walk in front of the house, but as soon as we got down toward the sidewalk and out into the street, clearly the water was still up over our knees, and our boots weren't going to be tall enough, so we were basically trapped in the house.

So we went up to the second floor. The front of our house has a tenant's apartment in the front. He had left, and stayed in the city that night, so we just kind of went into his apartment to look out his window, from the second floor. From there, we could look up and down Jefferson Street, and see that the whole thing was a lake. Cars were all still parked. It looked like nobody had left, and we would see other people looking out their windows. We were all more or less trapped. There were a few people that you'd see their legs and pants wrapped in garbage bags, and they were kind of wandering around. But at that point, also, we would see, occasionally there would be fire trucks that would come down the street, city pickup trucks. There was the occasional car -- SUV -- that would come storming

down the street and throwing water, but for the most part it seemed like it was city vehicles. A couple of times I yelled out to them, saying "What's going on?" One city worker yells back to me, "We don't know. Nobody tells us anything." A fire truck came storming down. They were just driving down. They weren't making any announcements or anything. The fire truck -- I yelled out at them, "What's going on? What's happening?" And they just said, "Talk to your mayor. Nobody tells us anything." Three times, I yelled out to the firemen and twice to the city workers. All of them had what seemed to be an almost kind of political response about what seemed to be about the city and the mayor not communicating, and they were given no direction. All of a sudden, I started to get really antsy; that here we were, trapped in the house, and there had been no warnings or anything leading up to this. I just felt the city had really collapsed badly; that the city government had collapsed badly, and just abandoned the citizens. Obviously, they couldn't have prevented the storm. They couldn't have done anything about the water that was coming into my house. But at least in terms of communication, and giving us some sense of not being -- because here we were, isolated in our house; not knowing what was going on with the power; when were we going to get power back? Was the

whole town like this? Was this something that was just in our part of town? We were given nothing, because we had no access to news or anything. We were completely abandoned. So it was disheartening.

If I ramble on and don't answer your question, you're going to come back and ask me again, right?

AS: Do you feel as though your neighbors were prepared? And how do you think they handled the storm?

HF: I did not think -- there were a number of positive things about the storm. Among those positives were the fact that we got to know, or got familiar with many more of our neighbors than we normally are, even though we've been on this block for almost twenty years. There's been a fair amount of turnover on the block in the last five or ten years, so we don't actually know a lot of the people on the block. But I think for all the people that we do know, and all the people we met and got acquainted with, I got a sense that we were all in the same boat (no pun intended), all kind of blindsided. Most of them had basements there were completely flooded.

But they were great. I'll tell you, as freaked out as we all were in our various ways, I thought that all the people we met, and all the people we met through those people on the block, were very community minded and were very willing to help out and share. I think, like us, they felt like any support or communication from the city completely collapsed, and we were on our own. Any help we were going to get was only from each other, and that seemed to be something that kind of brought us together, in that regard.

So we didn't have any negative experiences whatsoever, with any of the people we came across in our block. And even as we finally start to wander around town on Wednesday, everybody was kind of pulled-together at that point.

AS: How would you rate the city's preparation for Hurricane Sandy, versus it's preparation for Hurricane Irene?

HF: Well, Sandy, as I've already stated -- I would be pretty comfortable giving them a zero on a one to ten scale, ten being the best, and one being nothing. I don't think we got -- if this were a third-world country, I

don't think we would have gotten any better or worse support than we got, since we got no support whatsoever. Irene, I would actually give the city good marks. As I said, Irene -- the fire department -- there was more of a sense that the various municipal departments -- not just the city hall department, but the fire department, the police department -- you had a sense that there was actually some coordination, and that they were talking to each other, and that they collectively had some sort of plan -- the main plan being to just get people out of town as much as possible, and get all the cars off the streets. After Irene proved to be not as bad as we were told it could be, some people felt like, "Well, there they were. It was overblown," and this and that. I'll tell you, the day or two after Irene, with having to move trees, and having to deal with downed wires, and the cleanup, etc., it was great that the city had done what it did, and got all those cars off the street and the people out of town. Granted it was a weekend in the summer, so I think people were in a better place to get out of town than they were for a Monday in the fall, right in the middle of the work -- Monday night, etc.

Irene -- I don't know -- maybe a seven or eight in terms of a one-to-ten basis. I thought they did

good. I was glad that they went a little overboard, and they were a little more cautious, and they did what they did. It still confuses me, to this day, why there was none of that for Sandy. The question I have is, what did the city actually know before Sandy? Were they aware? Did they understand storm surge better than I did? Recently there was an article -- they were talking about Stevens -- and there was a guy at Stevens who was quoted as saying something like, "Yep, we knew there was going to be eleven feet of water, and there was eleven feet of water." Now I don't know what eleven feet of water means, but it sounds like we have this maritime -- we have a highly-regarded and accomplished maritime program at Stevens, people who know about this stuff, with equipment, wave pools, and things like that, that they know about water movement, and oceans, and tidal movements, and things like that. So it's hard for me to imagine that the city really didn't know more than I did, just listening to press reports, etc.

That was one of the interesting things about Irene. I realized, since we had power the whole time -- we could watch the news, etc. -- with Irene it became clear that you were not going to get any useful information on the TV, because the TV seemed to be aimed toward a regional audience. So they had to kind of report the worst-case

scenario, thinking that whoever's in that area is going to be watching TV, and they're going to want to know about that. So for us, who were not getting hit with the center part of the storm, it was kind of useless information. I wasn't experiencing what, maybe, the towns along the Passaic River were experiencing, etc. The best information, then, was just going online. Because at least online, if it started to target Hoboken, if it started to target smaller areas, much, much better than you could on the news on TV.

Of course, with Sandy, I had no access to any of that, but I would have thought that the city did.

AS: How do you think the city handled the aftermath of the storm, in the days after the storm?

HF: Poorly. My zero on the one-to-ten rating for how they prepared for the storm -- it doesn't get much better for the days after the storm. On Tuesday, as I said, we were trapped in the house. We didn't go anywhere on Tuesday. I guess by Tuesday night the water had gone down on the sidewalks on Jefferson Street. The street was still flooded; the intersections were still very flooded. But it was dark out, so we didn't go anywhere. Wednesday, when we got up -- the first thing I did Wednesday morning was to go

down to City Hall, figuring out that City Hall must know what's going on, and I could get some information.

So I went down there. The building was essentially empty. There was the community room on the first floor, off of Newark. I walked in there, and that seemed to be -- had the notion of mission control. I went in there and I found Joel Mestre, who, I believe, was the head of emergency management. Maybe I'm wrong. I went to the website today, and I see he's now the deputy coordinator of emergency management, so I don't know if that was his role then. But I knew he was pretty high up, and he would be somebody who, at least job-title-wise, should know more than me, and know what's going on.

Basically, he was just running around with his head cut off, in there. And when I started to ask him, "What's going on? How come we haven't heard anything from the city?" he just responded, "Well, you know, I'm really tired, too. My house was flooded. I haven't slept." It was all about him. I didn't get any information from him that wasn't about him. There was no, "You might want to try so and so," or something. There was nothing.

So I left there, realizing that City Hall -- I went through the building, and there was nobody around. So at that point, we proceeded to just walk the city. I

started with going to the three PSE&G substations. I figured, "Okay, that's my main thing right now, as I've got no power." So I went up to the Second Street substation, up near the projects, and the substation itself was dry, but it was an island in the middle of a lake. As soon as you got to the fence around it, it was all water. And it was quiet. There was nobody there. There was no activity whatsoever. Then we walked up to Tenth Street, up to the Shop Rite. The substation was there. There, the streets around it were dry, the substation was all dry, and there was a pickup truck parked outside the fence, and there was a guy in there, walking around. So I yelled in to him. He was PSE&G guy, so I asked him, "What do you think? What kind of state is this in?" And he said, "Well, I'm the first one to have been in here to look at any of these. Actually, it's much better than I thought. He reported that there were some transformers blown, etc. I said, "Do you have any idea when we might get power?" He said he thought it might be in two or three days. This was Wednesday -- meaning that Friday or Saturday -- that that substation was up. So I said, "I live on Fifth and Jefferson. Am I powered off this substation?" He said, "It's hard to say. It's not as easy --" He didn't know. So I asked him about the other substations, and he says, "Well, the Second Street and

Tenth Street only feed Hoboken." He hadn't been up to Second Street. He was going up there next. He asked, "So what's it like up there?" so I told him what I saw, in terms of how to access it, and the water around it. He said there was another substation up on Fifteenth Street, on the north end of town, where the Second and Tenth Street substations were fed off Jersey City from another station that was completely blown and not operable; but one uptown was either solely or jointly fed by a station up in Bergen County, that was still working. So that's why some people in town had power -- because they were being fed off that substation.

At that point we had also heard that there were places uptown that had power. We seldom went up to City Hall, to City Hall/Washington Street. Washington Street was dry. It looked like a bunch of the streets uptown were dry. But it was kind of hard to say where the water stopped as we walked east.

Then we walked up to the Fifteenth-Street substation. That looked dry. Then we did a big loop, up Fifteenth Street, and then came back down, I believe maybe Washington/Bloomfield garden, and that's when we began to see that people had put power strips outside. You were starting to see some people -- there weren't that many out

at that point, but you started to see some people sitting there, powering their phones, etc. It seemed like maybe two or three blocks where there were maybe two or three people. It hadn't yet mushroomed into what it became on Thursday and Friday where it seemed like, not every house, but maybe one out of three houses had power cords running outside, and people started to put benches out. People started to put food and drinks out. It almost looked like a competition from house to house, of who could be the better host. I didn't get a sense, talking to any of those people, that they really had any idea of what was going on, on the west side of town. It almost felt like they were guilty for not having been flooded or lost power; their biggest conveniences seemed to be that they couldn't get to work, and that other people they were communicating with were out of communication. And so forth.

But people were very nice, and it was almost, not quite a party, but it was a very positive, fun atmosphere up there. But then coming back -- that was Wednesday. So Thursday, I got up first thing in the morning, again, and I went back down to City Hall. This time I knew -- I stuck my head in the ground-floor office. The ground-floor office, at that point, now, seemed to have become, on Thursday morning, kind of a volunteer

headquarters, where it seemed to be they were signing up -- people whom I didn't recognize as being city workers or anything like that, who seemed to be organizing the kind of volunteer situation there.

So at that point, I went upstairs to the mayor's office. First, I started to go upstairs just to see who was there. The City Clerk's office was closed. I went upstairs. The Environmental Services, Human Services -- those doors were all shut. I saw the mayor's door was open, so I just walked in. I walked through the mayor's reception room, into the mayor's kind of meeting room there, and I saw that there were, I think, maybe three people. One of them, a guy there, eventually asked, "What can I do for you?" I introduced myself, and said, "I'm just looking for information. Who are you?" He introduced himself as Juan Melli, the mayor's communications person. He looked like he hadn't slept in a long time. I could see there was a power strip by the window, with power cords going out the window, I guess to generators down below. He's sitting there, and Michael Russo -- my councilman -- is sitting around the table with his hands folded behind his head, and he's like slouched in the chair, looking very relaxed, with his legs folded. I'm just looking at the two of them, saying, "So when is the city going to communicate outside? When are we

going to learn what's going on?" I wasn't so angry yet, with him. I was just asking those things. He said, "Well, the city's website has information." I said, "How am I supposed to access --? Can you access the city website?" And I'm pointing to the power strip on the window. He said, "I know a lot of people don't have power." Meanwhile, I'm saying to him, "Well, when is the city finally going to outreach and do something?" I see Michael Russo is motioning to Juan Melli, and pointing at me, in a manner of, "You see! This is what I've been telling you. Here. Listen to him. He's telling you the same thing." That was the implication of Russo's thing.

So I just said, "Well, there's been absolutely no presence. The city has had zero presence on the streets -- at least where I am -- other than a fire truck would go by, the pickup trucks would go by." There was even a city worker in a backhoe, driving down the street with what looked like their cousin or somebody -- clearly not a city worker -- in the scoop of the backhoe, with a video camera, shooting videos. The only people I saw were out shooting videos; they didn't seem to be working, or doing anything. I said, "Where is everybody?" And Russo is saying to Juan Melli, "Yeah. You see?"

So I turned to Russo, and I said, "Well, Michael, in all fairness, where are *you*? How come I don't see you back in our ward? How come I'm seeing you sitting here, with your arms crossed? Where are you? Where's the City Council? Where's anybody? Where are the directors? I see volunteers being organized downstairs, but where are the people we're paying, whose job it is kind of do something? They're nowhere."

He said, "Well, it's been tough. We've been trying to organize this." I said, "Well, what's going on with the power?" He says, "Well, PSE&G is working on that. They said it could be a week to ten days." This is eight hours, or twelve hours, after I saw a PSE&G guy, and he's telling me two to three days. And he's up at the substation. So I said, "Who's telling you that? Is that from guys who are here, working on the substations? Or is that some PSE&G default response from their office in Newark, or whatever." He said, "Well, this is what PSE&G is telling me.

So it seemed clear to me that while he might have been doing his best, the only information he had was that he hadn't left this room, and he was just being told this by whomever, from some other office, who hadn't left their room, who was being told -- it was all like fourth-

hand. So I had no confidence whatsoever that he had any better sources for information than I did, by simply walking around town and just talking to people.

So at that point, I think I ended up realizing that I wasn't going to learn anything from these guys. They didn't know anything. So I said, "All right. Well, thanks for that." I walk out, and Russo kind of walks out with me, and Russo kind of walks me out of the building and down the stairs -- basically, like, "If there's anything I can do --" Thanks, but what are you going to do.

So then, at that point, as we're heading down the stairs at City Hall, I realize, "Well, I'm probably going to learn more up in the mayor's office than I am walking around with Michael Russo, so I just excused myself from him. He leaves, and I go back up to the mayor's office. I go back up to the mayor's office, and I see, as I'm standing there, they're in the middle of talking about something -- and I'm just standing there -- a woman walks in and introduces herself to Juan and some other people. She says, "Hi. I'm from Reuters. Would you give me an interview on what's going on?" He said, "Sure," so she sits down. And I'm standing there. I'm like invisible at this point.

So she starts to ask him, "Well, how does the city think they're doing?" She starts asking very broad, very roundabout questions that don't really seem to relate to what's going on outside. And Juan is answering the questions, and doing what he can. Finally, at the end of her little thing, she says, "Well, all right. Is there anything else I should know, or you want to tell me?" No. So she leaves. At this point I see -- another one of the council people now is there. I forget her name. I see they're talking about something. They're now talking about how they can get "flip charts," or how they can put information out. I'm listening. "Where where are we going to get Magic Markers?" "Well, maybe So-and-So has Magic Markers." What their ideas was, they were going to get some sort of markers, and they were going to write information on storefront windows. But they were like, "Well, we have to make sure -- are they washable? We can't damage the storefront windows." And one says, "Well, what if we used flip-chart paper?" "Well, we don't know where to get that," and so forth.

So finally I interrupt. I said, "Are you for real? Is that your idea of how to get information out? To write on storefronts? They said, "Well, we're trying to come up with some way." I said, "Why don't you just

photocopy off a lot of a whole lot of paper. They said, "Because we're out of power. The photocopiers don't work." I said, "Well, what about Weehawken? They have power. Or what about The Office, or places on Washington Street. You can't put a generator into The Office, and use somebody else's copy machine?" And I'm thinking, what's with these guys? This is like a school project or something, that they're talking about. "You should be banging out 1-2,000 copies of something, and just distribute them around town. There are a few stores that are open. They're in the dark, but they're selling food or something. I would start with those places. But also, just around town. Start getting information out. Where's the City Council? Has anybody talked to the City Council?" They said no. They said, "Well, assume they're busy in their wards, and so forth." I said, "Well, why isn't there a meeting? Why isn't the mayor -- ? Where are the directors?" "Well, they're out doing stuff out there. I said, "There's no presence of any of these people. How come they're not making some sort of communication?"

So finally -- I couldn't believe what I was hearing. This was the state of response. I said, with PSE&G -- they said, "Well, we were told a week to ten days." I said, "Well, I just saw a guy --" They said, "They're

working on it." I said, "Well, I just went to the substations yesterday, and I went again this morning. There's nobody out there. I saw a guy there yesterday. He told me he thought it was going to be two to three days. And he said he was the first one to visit the Tenth Street, and no one, yet, had been to the Second Street. Why are these guys with the backhoe joyriding around town with their guy with the video camera? How come they're not using the backhoe to get some PSE&G guy into the substation, so he can start -- I mean, if PSE&G isn't going up there because they can't get through the water, how come you guys aren't helping them get access to the substation. Like, come on! There's got to be some more to this.

So it wasn't until Friday -- this was Thursday that I'm witnessing this in City Hall. Finally, Friday -- I don't remember if it was 11:00 or if it was 2:00 on Friday, the mayor had her first press conference outside City Hall. I went to that, thinking, "Okay, maybe we'll finally heat that." The mayor was there. At least I recognized two council people -- David Mello and Ravi were there. Maybe they were there and I missed them -- I had photos. I was looking at the photos. I don't see any of the council people; I don't recognize any of the department heads there. The mayor was the only one who spoke through

the press conference. At one point, she took questions. The mayor spoke, thanking the volunteers. And I'm thinking, "This isn't a community citizen-activist situation here. Why is it only the mayor and some citizen-volunteers who are doing the work here? How come, when she has a press conference, she doesn't have the chief of police, and the fire chief, and the department heads with her, like you'd see for Bloomberg." In Bloomberg's press conferences he would hand off to Kelly; Kelly would talk about something. He would hand off to people, who would all give their little spiel on what's going on in what they are. If you're going to tell me that the Department of Environmental Services is off, busy, somewhere -- which I'm sure he might have been -- he wasn't available to come to a citywide press conference, with the press there and everybody, to talk about, I would think -- he wouldn't be closer to than the mayor? It was almost like the mayor had no team. I didn't know if that was just because the mayor felt like she was the head of the team and she needed to do it. Either she wasn't allowing anybody else to come forward and say what she knew, or that she had to somehow be the one in charge -- the mayor is the main manager. She has these department heads that should be the specialists in their respective fields.

So I just thought the whole thing was silly. I had people, friends and relatives from out of town, talking about the mayor -- that they'd be seeing the mayor all over the news. There would be these shots of Hoboken all over the news. How come we weren't hearing a quarter as much as the rest of the country was hearing. It just felt like a political opportunity, for the mayor to go on the national press -- that everybody learned from Giuliani, in 2001, with 9/11, that the mayor, or the governor, or whatever -- they're role in a calamity is to make sure you get lots of press coverage, and that you put out the right message to the media, and then the press will show that that person did their job, and held the people together, etc.

Even when I wrote a letter to the reporter, complaining about the job the city did, there was a lot of backlash of people saying, "Oh, this is politically driven. Why are you downplaying the mayor? You just have it out for --" It became a political thing. Yes, my political feelings toward politicians notwithstanding, I was responding to what I saw and what I actually heard. This was not -- I didn't feel I was fabricating any of this. And as soon as I mentioned anybody on the block, or anybody else that I would see in town, I wouldn't even -- I'd volunteer to

them, I'd say, "So, tell me, how do *you* think the city is doing? What do you think of what's going on?" And each one of them, every single one, would say, "Well, we haven't seen anything." It was all very polite but negative. And then when I said to them, "Well, I agree. I haven't seen the city do anything." And then I would hear people say, "Oh, I'm so glad to hear you say that. I've been really disappointed, not knowing what happened."

So it's almost like everybody was very much caught up in what was going on. We were, I guess, lucky, in a sense, that we didn't have water flooding into our apartment; that we didn't have hardcore issues to deal with. It seemed very much, on this whole part of town, etc., that nobody felt they had any support from the city: warnings beforehand, or communications afterwards. It wasn't until like Friday or Saturday -- it all seemed to begin on Friday. And Friday -- at that point the water had gone down. Even in the projects, the water had gone down at that point. The water had gone down, and everybody was full-scale -- I work in Lower Manhattan, and there was no power there, so I didn't have to go back to work. I couldn't go back to work until Monday. It was just full-scale cleanup at that point. Finally, on Friday, more so Saturday and Sunday, you start to see the PSE&G tent, the

power with all the laptops and the power setup near the parking lot on *Observer*. You saw the big gas truck on *Observer*, giving cans of gas out. There was free food being given out in Church Square Park. There was all of this, very, kind of generous, like all these freebies.

A friend of mine came down from Jersey City on Saturday, and we walked around with him. He was completely blown away by the level of just free water being given out, and power bars, and sandwiches, all the food being -- free stuff being given out all around town. He's up in Union City now. He said, "In Union City you're not seeing anything like that." They weren't flooded, but they lost power. He said, "You weren't seeing any of this kind of largess happening up there." So Hoboken kind of became the poster child for everybody to do this.

And it was nice for a while, but, realistically, by Saturday and Sunday, I think we had all kind of gotten into a routine, and at that point it wasn't until the weekend that even the weather started to turn colder, and the food in our freezer -- our freezer started to defrost, and food was going to be better off outside than in the freezer. More and more stores were starting to open up, and you could buy stuff.

AS: So let's recap. In terms of where you think the city failed, in some respect, it seems with communications; with a lack of organization; a lack of contingency plan; and a sense of presence, a sense of the right people being out, publicly. Were there any other areas that you think the city failed in?

HF: Yes. I think after everything got normalized, and once we were all -- I realized that for people who really had damaged homes and such, it was months and, maybe, to this day they're not truly back to some normal level. But months later I thought -- so what have we learned from all this? Where is the look, the hard look -- what actually happened? What did we do? What might we do? What have we learned, and so forth? And perhaps that stuff has gone on behind closed doors. I like to think that it just hasn't leaked out to the public. But I haven't seen any -- I think there were some city-hall meetings having to do with, maybe, insurance funding, where people would come to City Hall and complain. But I'm not aware of there having been any - just like this interview now -- any interviews that the museum is doing. I feel like the museum, with this whole oral-history project, is filling a void that the city, on some level, should have done.

Granted, what you're doing with the interviews here -- it's from a historical perspective, in a lot of regards, and the museum, being what they are, are limited to what can they do with this, other than collate all this information and make it available. It's not like the museum can put anything into action out of this. But I'm curious as to what involvement, if any, does the city have in this project? The city has done virtually no outreach to gather people's experiences; to gather this feedback from the population.

That week after the storm, for the most part, the only information that could really be had was by people just talking to other people, and walking around, and learning things with their own eyes, and hopefully there are some sort of documents that might be gathered, whether they be photos or whatever, to figure out what happened. There is a community group in town that did, when the flood maps had come out -- they had a couple of community meetings to talk about the flood maps, and to talk about Sandy. But, on the one hand, those meetings were nothing more than some shopkeepers talking about their experiences, etc. There was no real information that was being given out; it was really just disseminating some information that they had collected.

But, at that meeting, I met a Stevens guy. At that meeting, I was walking around, talking to people, and saying, "Why -- I'd like to know what actually happened that night. How did the city flood like that? Where did the water come from? How much of the flooding -- and I assume it varies in parts of town -- how much of that flooding happened because the sewers backed up? How much of that flooding came in because water maybe flooded in over the railroad tracks, and came in from the south, across, maybe, west of Clinton, that part? How much of it was flooded because of water that flooded up from Weehawken Cove, from that? How much of the city flooded because the water just came barreling in, over the walls along the riverfront, straight in from the Hudson?"

A day or two afterwards, we were at Biggie's, on Newark Street. We lived next door to Biggie, for a long time, on Madison Street, so we know them. So I spoke to Mike, Biggie's son-in-law, and he was telling me that there was a guy in his restaurant there on Newark Street, who was in the restaurant that night when the water came in, and he described that it was like this kind of mini-tsunami, that kind of rode right past his storefront. None of it came into the restaurant, but just this wave of water that washed right up Newark Street, toward the city;

then eventually just went down and disappeared, and was dry.

Other people have told me that, coming up First or Second Street, there was this wave of water that rode its way in, that maybe was what -- the big water rise that we experienced from 10:00 to 10:30, when the water jumped up over a foot, was maybe part of that.

But what actually happened. I know that Stevens' wave tanks, that I mentioned before -- I was told that they have a tank there that can recreate any ocean-water -- they can create any wave action, etc. So, clearly, they must have some ability to at least understand what happened during the storm, from the Hudson; and how did that hit the land, and then once it hit the land, then come into Hoboken?

So this Stevens guy I met at this community meeting -- I asked him those questions. I said, "Do we know what happened?" And he said, "Well, honestly, no. Because the initial studies and reports that were done I think were for the broader region, by others." But he said Stevens was in the process of doing a model for Hoboken, to understand how the river waters came into Hoboken. But when I asked him how much water came up from the sewers, he said, "That's a very good question. We can't answer that. We

don't have the -- I'm not sure how anyone would -- I don't know how we can gauge that at this point."

Then, months later -- I don't know if it was in June or May -- there was a meeting -- there were a couple of meetings organized in City Hall by -- I forget who organized it. It wasn't the city. But there was a group, there were a couple former FEMA engineers who gave a presentation, and John -- I forget his last name. I knew him for a long time from the museum. I saw him a couple days after the storm. He was, I think, working with the emergency management group or something. He did a lot of volunteer work in the aftermath of the storm. He seemed to be the organizer of this event, and there was an event that evening and that afternoon. They had a different event for the city, itself. The headline of the event was something along the lines of "How to Protect Yourselves the Next Time," or something like that.

The gist of the presentation and the event was more or less for like all those basement apartment owners -- what can you actually do yourself, to kind of manage this? For people like me, and all the people I saw that day -- and this is like seven months later -- and if I hadn't pulled out all that -- if I hadn't thrown out what I did, and cleaned what I did, and pulled out all the wet

installation that I had under my floor slab here, I'm sure -- I assume I would have had mold weeks later, at that point. There is no way I was going to be waiting seven months for some guys to tell me [unclear]. But I kind of feel like, in the aftermath of the storm, I did what I could do to just clear out anything, and get rid of all the muck that had covered everything.

So for me it wasn't that informative a session. These two guys were smart, and they were very well-intended. One of them was from -- I don't know -- the Southeast, and one was from the Midwest. They were nice guys, who were clearly just doing this out of a sense of trying to help people. So I appreciate what they were doing. But they admitted they had never been to Hoboken before like that day, and they didn't really have any specific information that was specific to Hoboken.

At the beginning of the session, they went around the room. There were, if I remember right, maybe fifteen or twenty people in the room. They went around saying, "Okay, could you introduce yourselves? Why are you here? What are you hoping to learn?" So I asked these same questions. I said, "Well, (a) I'm trying to understand what actually happened with that." So John, the fellow who organized this, shared what he knew. He said what he had

heard was that in at least the southern part, the water basically all came in through the New Jersey transit property, on the south, of Weehawken Cove on the north, for the most part. But then I also said to him, "Another thing I was hoping to find out --" there have been these two flood maps, and I just don't understand them at all. I don't know what is being -- I was always told that there was a line -- I was on the planning board for twelve years, and we would see -- there would be flood maps that would show a line that ran down the middle of the town. That was the flood zone. Either you're west of that line, in the flood zone, which we are, and which are most things, west of Willow, etc., or west of Park -- and then there was the other part, and we were in this 100-year flood plan. Even my house -- I was told that this floor that we're sitting on now -- when we built it we were told it had to be ten feet above sea level; so, according to the survey maps, in Hoboken, our part, the sidewalk in front of the house is 7.4' feet above sea level. We had to raise this floor 2.8' above the sidewalk, in order to be above that -- which proved to be correct for this storm. We were probably six inches above the water line, for the storm.

But I don't know how that 10' above sea level -- I'm told that a water line above sea level, at

high tide, the amount -- so that's ten feet above the water line, when the water is at some mean, high-tide level, whatever that is. So for the Stevens engineer -- the guy [unclear] to say that we had eleven feet of water -- I don't know what that means. My understanding is that the Hudson River, at high tide, is normally at six feet or above. During the tide levels, the water goes somewhere from, I don't know, four feet to six feet high. I don't know above what.

So these flood maps now seem to have a lot more lines to them. It appears to me that, as opposed to there being just one measure of a flood zone, there are now several measures, but I don't really understand them, and I don't see anybody explaining those things. We keep hearing about new flood maps. Can't the city put it in plain language what these flood maps mean?

So it's things like that. Obviously, the city is at the whim of -- what did they know before the storm? Did they know about these storm surges? Did they know that there was going to be a lot more flooding in town than there was for Irene? Maybe not. But why do we still have these questions now? How come those things aren't -- and now we're starting to hear speeches and words from the mayor, as far as preparations -- a better prepared city for

the next one -- how can we prepare ourselves better for the next one if we don't actually know what happened in the last one? If we're going to set up barriers to prevent the water from flooding the town, don't we need to know where the water came in? Are these barriers that need to be at the New Jersey Transit property? Or the Weehawken -- ? What kind of barrier would we have needed to prevent the flooding that we had for Sandy? And are those kind of barriers silly? Because it seems that Sandy kind of broke all the rules of all the preconceived ideas that people had before.

I work, in a loose sense, in the construction business. I'm a lighting designer. I work with architects and developers and owners, and provide lighting for buildings. And I'm a lead AP, I'm very involved in sustainable buildings that work, etc. So I'm often in meetings -- much more so since Sandy, because we do -- I've got projects in the city. I've got projects in Manhattan, in areas that flooded along the Hudson, and there's a lot more dialogue now about -- everybody gets rid of the word "flood prevention." That used to be -- prevention is now replaced by mitigation. Because no engineer in their right mind, nowadays, seems to be along the lines of saying that whatever we do is going to prevent a flood. Because with

Sandy, we know it's going to happen again. And with climate change, etc., we know these things are -- just like Sandy was a high-water mark (no pun intended), there are going to continue to be higher and higher water marks. So at what point in time are we attempting to design for, in terms of preventing something from happening?

Hoboken -- all right, we had between a foot and a half and two feet of water here on Jefferson Street. If we had another foot of water, then all of a sudden where we're sitting now -- this would have been flooded, and, presumably, almost everybody on this block, the first four would have been flooded. It seemed like the water went down roughly an inch an hour. So with that, whereas the water had pretty much gone down in twenty-four hours -- if we get another storm, where the water is a foot higher, that means that instead of twelve to eighteen hours we have this flooded condition, that means it's going to be that much longer. So who knows if that means that power will be lost that much more. The cleanup effort will have to be that much more. Will my wife and I want to continue to live here? Are we going to be like those farmers in Iowa who, every year or two their houses get flooded by the Mississippi? All right, they rebuild, etc., but every so often they just take the towns and maybe move the towns to

some high-water mark, or they just move to some other place, or they move their house on the farm. Or, do they give up the farm? At what point, way down the road (hopefully way down the road) will Hoboken start to return to its prehistoric levels of Stevens being an island surrounded by -- will this go back to the swampland that it was 150 years ago, or whatever?

But until then -- the city's hands are tied to a certain extent, certainly in terms of mitigating floods and building more pumps, building water walls -- whatever they can do -- is far beyond the city's ability to do. They're going to be fighting it out with all the other towns and counties that have similar problems, to the state and to the feds to do this. At what point can the city do? They can come up with plans, but at what point does the reality of what can be done meet something that's -- all right. Is it worth it for us to spend billions of dollars to take certain measures that we can only guess are going to help us, until a certain point? All the time spent on dialogue -- since our governments have more or less lost the will or ability to spend money, or do what I think is their role in terms of looking after the populace -- their role is to tax and spend. Spend money and provide services. That seems to be a debatable point. As our governments

become less responsive and more torn by political infighting, etc., people lose more and more trust in the government, and are less enthusiastic to have the government do their job and do these big projects and spend these things. So it's almost like a Catch-22. In some ways, for us who were lucky in not losing our home this time, that becomes the disheartening aspect of this. It showed how much -- not on every level but at least in this time, the municipal government in this case -- they've shown that they're not any better equipped to do anything than the person in the street. They might have access to better information, but we didn't even see that. So the one advantage they have seem to have kind of been lost. It's very disconcerting.

AS: Did the city government get anything right?

HF: As much as I resented the fact that it seemed like the outreach was all handled by citizen volunteers -- that it was simply people -- maybe not necessarily me, because I didn't actually volunteer, even though I did. On Thursday morning, when I went down to the mayor's office, and I saw that, basically, nobody knew what

was going on, and I saw that Juan, the communications guy, was overwhelmed with what was going on -- I went down Friday morning. Actually, I went down early Friday morning and I met Juan and the mayor walking down First Street, and I intercepted them, I guess around Clinton. They were walking down First Street and City Hall. I was on my way to City Hall to see Juan, so I went down there. My purpose was to volunteer to Juan. I said to Juan, "I'm not interested in joining the volunteers, knocking on doors and giving out water or whatever it is. You seem to need help, and I'm interested in helping you on this." But, of course, I'd seen him with his boss, so it was probably not good timing on my part.

But, of course, he couldn't take me up on that. It ended up -- the walk down First Street ended up becoming a dialogue with the mayor at that point, just to see what she knew. Because this was the first time I had seen her since this whole thing began. I was sympathetic to her, because, obviously, nobody would really have wanted the job she had there -- to be the mayor of this town. But then that's when I asked her, "Where's the city council? How much has there been -- when was the last time you met with the city council?" She said, "Well, I've been in touch with them, but we haven't actually had a meeting. They've

been a little busy." I said, "Well, shouldn't there be a meeting, an emergency meeting with you and the city council, to talk about this?" Because it seems to me, again, the only outreach that is going to happen in the city is by actually walking and talking to people face-to-face. I said, "Why wouldn't you have each of the city council members set up a mini-satellite city hall in their ward, so that you could take the volunteers, or whatever volunteers you needed, or, hopefully, the City Hall workers, who I'm assuming have nothing else to do, and have them be shuttling information back and forth between City Hall and these satellite City Halls? And the city council people would set up in the satellite offices, and they, in turn, would have their own ward volunteers, and they could go block to block. Is there a map anywhere, showing the state of what houses don't have power? Who's flooded? What basements have been flooded? Has that information been collected? Do you actually know who's flooded out and who's not? What cars are dead? What cars are working, etc.?"

So she just said, "Well, the City Council, I don't think they would listen to me. And I think they would resent having someone tell them what to do." I said, "Well, you don't think, given this situation, that you, as mayor, there wouldn't be some banding together, some rally-'round-

the-flag kind of thing?" And she just said, "No." So that was disheartening -- (a) that she felt that way; (b) she just didn't do anything, because she just assumed she'd know the outcome of that. I said, "Well, look, even if you did it -- why wouldn't you do it, and if they refused, then you could put the onus back on them. At least you could let people know in that ward, 'Hey. The five council people who were willing to listen may have set up satellite offices, and that's going on. And those who said no, in those other wards, those council people didn't want to listen to me. I have no control over what they want to do within their wards, etc.'" I realized that, politically, what I was suggesting was far-fetched, I guess, etc. But it just feeds into this -- it just felt like there was no leadership at that point.

But anyway, in terms of what the city got right -- I can appreciate -- there were people I know who work in City Hall, and they were the ones who told me they went in on Monday, and when they walked in -- on Monday, before the storm, the mayor and a couple of directors just looked at them and said, "What are you doing here?" They said, "Well, we're here to work." And they said, "Well, don't you know there's a hurricane coming? You shouldn't be here." So I said to the mayor, "Why were the City Hall

workers just sent home? Was there nothing for them to do?" Here you're gathering volunteers to have them do -- I assume there's no end of things to do. And she goes, "Well, you know, some of the people had elderly parents, or kids they needed to look after." I said, "Sure. So those people shouldn't be obliged to come in. But people who can come in should come in. To just send everybody home -- I don't understand that."

So I think even if the City Hall workers were allowed to come in, and were allowed to take part in this, and were utilized to do *something*, they would have needed more help anyway -- because the phones are out, the internet's out. So I think that, certainly, gathering volunteers -- there was a place to have citizen volunteers. So as much as I resented the fact that it seemed like they seemed to take the place of the people whose salaries we pay to deliver services to the city, I do appreciate the fact that there was this outreach, and that those individuals were compelled to help, and that the city did organize them to do stuff.

Just like Irene. Before that, among the outreach beforehand was a group of volunteers that came and knocked on our door, and said, "Okay, you know there's this hurricane coming. Are you staying?" We said yes. They said,

"Okay. Then do you have water? Do you have food?" They were providing a good service, I thought. But, of course, that was Irene. But I'm sure there were people who were helped either getting evacuated out or whatever, so I do appreciate the fact that the city did have the wherewithal to get some help. Clearly, they needed it. But that might be the only thing I could look at as what the city got right.

AS: How else did you pass the time? Did you feel like you had enough supplies to carry you through the days?

HF: Yes. Luckily, we had a lot of food in our freezer, etc., and, literally, we had more food than we needed. So literally every night we invited -- we had neighbors come in. We never ate alone. We always invited neighbors in from the block, and we sat here -- in candle light, basically -- and had dinner. We had gas, so while we had no power, we got a little bit of power back on the Friday after the storm. Even though PSE&G said we had full power back, we didn't. We only had one phase -- even though they kept maintaining that wasn't the case -- which meant that we had certain outlets that would work, but none of

our appliances worked -- with the exception that, since we had gas, we had hot water so we could take hot showers, which was really great. As the house temperature started to go down into the fifties, it was nice to be able take a hot shower in the morning. And we could light the stove, and we had the stove working so we could cook, and we had hot food. That was kind of fun. Neighbors would bring whatever they had that was defrosting, or candles, or whatever. So that was a nice thing.

Otherwise, we just started to get up when the sun got up, to take advantage of whatever daylight we could, to clean. Basically, we were cleaning, hauling stuff out of the garage. There were days spent going down to Garden Street to charge our phones. My wife's phone service continued to work, so we were communicating with the insurance companies. We had flood insurance for the house as well as for our contents; but, since our apartment did not flood, the contents -- it only covered the contents in our apartment, it didn't cover the contents in the garage, because the garage is deemed not a storage space.

So we had insurance -- we got insurance coverage for food lost in our fridge. Our car, which was in the garage -- which worked when we turned it on, on Wednesday, but then on Friday, when we finally -- I kept

cleaning and doing work. My wife was starting to go up the wall, so I told her to just take the car, drive to Jersey City and get herself some coffee and do something. The car, of course, didn't work. So it was dead at that point, so we had another project of calling the insurance company, who essentially said that they would send somebody to boost the battery, but since the car was sitting in a foot and a half of water, they advised us that we might just think about totaling the car. We had a car with 100,000 miles on it, and even if the car were, the next day -- who knows what toll the salt water and everything would take on the car, a month later, three months, later, etc.? So we decided we had to total the car, which meant we had to get the car towed -- which was no small feat. We could see, during the day, the amount of tow trucks in town, hauling cars out of town, was unbelievable. And you could see, as the days went on, that all the cars parked on the street were all starting to fill up with water vapor inside the car -- so you could tell which cars were dead with that. At first it was going to be a week before we could get the car towed. My wife had to go back to work, and we had to start thinking about buying a new car. Where were we going to put the new car, if the old car was in the garage? So it just seemed like every day was spent -- there was at least an

hour or two spent on the phone with the insurance company. We felt like we had a very good insurance company. But, still, between dealing with the homeowners insurance, the auto insurance, and the flood insurance -- and on the car insurance, we had to get adjustors to come here and inspect the car before we could get it towed. Then the house -- we had to get flood people to come in and inspect the house. They came back a couple of times.

So it seemed like between cleaning, dealing with insurance, and then we would have dinner with everybody at 500-5:30, and we would basically go to sleep at like 8:30-9:00. It just felt like every day was exhausting. After the first couple days went by, and we started to deal with the reality of having to get our lives back in order, and how was I going to get to work on Monday, since the PATH was gone -- where were the buses, how were the buses running, and that stuff -- it just seemed like all this work to get us back to zero was exhausting.

AS: What did Hoboken learn about itself as a city -- less in terms of the city government but more in terms of its people? What did they learn?

HF: Oh, boy. I don't know that I can answer that. I guess, on my block -- maybe I can only go as far as that -- at least on my block, my impression, from the people I came across with, is that everybody was surprisingly positive about how well -- all the positive and generosity they met with the other people they came in contact with, and how much people went out of their way. So I think in this very small world here, people felt, among all the things to get depressed, and discouraged, and things lost that week -- that much, I think, went beyond just our own, me and my wife -- it seemed like there was that kind of community -- which was very much a part of Hoboken when we moved here. When we moved to Hoboken, it was still very much a neighborly small town. As the town got more gentrified in the last ten years, and real estate prices skyrocketed, and the neighborhoods really started to break down, in terms of what they had traditionally been -- I think a lot of that, for those of us who had been here for a while and had some sense of what that was like -- that was already starting to fade, or had already faded when we moved in, in '87. But there were still pockets of it left, and there was still enough people around who remembered that, that we felt like we could get a firsthand sense of that. But I think that had already kind of been

lost in the last ten years. Enough new people had moved in who were oblivious to what the neighborhoods were, or what things used to be, and they were more -- I think their concept of Hoboken was more of what it appeared to them today, and what they were going to make of it. So I think that neighborliness, which was kind of an old Hoboken thing -- and this block was always very much and old Hoboken block -- which, I think, why I'm characteristic of the resentment of City Hall, because I think a lot of that is rooted in the fact that City Hall has completely lost that sense of what Old Hoboken was. There were a lot of negative things about old Hoboken, but in terms of the positive things of old Hoboken, that stuff had been lost and dismissed on some level. But I think at least people got back in touch with that, for the storm. Whether anyone in Hoboken has changed -- I don't know. Or whether that experience, that positive experience that we had will come up again the next time there is a storm -- I suspect that it will, in some different way.

But just like after Irene -- from the aftermath of Irene to the aftermath of Sandy -- it was a whole different thing. Because I think with Irene, everyone was truly scared going into the storm, and truly relieved after the storm. And, generally, there was no -- we could

move on. There was no baggage left over. Whereas with Sandy, I think there was a certain complacency we had going into the storm, and -- I don't know. Depending on your experience, there was just a depression, or resignation, or something that came after the storm. So I'm not sure what was learned from Irene to Sandy, in terms of people's attitudes or whatever. So I'm not sure what was learned from this thing of Sandy, that would leave its mark on the town.

Once I started to talk to contractors, etc., they would tell me stories about the number of people -- landlords -- who just cleaned out those flooded basement apartments, completely renovated them, and rented them out again. People who would move into those renovated, basement apartments -- do they have any idea what that apartment looked like on October 30th? Do they think about that? It's not my business, I guess, not my problem. If I were that landlord, would I do something different? Would I write off that basement apartment now, knowing that either I'm going to have to keep renovating it every few years. Is it their responsibility to inform tenants that they're moving into something that's going to flood? This is America. There's personal responsibility. Should people just know what they're getting themselves into? Should they do their

homework, and not get themselves into that? I always thought it would be interesting in town if there were little bronze plaques set up around town, showing what the height above sea level is. So at least if, on a given block, I would have some way of knowing, "Oh. This is 7.4' above sea level. Oh. So this probably flooded, blah, blah, blah." Is that a smart thing or a stupid thing? Or a plaque showing those lines -- like you'd see in little towns somewhere, maybe in west Jersey, where they'd have lines showing that on such-and-such a date, water went up to this point. I don't know if that would serve any purpose.

AS: Do you feel as if Hoboken has recovered? And if so, was there a moment that made you think, "Hoboken is back?"

HF: Has Hoboken recovered? I would say so. It certainly looks like it's recovered, from walking around town. I still notice a lot of the apartment lobbies that have bare studs, where sheetrock was ripped out and they had to put back things. I notice storefronts, down on Washington and First Street, or elsewhere in town, where, whoever was in there, it's still vacant; they're waiting to be rented out. The retail climate in town was already

tenuous from the recession, beforehand. After this happened, it seems to me a lot of those business that were on the edge, were gone. I wonder, like, what kind of business owner would move in along First Street? We know the woman at Choc au Pain, on First Street between Bloomfield and Garden -- she was saying how the water stopped virtually right outside her shop. So she was lucky -- nothing came in -- but it was like in the middle of that block, the water kind of came up that far. First Street was starting to become a little bit of a vibrant retail -- given where we live, First Street -- I walk down First Street at least two times every day. But I wonder, now, what kind of place would open up on First Street.

So, in terms of Hoboken, being back -- yeah. Generally speaking, it is. And I guess, for me -- a point for me was springtime. It was back in April, I guess, or May. Spring, this year, I remember, even though it was wet, was a really good spring. Temperatures were moderate. There was rain and there was sun, and it was really when the leaves, all of a sudden, came back and everything started to get green. That was the point where we started to see our back yard -- we didn't lose all our -- we've put a lot of effort in plants, etc., in our back yard, and it was nice to see -- after it was all covered with that horrible

water, and all our mulch was washed away -- it was nice to see that 90% of our plants came back, and all the big ones survived. We didn't lose any big trees, etc.

So that, six months later, was a nice sigh of relief, thinking, "Okay. Life has returned." And I got that same feeling, just walking around town, seeing the trees, and talking to people. It seemed like we weren't the only ones who looked at spring a little differently this year, since Sandy was what blew away the last of the leaves on the trees, and that was clearly the end of the fall. Everything was just stark after that. But I still walk around town, noticing things that were damaged. I wonder, are they going to grow back. And even with the warm weather now -- I, myself, I cleaned out everything I needed to, and threw away everything I needed to here, but I didn't do anything in the house as far as pro-active things, to better prepare the house for the next storm. I was waiting until it got warm out, to do that stuff. So it's really only been in the spring and summer that I finally started to get rid of the old shelving I have, and get better, taller shelving, and to make places in my garage for things for be higher. We had kind of a secondary fridge in the garage, before it got flooded out and damaged, that we threw out. Now we bought a new one, and moved it into our

apartment. We had an exercise machine in the garage that got covered in mud. We had had it for a while, so we got rid of it.

So it was a chance for us to kind of clear out and start over again, but it wasn't really until, I think more honestly, the summer that I really started to feel like I was able to put the garage back to a normal state. I'm still not completely finished, because I'm pulling out the wood steps we had in the entrance to the apartment. I pulled out the wood-stud walls we had, so that stuff is still -- I hope to have it done in a month, but I feel like I'm still kind of working to come back and get to a point where, at least, "All right. I'm sure it's going to happen again. But at least I can have some peace of mind that I did everything I could do, and so be it."

AS: Is there anything you would like to address, that I haven't asked about?

HF: No, your questions were good. As you can see, I've thought about this. I've been thinking about Sandy ever since Sandy. But no. Thanks.

AS: All right.

HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, Daniel Gans, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*. I understand that I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on October 29, 2012.

2. The interview will be audiotaped. In the interview I may be identified by name, subject to my consent. I may also be identified by name in any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview, subject to my consent.

3. I understand that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that a photograph of me may be taken or borrowed for duplication, and that if I withdraw from the project, the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to Hoboken Historical Museum, and that the information in the interview can be used by Hoboken Historical Museum in any manner it will determine, including, but not limited to, use by researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy will be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript.

6. I understand that at the conclusion of this particular study, the tape(s), photograph, and one copy of the transcript will be kept in the collections department of the Hoboken Historical Museum.

Interviewee Name: Daniel Gans

Interviewee Signature Daniel Gans

Address 67 Jefferson St. Hoboken

Telephone number: 201-781-4654 cell 201-792-3814 ofc

Date: 8/12/2013

Archives 2013.039.0008

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: DANIEL GANS

INTERVIEWER: ALAN SKONTRA

DATE: 12 AUGUST 2013

Track #1

AS: First question: Tell us about your connection to Hoboken. How long have you lived in the city? Approximately where in the city do you live? Who do you live with? And what is your profession?

DG: I've lived in Hoboken for thirty-four years. My connection to Hoboken started when I first came as a child in 1957, to meet my Grandparents down at the docks after they arrived by ship from Europe. I came back many times throughout my youth, as it was a good way to get to Madison Square Garden and Leo’s and the Clam Broth house were a fun way to start the night. After college, my partner and I decided to go into the real estate development business and out of the many places we researched and visited we decided that Hoboken was the most attractive. The benefits the city had, being close to

Manhattan with an excellent transit link was obvious to us and the vibe of change in the urban landscape as a place people wanted to live was clear. I have served on many boards and committees over the years in supporting the town. I have made many friends in the community and feel a part of the ups and downs that the city has gone through since when I first came. It is my home and I love living here. I currently live on Jefferson Street between First and Newark Street. I have lived there for fifteen years, I live with my wife and my son, who is seventeen years old, and goes to school at Hudson County Schools of Technology, and he plays football for the Hoboken High School football team.

AS: Tell us about your background as a builder and developer. What sort of projects have you worked on in the city, and what insight does that give you into the city and its infrastructure?

DG: I have been involved in projects throughout the city working on renovations, and new construction both on and off the waterfront. This has allowed me to understand the infrastructure of the city from a-hands-on view over an extended time. When we

started our business we began by doing gut rehabs, this entailed bringing the building up to the latest codes. New water and sewer services were brought into the buildings, this meant excavating the streets to make the connections. Our first buildings were on 3rd and Park and had living space below street level. One of the issues at the time was definitely the sewer system, and the flooding that occurred. In the early renovation buildings, because of that, we built elaborate sump-pump systems and French drainage systems, in addition to putting check valves in the sewer lines to make sure that water wouldn't infiltrate into lower units. That was the beginning of dealing with the infrastructure issues and the problems the city faced when the sewers were flooded. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) had just been created about a year before our first project in 1980 but no standards or codes had yet been put into place.

AS: Would you repeat that again? Just in terms of your experience as a builder -- what insight does that give you into Hoboken's infrastructure?

DG: After our first two projects we began to build new construction and new FEMA regulations were being adopted that needed to be included in the designs. During

the mid 80's, I became very active in working with the city on how it was going to handle its sewage. -The Clean Water Act that Jimmy Carter had set into motion – said that the cities could no longer dump raw sewage into the rivers. So new sewage-treatment plants needed to be built. I became very involved serving on city committees to deal with this issue. The situation of non-action by the city became so bad the State imposed a moratorium on new construction until the plant was built. Along with that, it was apparent to me the plant alone would do little because of how old the sewers were and how they were built. Every time we went into a sewer there were lessons to learn, sewers would often collapse. Many of the sewers were brick others were wood dating back to the 1860's. Even when new sewers were put in as was done on First Street, which made it a lot easier to tap into the sewers, because they wouldn't fall apart there was still flooding issues. So new concrete sewers were put in at many locations throughout the city, but the concrete sewers, were not the only solution that needed to be looked at -- because there was still a lot of flooding.

The sewage treatment plant was built in Hoboken. That decision was made even though alternatives were presented such as tying the system directly into the

Passaic Valley Sewage Treatment plant. The new plant though did little if anything to stop the flooding though under normal conditions fortunately, the Hudson River was getting a lot cleaner. A lot of people believed that the solution to the flooding would be pump stations. It was envisioned that the pump stations would simply pump the water away in -flood conditions. If you have a sewer that doesn't let in any outside water this can work a water pipe is a pressurized pipe and it unaffected by being under water so you can pump water through it no matter the subsurface condition -- but sewers are not meant to be underwater and are not pressurized. The issue with the sewers in Hoboken is that the sewers fill up with water from the aquifer, and the aquifer is fed from the river; and is affected by rainstorms, it also is affected by the tides from the river. If you look at the wonderful old maps of Hoboken ---- it's great to have them around us right now in the museum, you can see the original topography of the city. I have one of the old maps in my office that was created by, by Jim Hans the founder of the Hoboken Historical museum, who lived two doors down from our first building, in 1980, and we became friends at that time. I remember how in Manhattan I first learnt of the value of the old topographical maps in understanding subsurface conditions

as you could see rivers that appeared to be gone that actually still existed under streets and buildings. In Hoboken on the old maps you can see where the swamps were and the existence of a river and pond filled in many years ago . If you're putting a building in that location, the river is still there. We built the building on the corner of Second and Monroe and Jackson, when we went to hook in the sewer lines and the water lines, at that location, we had to move the sewer and water lines because they were in line with the river-- if you look on the old maps, you'll see that the Hoboken River was there. The river is still down there; we saw it, and had to deal with it just as we had to deal with the tidal issues of the aquifer.

So back to the aquifer. When it rains, the swamps, as they are depicted in the old maps fill up with water, not just from the rainstorm but also from the tidal influence of the river. As the aquifer fills up, the sewers, end up being underwater and because they are not pressurized pipes they let in the water. The water fills up the sewers so you are not just pumping the water that's in the sewage system and the water that's coming from the sky, but you are pumping the aquifer. It's one of the major infrastructure issues that we face.

Are there solutions? There are solutions to these types of things. Everything has a cost to it. But that type of storm and that type of infrastructure issue typical to a Hurricane like Irene-. We see the water rising from the sewers, from below, through the aquifer, and into the streets. I think that was the type of storm that most of us believed was probably the one that's going to be affecting us the most. We looked, over the years, at the Hudson River, and we knew we were in flood-plain elevations, from the onset of our development years. As the codes changed, and as we started doing new construction in 1982 and '83 -- those buildings were living to a new standard, to new flood-plain elevation standards, for equipment and living places.

So we were very aware of the fact that we were building in a flood hazard area. I think most of us, thought that the Hudson River wasn't going to flood its banks. But certain infrastructure things that were done -- elevating buildings, for one. In 1986, the Jefferson Trust Building, at 300 Newark Street, we decided to elevate that building and put nothing underneath it. We did this because it is costly to put parking under a building. We had parking across the street. We elevated the building, and that building, in an area that was tremendously flooded

when the Hudson overflowed, that building was safe. And the transformers and things in that building were safe. The parking lots across the street were not. Planning and developing the Maxwell House project gave me new insights to the river and building so close to the river. Though the waterfront park lands flooded during Sandy none of the residential buildings had any problems and the garage that is below the flood elevation was dry because all entrances are from locations above the flood elevation and the garage is built using construction techniques that do not let in water this type of construction is refereed to as a "bath tub" though really it is a bath tub in reverse.

AS: Besides the flooding and the sewers, were there any other infrastructure challenges that the city faced in this situation? What about in terms of the average building, the average home, the average basement home?

DG: The only other point of infrastructure regarding the sewers that should be mentioned is that currently we have a combined sewer system, which means both the waste and storm water run together. Ultimately plans to build a two-pipe system should be put in place. Other

infrastructure issues such as the overhead electrical lines should be dealt with. It will be much better for the city to have all the electrical services (telephone, cable and power underground not only for esthetic reasons which are obvious but also for assuring that poles and lines are not affected during wind storms by falling trees and other debris. Our water system still has sections that are very old this problem manifest itself when sections break shutting down services. This problem is exasperated during the flooding of the aquifer because the ground shifts due to saturation causing the pipes to break. The gas pipes have the same problem that when the ground shifts this can cause the pipes to move. There was talk during Hurricane Sandy of having to shut down the gas supply for fears of breaks though this fortunately did not have to occur. The zoning pushed to have parking under the buildings, even on single lots, for quite some time. Each family had to have a garage under their house. These requirements on small lots ultimately didn't allow for the type of construction that I just mentioned at the Jefferson Trust Building, where we were able to elevate an entire structure -- 100 units -- and put the parking across the street. Because there was enough property involved in that development that allowed for that. But many projects were much smaller –one, two, or

three lots -- and parking had to be brought on-site. So the bottoms of the buildings became used for that. Also, retail space was allowed under the flood elevation level.

In new buildings the electrical services and equipment like that, phone, cable, and gas meters are "above flood plain grade." Buildings that have sewer drains both waste and storm at the street grade or below are exposed to the danger of flooding when the sewers fill even before the water is seen on the street. I heard that some homeowners were able to plug their sewers and thereby stop this from occurring.

AS: When did you first hear the words "Hurricane Sandy?"

DG: Probably two weeks before the storm. I'm an avid surfer, and I follow the hurricanes.

AS: What did you expect the storm to be like?

DG: I expected the storm would be like another Hurricane Irene, maybe a little worse than that though as we watched the storm coming up and realized the

rain would be light I began to think despite the warning of high winds Hoboken would be spared a fate like Hurricane Irene because the aquifer wouldn’t become as saturated.

AS: Did you think the city was prepared, given the infrastructure challenges?

DG: No the city was not prepared but I don't think the city could have been prepared for something like that to happen. I think it took many people by surprise. I don't think we were prepared nor any other community in the region was prepared. In hindsight, it's easy to say we weren’t prepared, but the thought that the Hudson River was going to flood its banks and fill in a major portion of Hoboken really was not in people's minds. Flooding was in the mind of the Federal Government who mandated certain building requirements in these regions and the building code officials in the state who mandated those regulations, but I don't think even they had fully contemplated the true danger that faced the city so that it would have been prepared for this.

AS: To the best of your knowledge, what exactly happened during the storm? Why did the city flood?

DG: Strong consistent wind pushing the water mass at high tide caused the Hudson River to overflow its banks. As the flooding came in, it was stopped in most places by the Castle Point hill, but this did not occur on the north and south ends of town where the elevation is flat. As the water rushed in on the south it came in over the railroad tracks, on the north end of Hoboken the water came in by the light rail line, from there the water poured into the back of Hoboken, and filled in from both the south and north, going into the middle of the back of town. The difficulty with Hoboken is the fact I mentioned before is that the back part of Hoboken is a swamp. This includes all the area from Willow Street and the name comes from that because it was where the willows started growing, The water went all the way to the most far western edges of Hoboken where the elevations rises because of the palisade cliffs. When the old swamp area was filled in it was done so at about Elevation 6 (6 feet above sea level). The flood plain elevation -- for residential construction purposes was set at 11. The streets are at Elevation 6, throughout much of the back of Hoboken.

What happened in Hoboken was that the aquifer in the back filled up, and made it more difficult

an issue to deal with because the water stayed there even after the river retreated from the flooding condition. In those areas along the waterfront.

AS: Did your home suffer any damage?

DG: Yes. My house was built in 1997 and I would consider it a new structure having been built under the flood hazard elevation standards. The structure is similar to what I described in the previous question. The building is a two-family condominium building. Each of the units has a garage, which is at the level of the sidewalk. Also on the first floor is the entry door and hallway, storage areas for each unit and an elevator that comes to the lowest level of the building. There was about twenty-one inches (people laugh when I say "about" as they know I measured it) on this level of our building. I think my garage is about Elevation 7, about a foot above the street. So anything that was in the garage, including my and my neighbor's cars, were destroyed. I had a lot of memorabilia, and personal belongings, including power tools and a woodworking shop that ended up damaged or destroyed. The building also suffered damage the sheet rock, insulation, wood framing along with the structural concrete block were soaked. The hallway carpet was one of the first

things ripped out after the water receded. My neighbors heating and air-conditioning system was destroyed and parts of the elevator equipment had been under water.

AS: Did your office suffer any damage?

DG: I was fortunate that my office, which was on the second floor, did not suffer any damage. The building my office was in flooded, and on the first floor there was over four feet of water. The building had been the Burlington coat factory, it is located between Fifteenth and Sixteenth Street, The street there is at about Elevation 5 The electrical panels in the Burlington coat factory were under water, and the along with the transformers, the building was lost beyond repair.

AS: When did you first get an opportunity to leave your home and survey the damage in the city? Where did you go, and what was your initial reaction?

DG: I left the third day after the storm. The water had started to recede. Other than that, I had not gone beyond the street level, in front of my own house. I had some deep-waders, but the waders – yellow rubber construction boots that are just below knee-high were not

high enough for the first day, to keep yourself dry. So we stayed put. Two of my son's friends came to our house and did not leave that day. They both came from places that were dry, and literally waded through the water, to get to our house.

I left the immediate area 3 days after the storm and went down First Street, surveying the damage. I walked with my son all the way down to the waterfront and took a look at what was going on down there–and it was astonishing to see the water had fully receded while in our neighborhood water remained in the street. In front of City Hall, at the time I was down there, it was chaotic. It was a rough moment. There was a lot going on, a lot of people including the National Guard mobilizing in an effort to assist. We were fine walking out in boots and waders, but our neighborhood still had 5 to 6 inches of water in it. You could see that the water had come in and left very quickly on the waterfront, which says a lot about how future solutions even if they are interim can be incorporated into the existing topography. Hoboken has some advantages that other places don't.

AS: Based on the damage that you saw, and the flooding -- is that more or less than what you expected, or thought was possible?

DG: It was much more than I expected. I did not heed the advice my father had always preached which was prepared for the worst and hope for the best. I laugh at myself, because I moved my car for Hurricane Irene, and for some reason I felt, from what I was listening to, it didn't seem like a few of the factors were going to be as bad. The main factor I was basing it on was that the rain event didn't look like it would be as bad. Interestingly, the rain didn't come. It wasn't the rain; it was the wind that hit us. So it was much more than I expected, much more than we ever really dreamed about. The Jefferson Trust Building at 300 Newark Street, when we built it -- we laughed and said we could have gondolas tied up on the outside of this building, and it would be fine. Now that doesn't seem as funny.

AS: Based on the infrastructure challenges that the city faced, how do you think it handled the aftermath of the storm?

DG: The city of Hoboken is an incredible story. It's what drew me here when we started looking at where we wanted to start a business, when we first came to Hoboken thirty-six, thirty-seven years ago, looking for an opportunity. Hoboken is vibrant and alive, and can sustain a lot because of that. We've seen economic hardship in other regions and areas, and Hoboken, this area has continued to be strong. I think, overall, Hoboken has pulled out from this, at least to this moment in time. We have a lot of challenges ahead, but we're very fortunate. Businesses have come back. A lot of businesses were lost, but those businesses that were lost -- new businesses came in and opened up in the shops that had been flooded. On the corner of my block a store that hadn't even opened yet flooded, and they just cleaned it up, went forward, and opened.

But we've come through pretty well. That doesn't mean that we have prepared ourselves properly for another event like Sandy, at the moment; we haven't gone anywhere other than talk from where we were but the city has survived very well.

AS: What, if anything, can Hoboken do to prepare for the next storm, or the next disaster? For example, you talked about the cost. What sorts of steps

would you take to either prepare for the next storm, to mitigate disaster, or even prevent disaster? What steps would you take, and what is the price tag for that?

DG: I think the steps have to be looked at in a progression. There are long-term possible concepts to follow, and short-term desires we need to pursue, to prevent future damage. Both are costly though the long term ones are much more costly and require much more comprehensive planning between waterfront communities. Short-term concepts include barriers that can be put in place to stop the flooding of the back of Hoboken; these could include floodgates along the southern and northern borders of the city. Long-term solutions include waterfront barriers, people have mentioned urban dunes being incorporated into the landscape of the waterfront and how and where to put this is a point that has been viewed in different ways by different people. These solutions need to be put in place along the entire waterfront not just Hoboken. I know there are hopes of funding from different places. I think the amount of funding we're going to see for these types of things is a lot less than a lot of people would like to dream of and if we wait we may not be prepared for the next disaster. And even with funding, a

common goal, a common concept of what the strategy is needs to be adopted. Those are the challenges ahead -- to decide that strategy, what's feasible, and what's going to get it going as soon as possible. Solutions on paper are no good. We don't know what's going to happen this year. I was pleasantly surprised at how Hoboken has came back, and housing prices, in the areas that were flooded, doesn't seem to have been affected that greatly. We'll all live a little bit smarter next time. Everybody's going to move their cars a little quicker than they did, put up things a little bit higher. I think the short-term solutions that need to be looked at -- we need to look at what can best be done that will save the most amount of property within the community, at the right type of pricing.

Being a developer -- I think developers can play a huge role in assisting with this. Developers along with the vision of the community and the politicians have created what I think is one most wonderful waterfront park systems in the state. That type of community vision needs to be put in place for the infrastructure so that damage from storms like Sandy and Irene will be dealt with. The solutions can be assisted by allowing the type of development that can pay for some of the costs. Hoboken is a tremendous opportunity in that there is a desire by

developers to build and if feasible solutions are put in place they can be realized.

AS: Is there anything that can be done to fix or alter the sewers, to better handle flooding, whether it comes from the average rainstorm or from a major storm?

DG: The flooding we talked about with Irene, is this type of flooding where a different sewer system could help -- Sandy flooding came in over the river and therefore the sewers were not the issue other than their capacity to carry the water away after it came in. You need dikes, barricades; there is a cool-sounding concept of urban dunes along the waterfront. In certain places you can't have dunes, obviously -- across railroad tracks and these locations will need to have operable floodgates. Things have to be built in different ways. But that storm is one storm, and that's a storm that creates tremendous amounts of damage, as we've seen. A Hurricane Irene storm, which also created a lot of damage but flooded differently -- and did not create as much damage as the overflowing of the Hudson River during Sandy, but is much more common and that is the flooding of the sewers, again, just pumping water that's in the sewer and coming down from the

rainstorm, we're pumping the river. And the volume of water is so great -- to fix this system means removing the sewers, or relining the sewers, and making them watertight, making a pressurized system -- all expensive fixes. One of the thoughts -- so that's how to fix the overall system. Put a pressurized sewer system in. It pumps all the time, and it's not gravity-fed. The sewers we have now are in most places gravity-fed a few pumps move it along the way but the pipes are basically porous and when submerged in water allow the water to come in. You don't need a pump when the system is flooded as the quantities are too great.

Another system I could envision is to create retention basins in different places in the community. Take Shoprite as an example -- a building and a big parking lot, in an area that has a lot of flooding. If the right-size retention basin could be put into these areas, and these retention basins in themselves become their own, enclosed system you wouldn’t need to repair the entire system -- now you need a piping system, to take you from the top of where the sewer line which is the catch basin receptor, connected by a separate piping system, and feeding that retention basin from the place where the catch basin is overflowing. So now we're just trying to accomplish capturing the water in the street. We're not trying to do away with the water

that is underground. Then this retention basin, now, can have a pump that, if you wanted to, you could have a pump that could go above flood plain; or, depending on the size of the storm, you could just keep the water in there, and then pump it back into the sewer system, once the sewers started flowing again. If it's a very bad flood, you might want to start pumping out these retention basins directly into the river, over a wall or a dam.

That's really what happens now. When Hoboken has a rainstorm, and we have, on Eleventh Street, by Maxwell House, one of the stations -- these are filtration systems. When the system is overloaded, on a regular storm, an Irene storm, and it has nowhere to go, the water gets filtered through some screens, and then out through a pipe, into the Hudson River. New York does this a lot, still; Jersey City is still involved in this, the same type of system issues, because our sewers are all combined systems. The water, and the storm water -- the storm water and the sewer water is mixed together within the system.

So that's a concept that I think could help, and I think that is a concept that is helps in our normal storm. I think Sandy is the type of storm that could absolutely happen again. We all hope it won't happen too soon. But, certainly, the streets will flood like they did

during Irene if even if not as bad almost on an annual basis. The streets have flooded since Sandy already. And definitely for those smaller storms, there are solutions.

AS: What advice would you give for new development, to better prepare for flooding? And is there anything that existing buildings can do to mitigate the effects of flooding?

DG: Each building is its own entity. Every building has to be looked at in itself, and what that building can do for flooding. New buildings will build their living spaces higher up is one solution. I was involved with NJIT in an interesting program that they started after the storm, a sustainability group that's studying this. One of their feelings is that the spaces that we build within that flood plain area have to become spaces we can retreat from. It's like a porch. It's something that -- you can take your furniture in; you can pull in from there; and you should decide to live like that. We're involved right now with a project where everybody wants to pull everything up four-feet off the ground, like the Jefferson Trust Building. If you walk by the Jefferson Trust Building at 300 Newark Street, and it's

four-feet high, and the planters are four-feet high -- I sort of laugh why we didn't put the planters maybe a little bit lower, somewhere else. But ultimately you do have this big grade change between the street and the building floor that is not familiar to our urban landscape. We want to be on-grade. We want to be able to walk by the stores; we don't want to have to climb up and down.

So we need to create -- it would be nice to be able to create spaces still within this flood plain area. Obviously, we don't want to park our cars down there. You can build garages like Maxwell House, what we did at Maxwell House, where the cars are parked below flood level but they're parked inside a bathtub, so to speak. It's a sealed area, and entry to it is above the flood plain. So you can build a garage that's below flood plain that will not have a problem as long as your entry is at the right elevation. With smaller projects, you have more of a difficulty, in garages on small sites, if they're going to be used on-grade. Everybody's going to have to know that with certain types of storms, you're going to have to move those systems.

I think that the materials that we use within these areas -- call them the areas we need to retreat from; the areas of possible flooding -- need to be

different. I mentioned in my own house the dry wall, the sheet rock, the insulation, the wood studs, and the masonry walls that were soaked for days with water. I've given a few presentations about the different projects, and the different places, and what we've done over the years. You look at least my house, and the mayor's house, too -- which is a building that we built (I proudly say she's my neighbor and I know she lost her car too). Her elevator suffered damage, too. We're all in this together. I walk around the neighborhood. Most of us have gotten things pretty much back. There is still a carpet here and there that is missing. But really only recently. I'd say up to about a month ago I still saw quite a bit of open walls. A lot of condominiums had issues with funding for this, because most insurance did not cover the modern buildings, like ours are, with the electrical in our living spaces. It's all above the flood, fortunately.

We're involved with a material called autoclaved aerated concrete, and this is a masonry block. This block won't let water soak through it, like a conventional block will. If the walls have been made out of that -- it has thermal qualities. I could have built the whole wall out of that, and all I would have had to do was clean my wall. I could have washed it off with water. No

damaged insulation and no sheet rock destroyed. I would absolutely build in these areas out of different materials in the future. I think the infrastructure, the big infrastructure issues, that we talked about so much earlier, are fascinating opportunities, be it dunes -- I've seen "plans" where people say we should fill in different parts of the river to different heights again, really creating these dunes, creating some protection. Big planning concepts that need to be moved on. We need steps to get there, but in the interim, what are we going to do when we're building, and what types of materials are we going to build? Are we still going to be sheetrocking down in that flood level? Because if we are, then the next storm is going to come, and most of us -- we put back sheetrock. We put back what was there, to the hope that this won't happen for another five-ten years or whatever, until I'm gone from here and somebody else will start worrying about that. At some point, people won't put it back. I think if I had to do it -- if it happened again in another six months or a year from now, I think I might say, "That's it. I'm not going to do it again. This is going to become worse and worse I will replace it in a better way."

So new construction has an opportunity. It also comes to codes, because we have to understand that

FEMA doesn't want us building down there. We have to classify, in the urban areas, a new ability to have street access facilities, and be like an old-style marketplace or something. Again, that you could retreat from; that you can easily move the things that are in that area. Because one thing with Sandy is, you started off with questions with how many weeks. We knew about it. We had plenty of warning of what to do. Goldman Sachs, around their building in Jersey City -- they put six feet of sand all the way around the building, sandbags around the building. They didn't have a drop of water. All around them, there was flooding. If you ask what can people do -- those are extreme solutions. They started that early. They saw it coming, and they said, "We can't have this first floor flood. Buildings in that area that did flood -- 30 Montgomery -- were down for months and months. The electric systems, the telephone systems, everything needed to be rebuilt.

So those are opportunities. I think elevating, obviously, the buildings, which is all required, but we want to still be able to do things within that area, and when we build in that area we use materials that are not going to deteriorate if they get wet.

AS: How did you pass the time during the storm and the aftermath?

DG: During the storm and after was like camping out. The first nights we cooked outside on the grill and ate as much of the food that was slowly warming up in the fridge and freezer. Our neighbors and housemates joined us and we all kept each other's spirits up. Taking care of the home was the primary focus during the day. Cleaning up. Mucking out, ripping out, starting the work of trying to put things back to normal, and figuring out what needed to be done, what we wanted to do as quick as possible and what could wait. We spent time charging batteries and the battery charger. I had a large battery charger. We didn't have electricity, my wife would go to friends who still had power in town, and they invited us to plug in so we would do this for a few hours to charge things. So we were doing things like that. But most of the time was spent cleaning out the mess. As I mentioned, we had storage. Tons of things were put out onto the street. Interestingly, the time -- it's like a snowstorm in Hoboken. It's the only time you see your neighbors. Everybody was out there. Everybody was pitching in. We were

all getting rid of cars, and getting things pulled out for years of storage, and trying to move to the next step.

AS: What did the city of Hoboken learn about itself?

DG: I think the city learned that it's vulnerable, in a way that nobody expected it to be. And the vulnerability is something that is a very extensive, complicated issue. That makes the vulnerability seem greater. As I mentioned, Hoboken rebounded, and Hoboken is an amazing city and community, a great location, which, ultimately, is the benefit, and why we are what we are. It's why Manhattan is what it is. The Hudson River is what makes us and hurts us in this issue, and even in the Irene issues, because even though the Hudson River didn't overflow in Hurricane Irene, the aquifer is affected. When we tied buildings to sewer lines, we used to always look for the tide charts, because you never want to tap the sewer at high tide. Sewers would collapse much quicker because they were full and the tap couldn’t be made without flooding the excavation. I was at different jobs where the street just kept caving in and caving in because the tides were so high at certain times of the year.

So Hoboken has come through, even though it has this new vulnerability. A lot of what I hope Hoboken has learned is still out there to see if as a city we have learned, from the experience.

AS: Do you feel that the city has recovered? Was there a moment that made you think, "Hoboken is back?"

DG: Hoboken's first sign that it was coming back was when a few weeks after the storm the High School football team who had their locker room and field flooded hadn't been able to practice, went to the state championship game in Giant Stadium and won. That was a sign from these Hoboken students whose lives had been affected, some losing their homes, that the City and its inhabitants were stronger than the storm. When I see the shops on First Street coming back, and people moving in -- the building next door to us, an old building, that had inhabitants on the ground floor of the building -- those guys, nice guys -- they quickly left. They weren't there when the storm occurred; they came back maybe two weeks later, threw all their stuff onto the street, and left town, sort of, "I'll never come back to this place again." They threw all their shoes out, flat-screen TVs, and left.

These buildings now are re-occupied --cleaned out, re-occupied. People are living there. It's a testament that Hoboken is back. Surprisingly, it hardly missed a beat, in the end. The story is ongoing, as we all know. Every flood, every storm, brings new challenges with it. But Hoboken has survived.

AS: Is there anything that you would like to discuss that I haven't asked about?

DG: Just one second.

Track #2

DG: We've touched on this, but I guess I'd like to underscore the importance of really creating a long-range infrastructure plan, which is tied to a long-term development plan. We think too often in terms of four or five years or less, when we think of growth and development. We need to think in fifty-year terms, when we think of what we expect to be the future. There was a wonderful exhibit here at the museum about the tunnels being built, the vision of the creators of these tunnels recognized not only a current need but what would serve the people for decades to come. I marvel at infrastructure

projects, even the "spectra" pipeline coming into Manhattan right now, which is feeding Manhattan gas that needs to occur to assure that the city can continue to be the economic engine it is. We need to think in the long term when we think of solutions, as much as we need to think of those solutions that can be implemented in the short-term. Long-term solutions should be solutions that we want to leave to the next generations, as the great infrastructure that we've inherited has paved the way for prosperity in our lives.

To sum it up a long-term vision needs to be looked for, accepted, and implemented as soon as possible. This should be done with a grand vision of what the future will be. The sooner we can get going the more we will be able to appreciate the results and the more we will be protected from storms like Hurricane Sandy and Irene.

HOBOKEN
HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, Carmelo C. Garcia, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*. I understand that I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on October 29, 2012.

2. The interview will be audiotaped. In the interview I may be identified by name, subject to my consent. I may also be identified by name in any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview, subject to my consent.

3. I understand that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that a photograph of me may be taken or borrowed for duplication, and that if I withdraw from the project, the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to Hoboken Historical Museum, and that the information in the interview can be used by Hoboken Historical Museum in any manner it will determine, including, but not limited to, use by researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy will be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript.

6. I understand that at the conclusion of this particular study, the tape(s), photograph, and one copy of the transcript will be ~~kept~~ in the collections department of the Hoboken Historical Museum.

Interviewee Name: Carmelo C. Garcia

Interviewee Signature [signature]

Address 400 Harrison St

Telephone number: 201-758-0370

Date: 5/3/2013

Archives 2013.039.0009

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: CARMELO GARCIA

INTERVIEWER: ALAN SKONTRA

LOCATION: 400 HARRISON STREET, HOBOKEN, NJ

DATE: 3 SEPTEMBER 2013

Track #1

AS: Okay. First question. What is your connection to Hoboken? How long have you lived in the city? Where do you live? Who do you live with? And what is your profession?

CG: My connection to Hoboken is that I'm a product of the Hoboken Housing Authority community. I serve as the executive director of the Hoboken Housing Authority. I live in Hoboken. I'm born and raised in Hoboken. I reside at 711 Bloomfield Street, on Seventh and Bloom. I reside with my family -- my wife and three beautiful children, and two beautiful dogs. Do you want to know their names? Which are Leah, Jill and "Lenise," [phonetic] and my two dogs are

Hudson and Willow. So my connection to Hoboken is that I have served this city with distinction, in the capacity of a city official, as the director of Health and Human Services, from 2001 through 2007, and later came on board to the Hoboken Housing Authority, in August of 2007. I actually was here during the crisis and tragic situation that we had on September 11th, serving as director of Health and Human Services. I was fortunate to help many people through the health department and human services at the time, and currently we are talking about two disasters that we experienced, which were Irene and Sandy -- but more so Sandy.

So does that answer all those questions?

AS: Yes.

CG: Good.

AS: Give us a background on the Housing Authority. Approximately, how many people live in the Authority? Where, approximately, are the Authority buildings? What's the general condition of the buildings, in terms of how many floors? Details like that. And, approximately how much personnel do you oversee?

CG: Okay. Was that enough on the first question? Okay. I didn't know how much you wanted me to go into detail. Okay.

With respect to that question: The Hoboken Housing Authority is a community that has six developments scattered throughout the city of Hoboken. It's 1,353 units. The buildings are designed in X-shaped style. You have three developments that are designed for senior-citizen and disabled persons. One is in Fox Hill Gardens, which is 311 Thirteenth Street. There are 200 units in that building, ten stories high. The other is 220 Adams, which has 125 units. Then you have 221 Jackson, which is 125 units. These three sites are located, geographically, in the west part of the city. The west end; what we consider the southwest end of the city is 221 Jackson. Two-twenty Adams is more southwest but midtown. Then you have Fox Hill, which is uptown. Then you have Christopher Columbus Gardens, which are two ten-story buildings, seven-story buildings, that are ninety-seven units, in the middle of the city, which is on Eighth Street and Ninth Street, between Jefferson and Adams -- 460 Eighth Street and 455 Ninth Street.

Those are the younger buildings. They're brick and mortar, predominately. All the mechanicals are in

the basement of the buildings. Then you have the most effective buildings, which are the aged buildings that have the obsolescence, which are the ones in the west end of town, which are considered to be Andrew Jackson Gardens and Harrison Gardens. Both of these developments comprise of 806 units in total. The Harrison Gardens development has ten stories. It is, again, another X-shape design in its construction -- brick and mortar -- and these are the first buildings that were built in the city of Hoboken for public housing, during World War II, post-World War II, in 1948 and 1949. The Housing Authority has, in total, fifty-two buildings, Pretty much ninety-five percent of the buildings were submerged during Sandy, as far as its mechanicals, because when they designed these buildings and constructed them, all the mechanicals were on the ground floor -- which, as we know, the new FEMA flood-plain guidelines are thirteen feet. These buildings were six feet, back then, before the new guidelines. So, unfortunately, it had a history in which flooding has affected the southwest corridor of the city. The quadrant here, or this area, indeed, when the water travels from the northeast sector of the community, down to the southwest, it always hits the lowest point, which is where we sit, currently, today. This administration building -- 400 Harrison -- is in the heart

of that lowest point. During Sandy, the water took six days to recede from this area. One of the developments -- Harrison Gardens -- was held hostage because of the fact that the water was at least five- to six-feet high. The basements were filled with flood waters of ten to twelve feet high.

So that, in architect form, is your structure of these buildings, as I just described them.

AS: Describe the typical Housing Authority resident.

CG: Before I go to that, Alan, let me just share another point of the conditions. You mentioned the conditions. We had conducted, in 2009 to 2010, a physical-need assessment, which the professionals, architects and engineers, were able to discern that these buildings in this part of town -- the west end, meaning Harrison Gardens and Andrew Jackson Gardens -- definitely should be considering an overall, simply because of the age of the buildings and the design. They're not ADA complaint. They don't have enough light and air ventilation. So we have been confronted with the challenge that after Irene, and then, of course, all the flooding in the past, that these

buildings continuously, in the basements, as far as the mechanicals, continue to receive water that creates corrosion, especially with the salt water, post-Sandy; and, also, it leads to rust and deterioration to the systems.

So when we're talking about the condition of the buildings -- there was a period when these buildings did not receive the proper treatment and attention that they required, from a preventive maintenance standpoint and maintenance management standpoint, when it boils down to a property management plan. So that leads me to share with you that these conditions are not conducive to sustain continuous disasters or continuous hurricanes. That's why we have a Vision 20/20, which is a transformation and sustainability plan that we're looking to pursue, to build our first anti- or Sandy-proof building, as I call it, so we can start to reconfigure the housing stock in this area, with a newer housing modernized, that is Sandy-proof, allows for it to be built above the thirteen-foot flood-plain guidelines, and would create an environment and neighborhood that has all the accoutrements that a community of this magnitude should have.

So when you ask me about the typical resident, I would say that we have blue-collar, working-poor, as well as residents who are elderly-disabled. The

typical resident is a family of pretty much mom, children. You have senior citizens and disabled persons, then you have individuals who are looking to have that self-sufficiency, which is the ultimate goal of the Housing Authority -- to have everybody provided with the self-sufficiency road map that would allow them to graduate, and make better for their family as well as, with our cooperation, improve their quality of life; to transform the culture; to break the cycle of poverty, as well as to give them hope and a better way to live.

So that is one of the goals that we've always pursued, because the typical family or resident of the Authority is a person who loves the city like I do; who understands the need for civic responsibility; who likes to get involved in the civics of this community; and who wants to see progress for the people of this community, who, for decades, were given negligent treatment, per se, in the management of these buildings, and in the care. It goes along the lines with our mantra that our people don't care how much you know, unless they know how much you care.

So that is the typical person or family within the Housing Authority. It's a hard-working person or family. It is those who are underprivileged; those who have special needs; those who are the most needy, I would say,

in this community. That's who we serve, and that's who we continue to try to give a better quality of life.

AS: When did you first hear the words "Hurricane Sandy."

CG: Interestingly so, Hurricane Sandy hit that Monday, and it's a memorable, vivid event that still plays in my mind. We heard about it the week before that. We were listening intently as to what could be happening, as the development of Sandy was coming to fruition, into it being eventually Super Storm Sandy.

AS: What did you expect the storm to be like?

CG: We heard everything with respect to the possible surge from the Hudson River. We heard everything. That it might just be passing us by. It was something where we prepared the week before. We had that weekend, in preparation for that Monday, on Saturday an emergency resident meeting to educate residents to basically help them prepare and plan for the worst. So we were praying for the best but preparing and planning for the worst, and that

Saturday, before we met with the residents, we said, "Here's what our intent is. Here's what our emergency evacuation plan is. Here's what our emergency recovery plan is." But, as we know with our residents in the Housing Authority, it is difficult for them to just get up and go, because they do not like to leave their apartments. They do not like to leave their homes. They basically are troubled in wanting to leave their homes, because of this sense of pride in ownership that they have in their apartments -- and they don't have anywhere to go. While we deploy an emergency evacuation plan, and an emergency disaster plan, we basically try our best to get them out of their apartments, if we know we're going to have the kind of waters and the floods that we had, but we know from Irene that they don't want to leave. Therefore, we have to shelter them in their units, and do our very best as an administration, as a management organization, to shelter them in their units, and provide a safe environment, to the best of our abilities, relying on the Office of Emergency Management. We're not relying on our counterparts; we're relying on a team effort to get that goal accomplishments. Therefore, that is how we were preparing for Sandy.

What I expected that night -- at about 9:00 that night we thought we had survived the worst. It was

about 10:00, and we were here, with all of our -- what we did was, we have all these pumps, and we basically put hoses to the pumps so we could pump the water out into -- over the light rail into the Jersey City area, which is an uphill kind of setup, so the water can't traverse back into the Authority. So we knew, in preparation, that we had to remove our caps, prepare with respect to putting hoses to all of our portable sump pumps and portable pumps, and we basically planned -- we fastened every item in the buildings, because we knew the winds were going to be about eighty, ninety miles per hour. We had tested all of our generators. We had run down the check list, which is our preventive emergency disaster plan check list. We went and checked all the doors; made sure they were all fastened. There were no windows that were loose, or there was nothing that was open. Elevator rooms, we checked all the roofs, we basically went to all the basements. We made sure that we made a way, so the water could probably be pumped out. The sewers -- we made sure that the sewers had been emptied out and had been flushed through, so that would not create a backup in the buildings, because that's the tendency that happens; to get backups that go into the first-floor apartments of the tenants. So you have to take the caps off of the plumbing system, and you have to ensure that your

sump pumps are working -- which we tested. Our generators, sump pumps, the emergency lighting, the life safety equipment. We made sure all our fire-lungs were in order. Everything, in fact, was prepared for that event.

By that night, at 10:00, we were all here, my team and I, and we thought we survived. We had maybe about a foot of water, and we thought we survived. Then, lo and behold, as I was running out, rushing out to Fox Hill -- because I got a call that our generator -- that our lighting went down because of the transformer that blew up in the northwest corridor of the city, which feeds power to the Fox Hill buildings, at the 311 Thirteenth Street building -- the generator, with the heavy winds at eighty, ninety miles per hour, was now, into the late hour of the day, was blowing drastically. That generator sits on the rooftop of the Fox Hill building. When we left, we thought, "Okay. We had survived the worst." Lo and behold, one of my employees sends me a video of the water raging down, like the rapid river, just coming down forcefully, that night, onto the Housing the Authority, in the Harrison Gardens and Andrew Jackson Gardens area. It was unbelievable. At this time, I am now at Fox Hill, up in the northeast corridor of the city, northwest corridor of the city, and then is when

we realized, "Holy cow! We're in for a tumultuous and tormenting event."

What happened was -- we were dealing with the emergency at Fox Hill. Myself and my electrician went up on the rooftop to see why the generator -- it had turned on, and then it blew. What happened was, when the transformer at PSE&G blew, it blew a power surge through our generator and transfer switch, and lo and behold, what happened was --

Track #2

So what happened then was the following. Once we heard that this rapid river of water was flowing into the Housing Authority community, we had already done our best to prepare and embrace ourselves for what would happen here in the west end of town, in Jackson and Harrison Gardens. In the meantime, I was busy at Fox Hill Gardens, where we worked until about 3:00 in the morning to get that building back on. Unfortunately, what transpired was that while we were on the roof, my electrician and I, he went to check the generator and manually set it, and the winds were at about ninety miles per hour. What happens is, the generator sits outside of the secured area. So you've got to go outside the gates -- which is really not secure,

because it has no gate around the edge of the building. So here we are, holding onto each other, because the wind is blowing so heavily, and it feels like you're being smacked. And we're on the rooftop, so it's even stronger on the rooftop, because of the height, and here we are holding onto each other, where my electrician is trying to reset that generator. Lo and behold, the wind was so strong -- the panel went flying. It busted our water pump in the actual generator. I thought at that moment -- I had to make a conscious decision, because of the safety of the situation. I pulled him away, we pulled out, and let me tell you -- and he's about a "buck-ten" -- him and I holding each other together -- as far in weight, he's about 110 pounds, him and I holding each other, on that rooftop! It was instinctive that we went to act on the situation, before the FD could come, or anybody else. Because, remember, at this time, they're dealing with the fire up at the transformer station, that PSE&G just found out blew.

So now the water is racing down the way. We've already braced ourselves for the worst down here. I'm up there, trying to get this building back on line, with its emergency lighting. We're trying everything, going through floor-by-floor. My staff immediately, my team converged into going floor by floor, door to door. We went

to the manager's office to take the list out, of the people that we knew had life-safety apparatuses, that require oxygen tanks or whatever it was. We began to identify those individuals. Then the EMT came, and the Fire Department came. We had already, previously, set up, in partnership with OEM, the annex shelter at Wallace School. Fortunately, we were able to convince certain elderly and disabled individuals, residents, who we basically knew should have been outside the building, in the satellite shelter which was next door, at Wallace School, which is what we did. After that, fortunately, we began to pull out all our flashlights. We began to work around the clock, to try to get that building restored, and made sure all the residents were not alarmed, and that the anxiety and the crisis did not put any additional stress, that would lead them to get sick, or lead them to get, god forbid, in a worse condition.

So we stayed in that building. Because at this point, now, you couldn't travel back to the Housing Authority buildings in the west end of town. You could not travel, because the water was flooding and immediately was just building, building, building, where I had one of my guys -- the superintendent of maintenance -- who slept in the Fox Hill community room. I stayed there until about

4:00 in the morning, then had to come back after making an assessment. I knew I had to come back as early as 6:30. So we were really around-the-clock on two-hour and three-hour minimal sleep. Bear in mind that, at the same time, Alan, in my own home, I had gotten water in my ground-floor apartment. I had no lights. So my whole family -- that's why I had to go back; to check on my own family, to make sure they were fine without the electricity. But we had already gone through the appropriate checklist, to make sure we had all the tools we needed to survive, in the event that this thing was going to be carried out for a long period of time. Which is what we did.

Then the next morning, I had to literally walk from Fox Hill -- 311 Thirteenth Street -- we could not use our vehicles to travel down into Christopher Columbus Gardens, which is on Eighth and Ninth, because the water was at least four feet high. We had to walk -- myself, my superintendent of maintenance, and my quality-control officer -- we all walked. We had our fisherman's suit on. It was pretty much one of those scenes where we have our flood suits, we're prepared. We walked in the water (I have pictures), where I even found an orange fish that had come in from the river, and other things. When we walked to Christopher Columbus Gardens, it was one of the scariest

scenes, because at Fox Hill the water did not come up onto the building. It did not go into the building. It remained at street level. But it did wash up all the debris onto our ramp, basically, and you could see clearly like a tornado had hit, or like a hurricane had hit, where you had debris all over the place. All the garbage from outside had come in. You had vehicles that were floating. As we walked down into Christopher Columbus Gardens, it was like a sea of green, and the sea of green was the anti-freeze. And we had oil that had been discharged from the compactor rooms. We had alarms going off, haywire, because the controllers in the basement were now submerged. It required immediate, immediate deployment and ingenuity of necessity, to basically invent different ways to get the buildings up to par with at least a safety standpoint of restoring the generators, to provide the emergency lighting; making sure that immediately -- because a lot of these generators were affected by not just the water but the salt that came in the aftermath of it. But lo and behold -- and then you had some rodents chewing away at the wires, because now, guess what -- they were disturbed in their environment, right? So they're going to go and travel, and you're going to get the type of rats and stuff that are going to come out, and

they're going to be chewing away at these wires, in these areas that are exposed to them.

So we were combating a lot of adversity and a lot of challenges were presented to us. But ultimately, I must say, we were prepared with a plan and we took action. We were on the ground, boots on the ground, right at the minute, at the second, of every hour that we needed to be there, to provide the same environment for our residents. We immediately walked down from Christopher Columbus Gardens after I did the assessment of those two buildings, and that was, like I said, a sea of anti-freeze. It was basically a sea of green. I have pictures to demonstrate that -- which, at that point, you had a mixture of Class 3 water. You had, basically, black oil; gasoline; anti-freeze; you name it, it was in that water. It was a situation where you acted on instinct. You were thinking about your people. We were thinking about our residents. That was a selfless act by all of my guys, where the team was prepared. Because beforehand we had huddled, we had given them the action plan, and we had let them know, "This is what we intend to do at each development," to insure that the residents would be safe.

So lo and behold, what happened, Alan -- at that juncture we went from Christopher Columbus Gardens,

after that building, after assessing it, doing whatever repairs or tweaks we needed to make to the generator -- to make sure, we went floor by floor, to make sure everybody was safe and make sure everybody had resources available to them. Again, we were sheltering the residents in their buildings. Then we went down to Andrew Jackson Gardens and Harrison Gardens, where we had to walk through the Eighth Street side, and come in through the light rail area, which is a little bit more elevated. So we walked through the Eighth Street light rail area to get into the housing, on foot. All along, we were walking on foot, because we could not travel into these areas by vehicle.

When I got into this area, we had already set up -- pretty much we had a food pantry; we had ice, because we knew from Irene that residents with diabetes would need ice. Now that the power was gone, and residents were nervous, and there was a lot of anxiety. The generators were working -- thank god we had already tested them. Some generators tripped because of the salt water, because when the water hit it splashed against, like a wave -- it hit against the walls of the building, and splashed onto the generators. So the water got into some of the generators. Of course, the controllers -- all of our controllers, because of the design of these buildings --

you don't have height in the ceiling, to raise everything up in the appropriate way that it should be -- although now we've mitigated, in certain mechanical parts that we felt we can, or certain controllers that we felt we can -- but you don't have enough ceiling height, because of the ways the buildings are constructed.

So what happened was a lot of the controllers got damaged, got wet, and the salt was eating away at it. But at this juncture, from that moment, I had to immediately establish the command center over in 221 Jackson. Everyone was moved out to 221 Jackson. We had a plan where people would come in if they could get into the city. Those who were residents of ours -- because we have an emergency resident personnel, which is a team of superintendents who are trained in the area of emergency preparedness and emergency disaster relief, as well as these kinds of disaster crisis situations -- so it's an in-house, kind of Office of Emergency Management CERT team. It's like our in-house guys, who are trained in these areas.

So we began to immediately -- the first thing you had to do was assess the situation. The second thing is, take action and repair what you could. The third thing is -- which we were fortunate -- I was able to have

my disaster recovery company always on hand, to address and help me with the pumping out of the water.

Track #3

CG: So, Alan, to continue -- if I can -- what happened at this juncture -- now, at this point, Alan, understand that during the nighttime, when, in fact, the next day, when we were here on site and the assessment was made, I had already -- my partners -- you have strategic partners. Any property-management company, particularly the Housing Authority, should have a strategic partner, which is a disaster recovery company. So we had a couple of companies on standby who (a) would provide us generators, if, in fact, we needed a backup generator. What I did was, I was proactive and innovative in getting what we call light towers, because we did not have any light in this area. But before we get to that point, we had to have rapid response and [unclear] basically, pump the water out. So they had these water buffalo rigs, and they're designed with a hose, a suction and a hose, that basically pumps the water out, like three thousand gallons per minute. It was just incredible, watching these massive machines at work. But the biggest problem we had was that the water -- unfortunately, because the floodgates were closed in the

sewer system, would come back out. So the only water that we were successful in pumping out was over the hill into Jersey City, but the other water that would go into the sump pumps, right? Would be ejected, would be circulated again, because the floodgates were closed.

So what happens is, at that point you're combating against forces of Mother Nature, and you're combating against existing, pre-existing plumbing systems and conditions that really would not be conducive to manage that type of situation, and to really expediently get the water out. So it took six days for the water to recede from our area. As a matter of fact, there was a situation where the water was holding that development hostage, and when the electricity went out we had to get a back-hoe. The Fire Department couldn't even get two rigs into this area, and we had to get a back-hoe to basically remove a tenant from the third-floor apartment, who was suffering from a medical condition. It was things like that, that people did not hear about; situations where the electricity was down for fifteen to sixteen days, and the hot water and heat were unavailable. This is now October-November. It was unavailable for twenty days, twenty-one days. Remarkably, the goal immediately was to shelter the residents. To make sure that each building was safe; that each aspect of what

we did was relative to the safety and the priority being the residents. Any needs that they had, such as we had a list of all those identified individuals. Before we even got to that point -- before I forget -- when it was raining harshly throughout the day, on that particular Monday, we were knocking on all the doors and giving notices out to the residents, saying that if they could evacuate, that would be something we would recommend that they do. Lo and behold, once Sandy hit we knew immediately that the deployment of our plan was to shelter the residents; was to maintain the buildings safe; to ensure that, from a life-safety perspective, all equipment would be operational; and all top of that, battle the remnants of what we saw happen. When we walked into this area of town, we had to climb -- you had to climb, literally -- using railing to climb into this area, to get into the Housing Authority area of Andrew Jackson Gardens. When I stood on the islands, the water was literally to my knees, on the island, which is already four feet above ground. This is above the street level. We had basements where you could have practically been swimming in, because the water was ten- to twelve-feet high; the markings are there. So you couldn't even get into the basement, to put anything on, or check the heaters, or hot water heaters, because you couldn't, because of the safety

issue. If there is, god forbid, a cable down. We had cables that were down. We had wind that blew the cables off the buildings, and we didn't know -- we had to make sure that they were -- if we had live wire or not, if it was a telecommunication cable -- again, it was a scary situation because residents didn't know how to react to certain aspects of what now they were living with, in this crisis. What we realized in the moment was, as long as my team could reassure and reaffirm the residents that we, as the professionals, as the specialists in this area of emergency preparedness, emergency disaster and recovery, that they knew we were on the ground -- boots on the ground -- and that they saw us in action, leading by example, that they would have their fears allayed.

And we did that. We accomplished that. Because it was like an army of my team, in Navy Seal fashion, that was out there -- you know what? Doing the unthinkable; really sacrificing themselves. We sacrificed *ourselves*. And my team -- they were *courageous*. It was in the line of Braveheart, right? Men don't follow titles, they follow courage. So they saw me in full-blown action where, instinctively, we were acting on things, and ingenuity, and necessity, and inventing, and basically doing [Unclear] stuff that we felt -- we had to jimmy-rig

stuff in order to get power from the elevators. Then you had the residents who were trying to get power from the elevators -- remember, there was no connectivity. No one communicated to the residents. There was no communication system from the Office of Emergency Management, or those who are responsible for communicating to our residents. So our residents felt -- After the sixth day, Alan, I went into City Hall, and I'll never forget -- I went in there while all these press, post-conferences are going on, and press conferences and what have you, and I said to the mayor, I said, "You know, unless we want another Katrina on our hands, we need the National Guard in here. We need to make sure that, in fact, we get the resources we need, such as the [unclear], such as the water, such as whatever is available to my families -- we need to get that.

I immediately contacted the Salvation Army. We contacted the American Red Cross. We had our partners out there who were willing to give us a hand, such as Hoboken Grace, such as all the other not-for-profit organizations, like Hopes, and all the other ones that were very instrumental. Charrito’s restaurant and others were willing to make the sacrifice and provide food. In Jesus' Name you had -- all these organizations that we reached out to knew that we were vulnerable and understood our need. We

had doctors and nurses come out of the woodwork who were willing to volunteer their time, so we could check the seniors in those buildings. Because remember, again, the Housing Authority community went fifteen to sixteen days without electricity, twenty to twenty-two days without heat and hot water. When I tell you the devastation we received was immeasurable to anything I had ever seen -- it was surreal as to the devastation, in what we were confronted with, in a real crisis management situation.

But were optimistic, we were prepared, we were fortunate to lead by example, and that motivated more residents to help out. That's what led more residents, from the resident advisory board, to the tenants' association, to volunteers out of the woodwork, in the community of the fourth ward. They were coming out with the willingness to help and donate. It was just amazing. Our community rooms that were flooded -- we had, again, it took six days for the water to recede. Upon the water receding, we immediately went into full-blown action of disaster recovery mode, which is your restoration process, which is you bring in these heavy, huge fans to dry out the area. You're basically disinfecting -- because remember, it was Class 3 water: You had gasoline, you had raw sewage, you had black oil, you had anti-freeze. You had a full-blown

Class 3, which is the worst classified water in its contamination.

What happened was, we had to, again, lead by example and be resourceful, in that we were providing snacks. We were out there giving out care kits, medical kits. We were out there getting the communications out, for the residents to come down to the command center -- 221 Jackson -- to receive your kit if you didn't get one. And bear in mind, we went without any lighting -- any lighting -- so this area was pitch black. And we had situations where, guess what? You had some predators that were coming in from other parts outside the city. They were preying on my residents, and we had situations where we had to call in the State Police -- because the Hoboken Police Department, to their credit, while they were trying to help, they were, at this point, exhausted in all areas, and they were extended out. We needed more resources. And what we did was, Alan, we basically reached out. We got the State Police involved, because we had a situation where some residents were being preyed on. There were some mugging that took place. There was almost a near riot. Let me tell you what happened. The residents now are being frustrated. They're frustrated. They feel that no one is there from the other parts outside of Housing Authority management, and

outside of the leaders that were on the ground; that no one else was there to help them. So the frustration grew, the anxiety grew, and it was like those Maslow's needs, of the social-psychological-physiological hierarchy, right? They need the basic food, shelter. That's what was going on.

So the families and the residents started to act out, in the sense that they were frustrated. They were afraid. Things were happening that they wanted to hear, "Well, when will it be over?" And all we can do, Alan, is to continue to shelter them, and continue to provide them the information that we had access to, based on what we knew in our studies, in our research, in our preparation could help the families out. And, there was one night, Alan, unbelievable -- I'm driving in a pickup truck, checking up. This is now about Saturday. From Monday now until Friday or Saturday -- it was actually Friday -- I'm there, and you have a Sergeant Dristi, who's out there -- because the residents are becoming, now, anxious. Now they're getting uptight. They want to know what other help is going to come. What's going on? So what happened was -- I'll never forget -- the young people started to become restless, and with the restlessness came such agitation, and with the agitation, some of the folks were almost going to have a riot. To the point where we had to intervene

there, where there was one sergeant, and the sergeant is trying to manage the situation in the developments of Andrew Jackson Gardens, and the residents don't want to hear it. The young people don't want to hear it. They feel, again, that they have been neglected.

What happens is, I jump out of the pickup truck -- I'll never forget it -- and I see two or three of the leaders that I knew. I see Sergeant Dristi, I talked to Sgt. Dristi, "Go speak to the guys. Come on guys. The whole city's been affected. It's just the Housing Authority. I show them pictures of my phone; of what I've experienced; of what I've endured in the travels from Fox Hill, being on that rooftop, in a 90-miles-per-hour wind, sacrificing my life and my employees to help the residents; then walking through CCG, and seeing this sea of anti-freeze, and oil, and gasoline, and looking at that our compactors were shot; the mechanicals were shot; the controllers were shot; and you're almost saying, "Oh, my god, how am I going to, like Superman, get this back in order."

And, lo and behold, the optimism, the hope that we gave the residents, the faith and the love that we gave them, was returned by them listening to our experience and our journey. The journey led them to see that we were all in this together. Therefore, at that moment, Sgt.

Dristi" he calls for backup, and the young people were restless, and this could have been an ugly situation, where they could have rioted. And guess what: We prevented it. We were fortunate. Because we had boots on the ground, we were fortunate to prevent that. That's where the leading-by-example, and the selflessness of sacrificing yourself and my employees -- my team, my team who was amazing, and was just extremely, extremely caring, and just compassionate, and passionate about what they were doing. That's what continued to fuel our drive, and what really got us to a point of being able to heal the community in that time of need.

And lo and behold, Alan, throughout all this, I went twenty-two days on two and three hours sleep, to the point where I had been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. I guess that part we can leave out. But the bottom line was that, in all this, the stress that was compounded by the two- and three-hours' sleep -- because it was around-the-clock for me and my guys, my team. It was really around-the-clock, where we knew that the residents, by seeing us in action -- not just by communication but by way of doing things that were showing them that we were going to make their life a little bit easier; where we distributed 5,000 care kits; 5,000 meal and medical kits.

We gave blankets -- 5,000 blankets. We have nearly 3,000-plus families, and we understood the necessity of making them feel safe, and reminding them that they had the basic needs. As long as they had the basic needs, we would get through what we had to get through. There were nights where it was cold, and if we did not give them these blankets, doubled up and tripled up, from the Salvation Army and from the American Red Cross -- those units were cold. There was no heat. You had situations with the age of these buildings, that you do have pockets of air, probably, transferring into the unit by way of the windows or the brick. So these are the kinds of situations that we challenged ourselves with, and we made it the best possible solution to the residents, that kept them feeling like they were safe.

Now here's the one story that maybe you don't know. During that period, again, it was escalating. The restlessness was escalating. The predators' preying on our residents was escalating; people taking advantage of what was going on, in that form. Here's what happened, Alan. Lo and behold, the night that the Lieutenant General from the Army Corps of Engineers, with his National Guardsmen, and with the mayor, came off the shuttle to visit us, finally, after -- it was about five days later,

four or five days later. Five days later -- when they're coming off the shuttle to walk and meet me -- they're meeting me now on 320 Jackson, right there on the corner of Third and Jackson. They meet me right in front of the building. Sergeant Williams -- I'll never forget him telling us -- as we were going to walk in to look at the assessment, to look at the damage that had been created, the sergeant saying, "Shots fired! Shots fired!" and everybody running back out. Then, lo and behold, it was found out that it wasn't a shot being fired, it was a noise that came from a vehicle that was trying to be turned on.

So lo and behold, that's how scared people were at the time. But that's what the anxiousness of the moment created -- the restlessness, the anxiousness, and lo and behold, at that time, that was it. After they came, the Army Corps of Engineers -- I had convinced the mayor and the city officials at the time that, based on the wattage load, if we had been provided with 200kw generators, we could power up the buildings. That's what we were able to do. We were able to get some generators from the Army Corps of Engineers. We were able to get some generators from the Army Corps of Engineers, and we used them -- because what we did for our own buildings -- we had to jimmy-rig our generators, and we had to bring out other portable

generators, and the kilowatts within those generators provided, basically, support for the emergency lighting, and for the backup generators that we had. So we had portable generators that we used to jimmy-rig, and to start up the other generators.

So it was interesting, in dealing with the innovativeness and the practicality of getting these pieces of equipment back and restored, after the water had already -- they had a lot of moist -- we had some challenges where we had to turn back on certain panels, we now had some moist within them, because of the water and its remnants -- and what happened, Alan -- you know what? You had sparks. Boom. You possibly could have a fire, or a potential blackout of that particular equipment. We were fortunate that we dried most of the equipment, or all of the equipment, and we had some -- there were some that were deceiving in that they were not dry, then it led to a small spark that we picked up quickly and we were able to defuse.

But we all along made sure that the safety of our residents was the number-one priority, and that the care towards our residents, in sheltering them, was always at the forefront of their expectations. We did that by leading by example. So lo and behold, we were very fortunate to have them prepared; to have an action plan; to

deploy a plan with the utmost execution and near perfection, to make sure that our communities, or our community, would, in fact, be safe. I know that's a lot that I've shared, but I was on a roll there. I just wanted to make sure I got it all out there, as to what really happened. Because these are the stories that are untold; the stories where you had a baby who needed -- who was a diabetic and needed insulin. We were fortunate to have dry ice, because that baby could have gone into shock. Rushing to go get it, in the deep freezer where we had it frozen -- we had situations where some people were vandalizing the elevator rooms, because they wanted power, to have connectivity, to hear what was going on. So you went into a basement and you might see fifteen people connected to that power source, because that's the emergency backup that comes with the generator -- which could create a disaster, or a hazard situation, because of the fact that it could trip the particular generator and create a small explosion. We were dealing with these kinds of situations, where it was really tough. It was challenging and it was adversarial, but God knows he was with us, and I thank God for the strength and resiliency that he gave us, and for the "proactiveness" and command that he gave my team and myself, to do what we had to do, which was the right thing

-- to put ourselves on the line as the front line team. We did that. We put ourselves right in the front lines, to make sure that our residents in these buildings would be restored, and our residents would be safe.

That's where we are today. We are still in the recovery process. We're still waiting for funding from FEMA, to continue to -- we're purchasing new generators. We're replacing some boilers. We invested a lot in boilers being refurbished, and also we had to clean them. There was a lot of cleanup because of the contamination. Because of the contamination, and because of the winds that were so heavy -- we had our network infrastructure destroyed. We had antennas that were blown off the rooftops. We had repeaters that were blown off the rooftops. We had trees that were ripped by its roots from the ground, that we had to get cut immediately, because it presented a liability. We had gates that were blown away. It was incredible, from the CCG all the way down -- which is Christopher Columbus Gardens. We had loose concrete that was blown off, and we had to secure those areas that really would have been a liability.

After that, on top of it all, we had two major main water breaks, because of the saturation of the water and the pressure on the knee. We had two major water

breaks right after we got everything restored, as far as the heat, the hot water, and the electricity. Right after, we had two major main water breaks in this area, in the Andrew Jackson Gardens, and in the Harrison Gardens area. So we were faced with major damage, over $5 million, $6 million, in damage, and it was just insane as to its devastation. But fortunately, again, what I think it boiled down to is having the right leadership; being able to execute on the plan, which we had already gone over -- the emergency preparedness plan; the emergency disaster recovery plan; and that's how we were able to manage to keep the operations working. Bear in mind that a lot of personnel did not live in Hoboken, could not come to work, so we were dealing with an elite team that really was prepared, was courageous, were amazing in their compassion. Because they understood that what it meant for me was ensuring there would be no casualty; that ensuring no casualty to human life; no casualty to -- or inconvenience that could be avoided for a long period of time. Any inconvenience was, I believe, a short period of it. We sustained -- we were sustainable in our action, in our action plan. We were able to, quite frankly, rise above the water. We were able to rise above it, and we were able to show, in demonstration, that the Hoboken Housing Authority

knows how to prepare, plan, and execute an emergency preparedness plan, for situations like that. It was in an invaluable experience, while quite challenging, adversarial, and quite sacrificing. It was an invaluable experience. I am grateful that I was able to be the CEO ED at this time, to have led my team into the fray of this crisis. I think that, today, we have, remarkably, turned things around, in a short period of time, and we're still recovering. The devastation was really impactful. So we're still recovering, but we were able to turn around the basic needs of our residents. Now, I think, we are in a healthy, better state, but we still are recovering, because we had to replace a lot of the damaged equipment, and mitigation is the critical factor now, that we are looking to implement.

But I'm dealing with, again, these aged buildings. We have a lot of obsolescence, which, in its design, is not conducive to the implementation of a lot of the mitigation that I would like to do -- which is to create safe rooms, which is to elevate certain controllers, certain panels, things of that nature, which we're doing it -- replacing certain wiring -- things of that nature. We're tubbing things. We're making it more where it's protected.

We're approaching flood barriers, to basically try to remedy the situation as best we can.

The problem is, again, we'll never be able to raze any of these buildings. We are in a flood zone. We have a sewer system that is antiquated. We have a plumbing system that is antiquated. We have issues, still, that we will face if we get hit by another Sandy, or if we got hit by an Irene and Sandy, we'd be in bigger trouble, and it would be a greater crisis. So I'm just grateful that today I can tell you the stories of what we dealt with. What was amazing to me was how my community, the Housing Authority families, came together to serve others. Out of the command center, we were distributing goods, and what I love the most is the camaraderie that was built from that. Again, showing how strong Hoboken is, showing that when it comes to any disaster or crisis situation, the community knows how to come together for the greater good and purpose of everyone.

That is what we were able to demonstrate. That was what we were able to do and accomplish, as we led by example --

Track #4

AS: What did Hoboken learn about itself as a city, after dealing with this storm.

CG: That's a great question. I believe that Hoboken learned that when it comes to dealing with a crisis, that it is a city for everyone whom must come together, to serve everyone, especially those who are underprivileged; especially that I think it realized that from a communications standpoint -- there was a lack of communication, and we have to better prepare ourselves, and systematically have in place communication mechanisms that will keep everyone posted as to what is happening. I think Hoboken learned that there is a community, such as the Housing Authority, which sits in the lower point of the city, where the water would be the most impactful, and would reside there the longest -- which it did not recede until six, seven days later. What we learned is, overall, that there are better ways that we can handle these kinds of situations, and that, collectively, we need to be communicating better, and that, collectively, we can do more. We can do more. Collectively, we can do more. And this community is not an isolationist to the rest of the city. I think there are many folks who are learning today, from the stories that we're telling, that, in fact, this

community requires an overall and reconfiguration of its buildings, in order to be prepared for another Sandy. So when the city asks the question, "Are you ready?," unfortunately, we can only say we're ready on the ground, to embrace and react to another Sandy if it were to happen. But the buildings, our properties, this community, is not ready for another Sandy, in the sense of its current composition, in its building makeup; in how these mechanicals sit in the basements, which are below the flood plain level; and clearly, with an antiquated plumbing system, sewage system, it really requires a lot of work moving forward. I think that to better suit the city and this community, we have to make the proper investments, and we have to basically bring everyone together collectively, to create a sustainable tomorrow for the community at large, and in the Hoboken Housing Authority.

AS: Final question: Do you feel as if Hoboken has recovered. And if so, was there a moment that made you think, "Hoboken is back?"

CG: The question is, "Do I feel Hoboken has recovered." *Yes*." There's no doubt in my mind that the city has recovered. It should be thriving in its, I guess,

marketing to the rest of the world, or the rest of the country, that, in fact, we are back. And I think that while we are still in transformation and restoration -- actually we're beyond -- we're not in restoration, we're still in recovery when it comes to funding opportunities; when it comes to mitigation factors. That's the recovery that I referred to in this second part of this interview -- or question. But I don't think that Hoboken should make itself to still be hurting like down the shore. I don't think Hoboken is near what the Rockaways or what down the shore looks like and feels like, which has been an amazing, amazing sense of resiliency from Governor Christie to the President, working together, focusing on the people and the progress, for a better tomorrow, and really putting aside the politics.

So I think if we were to do that, and operate as we see our national leaders operate, during Sandy and post-Sandy, that is what we need to employ in the great city of Hoboken, so we could focus on the progress and the people for a sustainable future, and remove the politics so it doesn't inhibit, paralyze, or in any way prevent us from doing what is the right thing for this community, as executive director of the Housing Authority, and for the community at large, as a taxpayer. That is what

I would like to see happen, and that's what we are pursuing in our purpose, and in our operational goals. I can only speak as the executive director of the Housing Authority, from that standpoint, but I can tell you that, as a resident taxpayer, I would like to see these take-aways, a lesson, and that we actually apply solutions to correct what was not done correctly.

AS: Thank you.

CG: You're welcome, Alan. It's been a pleasure; and thank you for the great questions.

HOBOKEN
HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, Spencer Gelband, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*. I understand that I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on October 29, 2012.

2. The interview will be audiotaped. In the interview I may be identified by name, subject to my consent. I may also be identified by name in any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview, subject to my consent.

3. I understand that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that a photograph of me may be taken or borrowed for duplication, and that if I withdraw from the project, the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to Hoboken Historical Museum, and that the information in the interview can be used by Hoboken Historical Museum in any manner it will determine, including, but not limited to, use by researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy will be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript.

6. I understand that at the conclusion of this particular study, the tape(s), photograph, and one copy of the transcript will be ~~kept~~ in the collections department of the Hoboken Historical Museum.

Interviewee Name: Spencer Gelband

Interviewee Signature: Spencer Gelband

Address: 260 7th Street

Telephone number: 201-610-1496

Date: 9/3/2013

Archives 2013.039.0010

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: SPENCER GELBAND

INTERVIEWER: EILEEN LYNCH

LOCATION: 260 SEVENTH STREET, HOBOKEN, NJ

DATE: 3 SEPTEMBER 2013

Track #1

EL: This is Eileen Lynch, and I am speaking with Spencer Gelband, at his home at 260 Seventh Street.

So Spencer, let me start by asking you what, since you've had some experience with flooding already, before Sandy -- when you heard about Sandy, what did you think? It's just going to be another storm? Or what were some of the precautions that you took?

SG: Well, I took it really seriously, and I thought of the tropical forecasts, or the weather forecasts -- that kind of thing -- and I was very suspicious of Sandy; it just looked like it was not going to be very good for us. I kind of always was interested, and also afraid, kind of, of hurricanes. I grew up in Rhode Island, and one

of the big events in my life was in Providence -- the flooding there, in 1954, from Hurricane Carol. That flooded downtown Providence, and we lost power for days. I remember going on an expedition with my father in his Oldsmobile to find some ice -- which we found somewhere. Later, that same month, we got hit by another hurricane, but there wasn't the flooding. It wasn't as bad a hurricane -- Edna -- which everyone thought was kind of interesting, because that was my mother's name. Then, probably three years later, my father worked in a downtown Providence department store, and he got me -- how old was I? About ten years old -- to come down, and got people to come down, who were moving all the merchandise from the first floor upstairs.

So that's pretty much what was one of the preparations here -- moving everything from the ground floor upstairs, before Sandy. That was certainly one of the preparations, but keeping an eye on that. So about two or three days before the hurricane hit, I said, "Okay. This is not going to be good," and I said, "Okay, we're probably going to get maybe six feet of water down here." I was looking at, okay, if we get so much of a tidal surge, where's the water going to be on the street? Oh, it's going to be here. Okay. Everything below my chest has to be moved upstairs, if we can.

So chairs; movable furniture on the ground floor; whatever books or art that was below a certain level; whatever could be taken upstairs, we took upstairs two days ahead of time. We had two flooding incidents before this. In '96 there was a "Nor'easter, in October of '96, and we were badly hit. We hadn't finished renovating that floor then.

EL: This was just like a basement at that time?

SG: Yes. This was a basement. We restored it to the original floor levels, of 1856 or so, when the house was built. I know the street had been raised since then. It's kind of obvious, if you look at the side of our stoop, going upstairs -- it kind of extends below the front sidewalk by about a foot or two.

EL: Exactly.

SG: So, okay, we brought things upstairs. That was one of the preparations. We had to decide whether to evacuate. The year before, during Irene, I evacuated, and took two of the cats out to Danville with me, to a

friend's house, and left one of the cats in the city, with friends there. I drove out to Danville.

EL: And what kind of damage did you sustain from Irene?

SG: From Irene, I wasn't able to see it myself because I was stuck out in Danville, but my housemate, Pierre, was here. He was like the greatest housemate ever. He stuck it out here. We had a couple of little emergency pumps, and those were set up. We set those up. But he cleared it up. I guess it hit on a Saturday night or Sunday morning.

EL: Something like that, yes.

SG: I couldn't get back here until Monday, when they reopened the streets, and I came back with a dehumidifier and that kind of thing, because I knew we would need that. I was able to call in to him on the cellphone and all that, but we hadn't lost power in Hoboken with that. So our sump pumps, as soon as the water was reasonable [unclear] only got about a foot of water. We had to replace the baseboards down here, to clean up down here.

We got about a foot of water. Ironically, where I was in Danville -- that got hit much worse. There were some severe detours around. I had to detour to the next town, to get onto Route #80, to come back to Hoboken. So that was pretty much a trip, to come back here. I would commute back and forth for a few days. We've cleaned it up pretty much. We redid the baseboards and that kind of thing, and did some "mold" remediation. We had to replace the water heater and the furnace, the gas boiler. Those were covered by insurance.

So by, oh, the end of October everything was completed here and repainted. So I had my usual Thanksgiving dinner here for people, which was very nice.

EL: So you left for Irene, but you stayed during Sandy.

SG: Yes. Pierre was kind of skeptical. He thought that Irene was a bad experience, and I said, "No, it could be much worse. Looking at the weather forecast, when it was going to hit -- looking at the tide charts, that kind of thing -- it's going to be worse of a problem, I think." I moved my car up to the garage that just got torn down, at Park Avenue and Fifteenth Street. I think

there were one or two spaces left by the time I moved it. I guess that was on Monday, early in the day. I was on the top floor. I was more concerned, when I got the car there, that debris would damage the car there --

EL: Interesting.

SG: -- but it was fine there. I left it there for several days. People were closing the garage at the end of that month. Then I came back here and prepped things; got some food upstairs; moved everything upstairs -- water, sandwiches. The cat's food got moved from the ground floor upstairs, plenty of cat food. They got a feeding station upstairs, so they were okay with that -- a little confused, but they had gone through this before. That kind of thing. Maude, the cat, is particularly concerned about water. I think she was rescued during a flash flood.

EL: Oh, really?

SG: Yes. My deceased partner, Kevin Gerard, had found her out at the [Unclear] Humane Society, and she was adopted there. He had brought a friend's cat there,

when the friend's cat died. Maude was out there. Somebody had left Maude out there, and Maude was in a storm drain, and pulled out of a storm drain, in front of [unclear]. So Maude came to live with us, and she has this concern about water.

EL: So you know that Sandy's going to be bad. You sound like you took good preparations [cross talk] upstairs.

SG: I had sandbags. There's this little gap where the stairway comes down, just a little [unclear] by the sidewalk, in front of the house, which [unclear] about six inches from under the iron work gate, after '96, and filled the gap with sandbags.

So we thought, okay, we're okay. The sump pumps we're working. Things were okay.

EL: So now it's Monday.

SG: It's Monday.

EL: I know I went down to the river on Monday morning, and you knew the storm was coming up from

the south. But the wind was whipping from the north, and you saw all the trees -- and I just thought, "I feel like I'm in a bad science fiction movie here." And the waves -- I have to tell you, the waves down by the river -- they were crashing into [unclear]. They were like four feet high. I'd never seen the river look like that, and it was about 10:00 on Monday morning. I was like, "Oooh. This is really bad."

SG: That was around the time I moved the car. I drove by the river, and I was concerned about it. But I kind of felt okay with the wind from the north then, because the circulation of our low pressure center would have meant that it would have been to the east. If the hurricane passed to the east, I felt a lot better. The storm surge would have been less. But that's not what happened with Sandy. It took a hook west, and crashed into the Jersey shore. So we had the wind from the east, pushing the water into the harbor, into Hoboken there.

EL: You're not on a street that normally floods -- is it?

SG: It's a little odd. We're a little low here, so we do have some flooding. Not as bad as west, or up near where they built the Shop Rite. But we do get it. The drainage in the Willow Avenue sewer is not really good. I understand that they're going to be rebuilding the catch basis at this corner, at some point in the future. It may have something to do with that. Kevin Gerard had lived next door. We moved in here in '95. He lived next door for thirteen years, and there was never a flooding issue then. They never had it then. Ninety-six was the first time in his, I guess, fourteen, fifteen or more years of living in Hoboken, that that had happened.

EL: So were the lights out when the flooding started?

SG: No. No. Everything looked okay. It was starting at like 8:00 at night. A lot of the neighbors had done preparations for it -- some sandbagging, that kind of thing. The pumps were working around. If I recall -- I might be a little off on the clock time on this -- but at around 8:00, I was standing out front, waiting, watching things. The neighbors were out on the different steps. Two doors down, Steve and his wife had just moved in, in

October, a few weeks earlier. They had purchased the house and moved in. She was expecting a child. So Steve was out there, our next door neighbors were out there, kind of watching. And between like 8:00 and 9:00 we started getting water in the street.

EL: That's when you first noticed it, in the street.

SG: In the street. There wasn't a whole lot of rain.

EL: Now had you seen that before?

SG: I had seen it before. There were some flash floodings that the sewer couldn't handle, and sometimes it would get up to the curb, or maybe a little over the curb -- which is why we built the berm [phonetic] there, and some other neighbors did, too.

So, okay. Up to around 9:00 things kind of looked okay. [Unclear]

EL: You mentioned it wasn't raining a lot.

SG: It wasn't raining. I was kind of hopeful. I'm thinking to myself, "As long as the surge doesn't create a problem for us, then it will be okay. There's not a lot of rainfall, so maybe we'll be okay." But I know if the river gets to a certain point, there are flood gates, and the water can't really be pumped out anymore. There's nowhere to pump out the water -- which is the same situation if there's nowhere to pump out the sub-pump water into, if we ever got it inside, if it got to a certain level.

So a little after 9:00 at night, the water really started rising in the street, and started hitting the car tires. That kind of thing. By about 9:15, it had built up, it had reached the top of the berm sandbags, and was kind of resting there for a while. And I'm thinking to myself, "Oh, high tide just passed. It's 9:15." High tide was somewhere between 8:00 and 9:00 at Castle Point, I had looked up. Maybe it was an optical illusion, or just fantasy, or hope, and I said, "Oh, it looks like it's receding a little bit. That's good. But then it suddenly reversed itself and started rising, and was rising steadily. It passed the top of the berm and the sandbags, and it became like Niagara Falls over that, into our house, into the ground floor of all the houses along the street

there, at least into the next block, between Park and Garden, all the houses, way into there. I don't know how far up it went. Maybe nearly as far as Bloomfield, but I don't know if the block between Bloomfield and Garden got too much there. Their houses are built a little differently in that block.

The liquor store at the corner of Park and Garden, Park and Seventh, their stock and things in the basement got totally flooded. Houses on Park got severely hit.

Track #2

EL: Let's go back to your noticing that there is a little water in the street, and it comes right up. Then you think it looks like it's going to recede.

SG: Yes. I thought it was going to recede a little bit. I don't know whether it was an optical illusion or false hope --

EL: -- or denial.

SG: -- or a mind trick, or denial. Sure. But definitely, by then, it was covering the axles and the car

wheels, and started steadily riding, over the berms into the -- I know in England they call it the areas of the houses [unclear] -- water falls into those, and then inside.

EL: And you were all upstairs.

SG: We were out on the front stoop, watching this happen. We could see the [unclear] of water, just smashed open the front door. The force of the water in back of the house (because the rear yard, of course, flooded, too) --

EL: I didn't think of that.

SG: -- that split the door. It just split the door. The part of the door remained on its hinges, and it split off the rest of the door. It was that forceful, when it came in.

EL: So it happened all at once.

SG: Pretty much. Basically, all at once. Once it reached a certain level. It's amazingly forceful.

EL: So you couldn't tell if the drains were backing up.

SG: I knew the drains were backing up, because after '96 the inside, here -- we installed a catch -- catch valves I think they're called, and there are other shut-off valves for this thing. The kitchen is downstairs here, on the ground floor, and we have like a two-inch [unclear] valve that you can manually shut off. I did that -- I would do that if there was a flood forecast or that sort of thing. We're at a pretty low level here, and that prevents a backup. It's very effective for that. So I knew it wasn't going to back up that way. It could back up to the sub-pumps, that kind of thing -- which I'm sure it did.

Shortly after that -- I stayed a bit hopeful until we lost -- I'm not sure exactly when we lost the power. The power went down around the same time --

EL: -- as the water started coming in.

SG: -- as the water started coming in.

EL: That makes sense.

SG: Then I thought, "Okay. There's a real problem." If we didn't have power, we couldn't do anything, because the sub-pumps were ineffective. Even if they worked, if there was two feet of water in the street, it had nowhere to go. Obviously, the sewers were filled.

So there wasn't too much I could do. I got really worried. We moved furniture up to the first floor from the ground floor, and the water started coming up, and it was on the second step below the first floor. I was getting worried, "If this hits the first floor, all this equipment and all the things I moved up there would be destroyed, too." Fortunately, it stopped below that. Then, okay, you just have to kind of rationally deal with this, and let's see what's going to happen.

EL: So you had water, it looks like, well over six feet.

SG: Oh, easily over six feet. Yes. Down here. Yes. It came close to the ceiling of the ground floor.

EL: How long did the water stay here?

SG: Well, because we didn't have power, we had to use a generator for the pumps. We did a couple of the small pumps. We had them ready to use, but we had to power them. It was tough finding -- we had to get a generator, and a neighbor was able to get one of those. An issue was finding the gas to power it with. That was really difficult. So we could pump out some of it. From Monday until at least Wednesday there was still water in the street, at least Wednesday. Because some friends came over, and insisted that I come and stay with them -- because they were dry. Pierre didn't want to go. He stayed here. I took Maude, and left the other cats here. They would be fine, but Maude was more panicky. I took her up to where I was staying, and stayed for [unclear].

EL: Was it in Hoboken?

SG: Yes, in Hoboken.

EL: Did they have power?

SG: They didn't have power where I was staying, but it turned out around Eleventh Street, about a

half block either side of Eleventh Street, around Bloomfield Garden, that area, for some reason they didn't lose power. Somehow, they were on some line [cross talk] different grid. On Wednesday, they came down, they got the Wellington boots that we had lent a neighbor around the corner. They picked them up for me. They were kind of cracked, so we duct-taped them, and I walked up to their place.

EL: So you actually sloshed through water.

SG: I sloshed through water to get there. There was this guy who was trying to walk -- he was carrying his big dog -- on the sidewalk here, on Seventh Street, to get up -- so he could walk his big dog somewhere without doing [unclear]. He was sloshing through the water, carrying the dog. By Wednesday noon it was still up to and over the "berm," and the cars that were on the street, that didn't get moved -- some of them had kind of floated out of position, over the curb. That was kind of disturbing. I was real glad I moved my car.

EL: It's funny -- because when I saw the cars, all cockeyed, I thought, "Wow, man, people ditched

their cars in a hurry and ran." I didn't realize that the water had picked them up and moved them.

SG: Yes. Yes.

EL: I kept thinking, "Why are all these cars parked so funny."

SG: Oh, yes. The cars, some of them -- the alarms went off, and the alarms just kept going off until that stopped. There was one SUV that was parked in front of the house next door that stayed there for a good month, later, until it got moved. But lots of people I know lost their cars, because they hadn't moved them.

EL: Yes. So it was Wednesday. There was still water in the street.

SG: There was still water in the street. By then I think my next-door neighbor, who came back to next door -- they had a generator, but getting gasoline for it was difficult.

EL: And do you know where he wound up getting gasoline?

SG: I don't know where he got it. I had a friend, my friend whom I was staying with, who lived uptown -- she got a couple of gallons. She went up to Weehawken or someplace and got it. She was in a long line there, and got it for us. But we started using the generator. It wasn't until at least Saturday that the water was cleared out of my house.

EL: Almost a week.

SG: It was really slow.

EL: That's five days.

SG: Yes, five days. So there was a lot of damage caused by the sitting water, that didn't have -- if it had just come and gone -- like with Irene we had a foot or foot and a half here. We had had "wonder board" walls down on the ground floor and that didn't get -- they didn't get hat -- just the baseboards got damaged. But this soaked into the "wonder board," and into the insulation behind it,

so everything had to be removed, taken out. That kind of thing. When we had Irene, we had a remediation service and [unclear] one of the first things I did was try to get a remediation service to muck out, clean it up. The T-Mobile place removed the debris. That kind of thing. That was kind of difficult.

EL: Because they were busy.

SG: They were real busy. And also, okay, when the panel went down, most of the phones stopped working. So if a cellphone stopped working, certainly AT&T stopped working -- Verizon, you could text-message and occasionally call. But up around Eleventh Street, or Garden, where my friend Vicky's apartment was, she maintained power. She had Verizon FIOS. Verizon FIOS did not go down. We could watch the reports on the television there, [unclear]. We could use her computer.

EL: I hadn't heard about Verizon.

SG: Cable went down, but Verizon FIOS did not go down. Landlines, however, went out. Copper landlines went out all over town. Where I was staying had no power,

and had no landline phone. Also, I couldn't use my cellphone because it was on the network that didn't have the coverage [unclear]. There was one spot -- there were odd spots around. I could stand in front of a certain [unclear] on Garden Street, in the 1000 block, stand in a certain direction, and be able to text in and out of there, occasionally. Or, a few other places. Possibly, it was getting self-service from the Heights, or from New York City, but other places I couldn't get service.

EL: And you were trying to call.

SG: I was trying to call the insurance, remediation, anything like that.

EL: So how long were you out of the house?

SG: It's hard to remember now.

EL: I know it all seems like a blur.

SG: It was at least two weeks. That Saturday was tough. We were told there was a charity dispensing gasoline down in the area of the PATH station.

EL: On Observer.

SG: On Observer, yes, and I got down there with a small gas can. There was a very long line there. I waited from about 1:00 to about 4:00 for my couple of gallons of gasoline. There were about ten people from the Source.

EL: That was a cold day, wasn't it? One of those days was really cold.

SG: A few of the days were called. That day I don't recall it being really cold, but we were standing there in the line, waiting to fill up. People brought all sorts of containers there, and that was a problem. By the time I got to ten people from the front of the line, the fire marshal came and was going to shut this down. People were getting pretty upset that that was going to happen. I thought, "Wait a minute, there may be a riot here," if he did that. Apparently, some woman had splashed gasoline inside her house, on Bloomfield, downtown, and caused the block to be shut down. That was a real problem. I guess there were a lot of stupid actions, the day after the

storm. People hadn't thought their position through, entirely.

But I did get the two gallons, I came up here, and we finished pumping it outside [unclear]. It was just such a real mess here. It was an incredible mess.

EL: You couldn't really stay in the house.

SG: Well, Pierre did. I stayed up at my friend's, up on Garden Street there, with Maude. I think I came back and forth, and we did what we could. During the following week, I made arrangements with the remediation company. There was one here that was less bureaucratic than one of the national brands.

EL: Service Pro?

SG: Servpro I had used before, but they are so bureaucratic -- "We'll get to you. We'll get to you." They were doing paperwork around the corner. I said, "Well, you'll have four if you can come around the corner and do it." Well, they didn't. They ended up calling like a week later. I used a different company, out of Hackensack, and they mucked this out. They removed things, they bagged

things up [unclear]. That required taking down the walls, down to the bare studs. That hadn't been done. So it was totally rebuilding the ground floor again. Nothing except the granite counter top pretty much remained that was useful in there. The kitchen is down here. The kitchen cabinets had gone.

EL: I see stairs going up to the second floor. So was the water on the stairs there?

SG: Going to the second floor.

EL: No, going up to the third floor. I'm sorry.

SG: Oh, yes. They were covered with water. The carpeting had to be removed.

EL: So you couldn't even come down. I mean, not at first. Unless you wanted to swim.

SG: No. No. The water was up close to the first floor then. Everything down here was submerged for several days. The remediation process, they handled that.

Well, the streets of Hoboken -- I guess it was the day before Christmas, about two years before this, we had this huge snowstorm, and the sidewalks were like tunnels pretty much. We were digging ourselves out of that. This was like a snowstorm of trash in the streets for a couple of weeks, because there was no place to put the trash. Everybody around tearing out the walls of their houses, getting rid of their electronic equipment, furniture -- anything like that.

EL: It could have been a war or something.

SG: That was an enormous project, just getting rid of the debris from that. And as soon as they could clear a street, there was more debris to put out there. So they had to go through this cycle several times, to be able to do this.

Well, then a contractor was needed -- what would be done -- I did find a contractor, a good local contractor. He had done an excellent job on two of the houses which got renovations on this street. He was from Hoboken. His own facility down at Newark Street was flooded out. He was around, and he was really good.

EL: Who was it?

SG: Walter Ortiz. He was overwhelmed by work too, and he was really good. So, contractor, plumber -- that kind of thing.

EL: Did you have any interaction with the city, FEMA --

SG: FEMA was right on the spot with their adjustor. She came in and looked around, did a report, and registered right away.

EL: You did register right away.

SG: Oh, yes. It was easy, to do it online. At my friend, Vicky's, we could do that. The insurance company was more difficult to bring in an adjustor, and most of this was done maybe about ten days or more after the storm. There was so much for the adjustors to do. They were all were from like Florida, Texas, or the Midwest. That kind of thing. FEMA was very quick with a temporary relocation check. I had to stay there -- I stayed there for at least a week after the power was back on, because --

well, there were a number of reasons. One, we couldn't use the water here. That kind of thing.

EL: Did you have heat?

SG: We didn't have heat, we didn't have water, there was no hot water. And just getting those things back in place, even after what was basically gutted down on the ground floor -- getting those back in place was difficult. PSE&G, we had their inspectors around. They had to look at the gas lines in the area. They also had a different crew dealing with the electrical. We had to redo all the electrical. Our electrical box was flooded. We had to redo the circuit-breaker box. So that all had to be replaced. We did have a local electrician doing that; he was really good, and that got done. When that was done, that was a big difference. My plumber -- it was also difficult to get through to PSE&G. They were just overwhelmed -- just to get through to talk to someone, to make an appointment; to talk to someone, to look at the damage and what had to be done. It took a while. So I told them, "Look, I know what has to be done and replaced. You replaced this a year ago, so I know what needs to be done.

Can we just order the things." They say, "No, we need to come out and look at that." They finally did that.

They did restore the gas. We did get the power restored, so we were able to get hot water by the end of the month.

EL: By the end of November?

SG: November. Yes. A lot of people didn't. My plumber did find a proper hot-water unit that fit in there -- because not all of them did. I was relying on PSE&G for the gas boiler installation -- that kind of thing -- so they did that. So we did have some heat in December, but it was still pretty open here. We still didn't have the doors in the front and back.

EL: Oh, my god. Down here? You had no doors?

SG: The door in the front, we could prop that closed; in the back, it was cracked in half. It was all plastic sheeted there. When it got cold, we had to supplement upstairs, with space heaters.

EL: So your dealing with FEMA was positive.

SG: Yes. That was positive.

EL: Did they offer you financial help?

SG: A little bit of financial help.

EL: Basically they were helping with the heat and --

SG: Yes. But because we're in the ground floor, two-steps down from the street situation, which exists all over Hoboken, that is exempt from a normal FEMA, suburban -- several steps up, ground floor [unclear] and around the country. It's just not designed for an older, urban area. So it did not cut -- so the insurance and the FEMA things -- the FEMA covered, I guess, minimal costs to buy cheap, new kitchen appliances -- because their duty was to make the place basically livable again.

EL: So refrigerator, stove, like that?

SG: Not at the value of what it was, but at the value of what you may be able to find the cheapest one

possible at. And whatever. The insurance -- federal flood insurance covered certain structural damages, no personal property losses. And FEMA covered only personal property losses of some of the kitchen, the most basic kitchen equipment; what you would need to live. Things like -- this was the kitchen and dining room and kind of library thing, built-in bookshelves. I'll never had built-in bookshelves again here. Lamps, electrical fixtures I didn't think of moving upstairs. Any kind of art work that seemed to be over six foot, near the ceiling, I put on the top bookshelves, that were lost -- that's not an insurance-coverage thing, or FEMA. That's personal losses. That kind of thing. Plus, insurance doesn't cover finishing your walls. If you're living in that area, it's raw dry-wall, un-taped, un-spackled. That kind of thing.

One thing, later on, there was the Relief Fund, in Hoboken. There was a fund.

EL: What the mayor set up.

SG: Yes. That was an enormous help.

EL: Rebuild Hoboken.org.

SG: That was an enormous help.

EL: Really.

SG: Oh, yes.

EL: Oh, that's wonderful. Tell me about it. Did you have to apply?

SG: Yes. I applied for that. That was early the next year, in this year -- 2013. I applied for it.

EL: And how is the process? Did someone come in and work with you?

SG: They evaluated the application, looked at the financials on it, and determined the history and the losses on it. And I think everyone shared in the fund. That went a long way toward replacing the kitchen cabinetry that was down here, because it didn't get covered by anything else. A lot of things -- lighting fixtures and things. It helped to finish the dry-walls and paint. That really helped a lot on that. That really did.

EL: So the damage from Sandy compared to Irene is --

SG: It's a totally different category. Irene was as if we had a flash flood, and it was gone in a day. We never lost power. The sump pumps basically pumped anything in here out in the street, and it did that.

People's reactions were very interesting the week after the flood. People who had power, up around Eleventh Street -- everyone there had set up card tables and things, offering to power your cellphones -- because a lot of cellphones didn't work because towers weren't working. But to power cellphones and that kind of thing. They had power cords out there for you, offering coffee, or whatever they could make there -- pastry and things. It was a really supportive community, everywhere. Even standing in line that first Saturday, to get the gas cans, everybody kind of supported each other, kind of wanted to know what was going on and things.

I didn't want to get too much into anyone else's personal stories of that kind of thing but, clearly, there were a lot of people kind of in shock. You could see that. I stayed at least to the end of the month up there, and paid my rent for their little apartment that I had

rented out there. FEMA covered that. Then I came here after the power was on, after we had hot water. I came back with Maude. We came back here.

EL: Would the cats come down here, even after the water was gone? Or were they a little freaked out?

SG: They were a little freaked out. I didn't let them down here while the cleanup happened. I moved everything that I thought I could up here. Things that were higher -- cabinets I didn't think there would be any problem with.

EL: But they did get hurt.

SG: Yes. Stevens students organized volunteers. The following Saturday, we were still moving debris out of here -- the remedial team -- and I said, "Okay. Anything that looks like possessions, bag up and put in the back yard. There were a lot of things that floated out into the back yard. So I was out there with a team from Stevens. Everything was confined in the back yard, and we determined whether it was salvageable or whether it was

trash. A lot of china and glassware was out in the back yard. It was just like a cabinet had removed itself from the wall, gone out through the back door that was blown off, and ended up in the back yard. So, basically, okay, bag it up; move it over to Bloomfield, where I was staying; clean it off; box it up. We recovered about twenty boxes of things like glassware, china, candlesticks and things like that, that were not water permeable.

EL: That's good, that you were able to recover some stuff.

SG: That was good. And the process of doing that is kind of therapeutic. "Okay, why didn't I put this out for the yard sale thing? Why didn't I put all those CDs that we lost out for the gate sale, the neighborhood gate sale, back in September?" In fact, we were still finding CDs out in the back yard, up to about a month ago. This is September now; even in August I was finding CDs in the back yard, half buried in the garden.

EL: I notice you have a butterfly bush out there. You have some sweet plants out there. Your plants didn't get hurt?

SG: The butterfly bush was getting to be treelike. The plants out in front kind of died. There are some boxwoods in the tree lawn there. They survived, they came back. They were underwater. They were there until at least Wednesday, when the water was down enough. But at least a couple of days. The butterfly bush, in the lower area here, down the steps, the house side of the "berm" -- that got covered for a few days. I thought that was lost, but I decided, "Okay. I'm just going to leave the trunk of it there and see what happens," and it started coming back, actually. That surprised me. And some of the flowers that were down there came back. That was good.

The back yard, which was flooded -- some of the plants came back. All the [unclear] came back. They seemed to be pretty hardy. But some of the other perennials didn't do as well there.

EL: Did your neighbors pretty much experience the same thing?

SG: They experienced the same thing. Yes. On both sides. They all had to go through rebuilding. On one side, Rick owned it -- he was renting out his place, so he

was in a real hurry to get it back, available for his tenants. So he got that back in January. He really rushed it ahead, though. Basically, we were cleaned up and the heat back, but we were down to the studs in December. December 5th, for some reason comes to mind. That's when the heat got back in. The contractor started doing some work in January and February, and by the end of March he got overwhelmed, and kind of had to stage the house according to the personnel he had available. We got back in here -- walls were going up like March, April, end of April some painting. My appliances were delivered in May. Plumbing was almost finished during the summer. There are still some plumbing details that need to be finished up now. I was able to boil water about nine months after Sandy. I didn't want to use anything down here until I knew I could clean up after myself down here, and had running water down here, with the plumbing totally ready. That kind of thing.

EL: It's funny -- I usually ask people, when I do these interviews, "So what do you think you would do differently next time?" But it sounds to me like you -- what could you do?

SG: I don't know what I could do differently next time, in a situation as severe as that. I'm not sure what I could do.

EL: I'm not sure if there's anything you could have done. You took the proper precautions.

SG: I don't know if anyone has actually yet totaled up -- it's probably in the hundreds of millions of dollars of damage in Hoboken alone that it cost. I think clearly see level rising, that kind of thing -- we're just a few feet above sea level in this area. Some areas are a little lower, some are higher, but even the ones that are a little higher would get hit. What they did in Providence, in the late '50s, was build a hurricane barrier, along the Providence River. It was a barrier, so that the river still would go through it, and it would get lowered when there would be an incredible -- well, not incredible, but unusually high tides or storm surges predicted, nor'easters or hurricanes -- that kind of thing. That protected the property in the downtown area. I'm not really sure how long the barrier was, but I'm sure that it would cost more -- it would probably cost no different, in inflated terms -- it was a mechanically movable barrier that blocked a river

flow -- that kind of thing -- and then pumped out the river water coming down, when the barrier was down -- in Hoboken, we don't have a river to pump out, if we lowered a hurricane barrier, but, certainly -- a barrier along the north end, near the park, with gates that are generally open, for the streets, for the light rail, and that kind of thing, along the south end, to protect the rail yards, and to protect the openings there. There are only three ways to get out of Hoboken at the south end, at this point -- it may be an issue to deal with the historical aspects of the railroad station and that, but a lot of cities have done it. Richmond has done it along the James River. It can be an asset in more ways than one. It could be a recreational asset in a way, like a little high-line thing. You have a little bicycle path on top of a flood barrier.

EL: That would be nice.

SG: That would be kind of neat.

EL: It would be nice.

SG: But nobody wants to abandon the city.

EL: And we can't start building -- I mean, this house has this lower floor.

SG: We can't put this on stilts. We can't put the city on stilts.

EL: You can't take a building that was built in 1850 and --

SG: No. You can't do that. Some places have been sold on this street, that have been flooded.

EL: Really.

SG: Yes. Rick was going to -- after he rebuilt, he was going to -- we talked about it. He said, "I was planning on selling in about year, and I'm going to do that." But then he decided -- it sold right away. Yes, this house. And a couple of houses on the block up between Park and Garden have sold since Sandy. So there are still people interested in living in Hoboken. People from other places said to me, after the storm, "I can see why you like living there so much. The support in the community around there is really fabulous." They were really impressed by that.

EL: Well, that's a very positive, happy note to end on. I want to thank you for sharing your story with us. Thank you, Spencer.

SG: Thank you.

HOBOKEN
HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, April Harris, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*. I understand that I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on October 29, 2012.

2. The interview will be audiotaped. In the interview I may be identified by name, subject to my consent. I may also be identified by name in any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview, subject to my consent.

3. I understand that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that a photograph of me may be taken or borrowed for duplication, and that if I withdraw from the project, the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to Hoboken Historical Museum, and that the information in the interview can be used by Hoboken Historical Museum in any manner it will determine, including, but not limited to, use by researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy will be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript.

6. I understand that at the conclusion of this particular study, the tape(s), photograph, and one copy of the transcript will be kept in the collections department of the Hoboken Historical Museum.

April Harris

Interviewee Name: April Harris

Interviewee Signature Robert Foster – Robert Foster

Address 819 Park Ave # Hoboken, NJ

Telephone number: 201-792-2112

Date: 8/30/2013

Archives 2013.039.0011

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE:	APRIL HARRIS
INTERVIEWER:	BOB FOSTER
LOCATION:	2 INDEPENDENCE COURT, HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY
DATE:	30 AUGUST 2013

BF: We're sitting inside the Independence conference room. The date is August 30th, and it's about 2:00. I'm sitting here with April Harris, and the purpose of our interview is to discuss Storm Sandy, and that amazing, incredible, horrible, wonderful week. April, could you start by telling us a little bit about your background? Maybe where you grew up in Hoboken, and anything to set us up, of who you are.

AH: I'm a lifelong Hoboken resident. I grew up in a housing authority on Jackson Street. I left for a number of years for marriage and other things, and returned to begin a ministry to the poor, of which Hoboken had a high percentage at the time, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. I [unclear] with the Hoboken Clergy Coalition during the arson crisis that we had. We began a ministry, which

still exists for the past thirty-two years, providing aid to people in the way of food, clothes, educational support, and many different ways.

So it was in existence in the basement of Our Lady of Grace Church, a historic church in Hoboken. It's below sea level -- and I guess I set it up.

BF: You certainly did.

And the storm itself, did you -- ?

AH: Well, we had to do a lot of preparation the year before, for Hurricane Irene, and we were expecting flooding in below-sea-level places. And since I get a couple of inches of water, in the right combination, in that basement ministry space, when the tide is high, when the rain comes down fast, when the water table is high, I'll always get a couple of inches. So I would need to be a little prepared for some high flooding for Hurricane Irene. For Hurricane Irene, I did a lot of preparation but I couldn't get everything upstairs. I found that I went waist-high for preparation for Hurricane Irene, so I did the same thing for Hurricane Sandy -- and I didn't bring anything to an upper floor, much to my shock, disappointment, and trauma, when Hurricane Sandy rolled in.

You want me to talk about what it was like for me? I prepared everything that I best could, put everything waist high, and went home. I expected to have a similar experience to Hurricane Irene, which wasn't too bad. While the storm came in, we were able to watch everything on the news. During Hurricane Irene we didn't lose our electricity, so I really kind of believed -- because I'm located, personally, in residence, on Eighth and Park, which is on a high point of Hoboken. I parked my car on Eighth and Park; I didn't take it out of town like I did for Hurricane Irene. I just sat tight, and got food for four days, water for four days, batteries and what not, to prepare for a couple of days of disruption in our lives. Around 10:00, on the night the storm was raging, suddenly we were in darkness.

Once you're cut off from all communication, it's a very unnerving experience. You just have to sit tight. I was personally on the third floor, and I just kept worrying about what was going on in the basement of Our Lady of Grace -- which is center in town, so it's right at the point where you start in an elevation. I just kept hoping and hoping that everything would be okay. There was no way for me to know. And we were supposed to stay indoors. I did have a son who was out in that storm, in a

jeep, a four-[unclear]jeep (he had monster "tires" and he was out pulling people's cars out, and doing good stuff), giving me text pictures, and he sent me a picture of Fourteenth Street (he said it was Fourteenth Street), it looked like the river had come all the way down. Then he told me, "Mom, the cars, when I was coming down the viaduct," which is on Fourteenth Street, "the water is up to the top of the buses that were parked over there." I said, "Oh, get out of here. Not for real."

So this gave me an inclination that Hoboken was getting submerged by water, that I would not even expect. I know the people in the housing authority, during Hurricane Irene, were blocked into their buildings, the water coming up to all the staircases, and they had to wait like two days. So from my perspective, as an emergency service, knowing that there were going to be poor people who were impacted -- electricity and stuff -- I began to worry about me being able to respond to them, should the ministry site that I had get hit.

In my ministry space, I had thirty years of archival records; all the financial records; all my computer; my copy machines; everything that the poor needed -- all the clothing; all the projects that I did; all the educational equipment; children's programming; toys. I

can't tell you how much stuff was there, at risk. It looked like I wasn't going to get away unscathed; if not personally, the ministry space might have submerged.

So I couldn't wait to get out there, the minute we could go outside. I found myself walking through almost a landscape I didn't recognize. Water was all the way up between Willow and Park Avenue, and it went straight down to the base of the hill. Now since I knew that Our Lady of Grace was between Clinton and Willow, on Fourth -- and I had heard, or somebody told me as I was walking toward the church -- that the hospital had been evacuated; that people couldn't access that -- I said, "Is that what happened to the basement of Our Lady of Grace?" There was still no electricity, and I was kind of -- I don't know, hopeful mode? -- trying to say maybe it wouldn't be so bad; maybe it would be under the waist. When I actually got to the church, I could see that the water had already swept through the park and left debris. I saw overturned things, puddling, and still water in places. So I went to the top of the stairs of the basement, and the janitorial staff -- Gustavo shook his head and he said, "No, Miss April, you can't go down there. The water's up over the stairs." I didn't believe it; I was going to go down. I was going to go down and see if anything was left. But when I opened the

door and stood at the top of the stairs leading down to the basement, the water was only below the first step, and I was told that the water had come out of the basement to the street level. So it was totally submerged.

So I went into almost shock, because thirty years of doing work for the poor, and everything was wiped out. All I could think about was the emergency level of the people in the projects who might come to the ministry, looking for help, while the city was in a crisis -- or they were in a crisis -- but I knew they were still actually blocked into their apartments. Actually, you may want to stop this tape, because my story of the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy has a lot of details to it, and I want to make sure I give you what you want.

BF: Sure. I maybe missed the point, but you're continuing fine.

AH: Well, I just thought that there's so much that happened, and so many levels, to me -- because I, as the emergency service to the poor of Hoboken, was a hurricane victim myself. I needed to find out, when all communications were down -- because we're talking the second day after. The city is still in shock, and we're all

on our emergency reserves in our own houses. Eventually, because this went on for nine days, of no electricity and disrupted services, everybody ran out of food in the whole city. The whole city was in a different emergency, but on that day I just -- we still had our own food, our batteries, everything, in our own house. I was traumatized by losing the ministry.

So I walked back home in a shocked state. I went upstairs and told my husband, "It's gone. The whole thing is just gone, and I don't know what this means. Does this mean I'm no longer going to have the ministry to the poor? I can't do anything." I prayed, and I felt an inward direction. I said to my husband, "I feel like God just wants me to at least go to the space, and stay in the chapel upstairs. So if anybody comes looking for help, I can tell them I can help them." So at least, if people look for me -- I know this isn't a religious interview, but basically the Bible verse I heard was, "Be still, and know that I am God."

I couldn't do anything, so I went to the chapel the next day, and the water had receded to knee-level. You'd better believe that, with a flashlight, I had boots on, I had on pedal-pushers, and I went down there to see what was going on. And this is what I saw. All the

freezers and refrigerators were turned upside down. All my desk and everything was sopping wet. Everything was ruined. Everything. There was nothing that could be retrieved -- *except*, floating on the water was the box of membership cards, hard copy, that I had painstakingly put together for all the poor who were active in the ministry, with all their children's names, addresses, and phone numbers -- floating, perfectly dry, still alphabetical. [Laughter] I know. It turned out, to me, that nothing was worth retrieving anyway except that, because if I needed to organize an emergency response to the poor, that would have been the best thing. I didn't even know how we were going to pump out the water. Actually, I was just in such a startled state.

So we stayed up in the chapel. It was a little chilly, I know everything was dark, and we were just waiting there. The next thing that happened was this organization, a chain-reaction of one of the volunteers from the Hoboken Synagogue -- her name was Bette Birnbaum, and she had recently moved to Hoboken and become involved in the ministry. She happened to have a connection with an organization called Nechama, which was Hebrew for comfort. They were a Jewish response to disaster. She contacted them in Minnesota, and asked them to come and rescue the

interfaith food pantry. That's how Nechama came to Hoboken. It came at the request of this woman, and through the Hoboken Synagogue.

It was Friday by that point, I think, or something, because when the head of Nechama came and said he needed me to sign an okay that they could clear out everything -- they were going to clear out all the debris, and treat everything for mold, and do it all for free. They would mobilize all their own volunteers and everything. They just needed to go to the city of Hoboken, to ask where they could put the debris. Well, when the city of Hoboken met them, they begged them to save the moldy service center, and other places in Hoboken. [Laughs] So they actually ended up being a major part of some of the rescue in Hoboken, but they did clear out the ministry.

BF: How many people involved from -- ?

AH: Oh, gosh. First of all, what it was like in those days -- they're a major organization. The go across the country for wind and water damage -- tornadoes and stuff -- and they're experts. They were so kind and good and understanding of what it was like for people to be traumatized, losing their belongings. Now I thought that

that was all that was going to happen; that they were going to clear out the space.

By the way, the church didn't get that service. Only In Jesus' Name basement, and I didn't even know if the priest would want me to go back there again, because I was only there on their good will. But it was the beginning of a lot.

Because they started work at 8:00 A.M. in the morning, I had to get up and go there at 8:00 A.M. in the morning and be there, because the whole building was unsecured. I was in that chapel -- "Be still and know that I am God" -- while this army of people came and just cleared out -- they mobilized all these volunteers. Then all of a sudden, from everywhere it seemed, me staying there -- oh, I forgot to tell you. I really should go back to -- before they came, when I heard the water had subsided enough for the people from the housing authority, to get out, I figured they were going to come looking for emergency food. So let me just say that I'm walking back, stunned, on the second day, knowing I still have water, but asked permission if I could use the upper floor to at least bring some food in case people came. I had no food.

Coincidentally, one of the churches had taken up a food collection and a money collection -- I

usually don't accept money, but they handed me, before this happened, $400 in cash. I prefer a check, for accounting purposes. But it turned out to be for emergency purposes, so this was perfect. Because I had that. That was the only resources I had access to, since we still had no electricity and everything. I went to the A&P -- which was in its own devastation. It's on Sixth and Clinton. You come to your town and you see National Guard trucks; you know in talking and listening to the emergency channel -- which I happened to be listening to, because my son left his -- he's an EMT person -- he left his two-way thing, and I heard all the different emergencies that were going on in the city. I didn't have radio, but this was very informative, because they would be saying things like, "There's a woman in such-and-such a place who needs oxygen. Can you get to that?" They were coordinating real responses to the vulnerable.

Anyway, I remember giving the National Guard guys the thumbs-up. They were bringing water. I heard through that grapevine of things that people were having to be evacuated from the housing projects through second-story windows, and that they had set up two emergency shelters in Hoboken for people who were stuck in their house and stuff. There was all this stuff going on, but in my little world

the only thing going on was what was I going to do about the fact that *used to be* the emergency response, and now the whole city was in an emergency response need, including me. [Laughs]

On my way to the food pantry, I went in and the A&P was dark. Their cash registers didn't work. They were throwing out all their food from the freezers and everything. I asked the manager could I please get whatever I could to stock my food pantry, in the off-chance that people were hoping to get food from me, until I found out where the other food responses might be. He was nice enough to let me run through there like Supermarket Sweep, and they added everything up on a hand calculator. I paid them, and I took that to the food pantry, and that's when I waited.

As it turned out, the city was doing a great response. Everybody was putting food somewhere else, and people didn't need emergency food from me. We all needed emergency food, in every possible way. I was marooned in the ministry while everything was going on. Me and my husband -- luckily, he had been laid off from his job very recently, and he was available to help me work at "St. Lucy's" Shelter with the homeless. So he was available to stay with me in there. I actually feel that that week was

so incredible. The kindnesses of people from outside the community was overwhelming. The fact that I had a ministry to the poor attracted all kinds of donations and stuff. So as quickly as Nechama was throwing everything out of the basement, donations were throwing in through the top. I had no space to put it, and people weren't quite paying attention to that part, so I had to rent storage.

My favorite, most treasured -- well, I have a couple of treasured moments -- but one, personally, as a ministry, and as a missionary to the poor, was that World Vision came into Hoboken. They did their evaluation by going through the town. And since we had no communications, no phones and all of that, nobody could find each other unless it was serendipity/synchronicity stuff. They came and met me, and chose the In Jesus' Name Charity Ministry to do their distribution of their resources to the vulnerable in the community, because I already had that type of focus. Their resources and their responses are always to the poor and the vulnerable in the world. They're a worldwide organization. I used to want to be a missionary with them, so I got to be one during Hurricane Sandy. I have pictures of me. [Laughs] They said that when we did the day of distribution -- which I was able to mobilize the poor to come to Our Lady of Grace School Hall, which wasn't

destroyed, for all the stuff that was collected, and stuff from World Vision. We did that on November 6th, by sending out -- I had all the addresses and phone numbers, and I created an on-foot response. I generated that; gave them my business card to refer their neighbors -- because if they weren't pre-registered to the ministry, it didn't mean they weren't in need at that moment of these items that we distributed. That was really special to me.

One of the most amazing synchronicities that I saw was -- cellphones we were able to charge in various and sundry ways -- trucks coming in and letting people charge their phones, and different generators and stuff. So I would get phone calls from some of the poor, in some of the senior buildings and stuff, saying, "April, we have no food." I said I couldn't do anything, I'm like, well -- and telling me what was going on. In 221 Jackson there was this very -- she's in a wheelchair and she has celiac disease. She was trying to cook for other people and she ran out of her own resources. She said some of the poor couldn't come down all the way, when the National Guard was distributing stuff, and she was concerned. But she didn't have paper plates. One of the things I got at the A&P that day was some paper plates.

So I said, "I have some paper plates, and could you use some pasta and this and that? And do you want to cook for some more people?" I was afraid to ask her what she was eating, because she couldn't eat anything, because of her disease. I was so touched by her compassion. My husband and I packed some stuff together, got the paper plates, walked in and met her husband, who took the packages to us. Then she called me so happy: "Oh, April, thank you so much. I was able to feed like twenty-six people, and I couldn't make it today." I didn't even want to know how she was eating. The next day, me at the chapel [unclear]. I am standing at the head of the stairs. Electricity was coming on some places a little bit, and this woman, well-dressed woman, just walked in, and she had two bags with her. Donations had been pouring in, so I said, "Thank you." She said, "No, no, wait a minute. I have celiac disease, and I brought all this wheat-free, gluten-free stuff, because I thought to myself, 'What if there's some poor person who's stuck in the midst of this whole thing, and they can't get the right food that's being distributed on an emergency basis.'" I said, "As a matter of fact, I do know somebody. Let me give you her phone number, her address, and her apartment, and if you could get it to her -- what are the odds? What are the phenomenal

odds of that woman receiving her emergency food through a chain-reaction. It's almost enough to make you definitely believe in God. I already believe in God, so it doesn't surprise me in the least.

But I always that those type of things -- like the cards surviving; the impossible odds; the fact that you always receive what you need when you need it, and you don't always know what you don't need. And if there's one thing that I found out from Hurricane Sandy is what you don't need. A lot can get lost; yet, through many other chain-reactions you get the minimum of what you do need.

I'm still in the dark, and the building's electrical grids were under water, so even when the rest of the city came back on, and the furnace was destroyed and everything, I still had to stay with no lights and no electricity for almost the whole month of November, until everything came back on -- and stay there twelve to fourteen hours a day, because nobody was really communicating what I could and couldn't do, and what I could and couldn't need. So anything could happen. Anything. People were coming in, bringing donations. I had to stop trucks from coming to me, thinking that I had the means to distribute it. I was just overwhelmed by people's goodness, by their donations. I considered it was two

hurricanes. First there was the Hurricane Sandy; then there was the hurricane of good will -- [laughs] that people thought I had the capacity to do. I did everything I could, but it was not possible.

How did I eat and how did I survive, personally? Well, thank god for -- I was so busy coordinating my emergency response, and the clearing, and the hundreds of volunteers coming and going. It was like a madhouse. God might have said, "Be still and know that I am God," but boy, [laughs] I'll tell you, it was like a whirlwind of stuff that I had to coordinate, and match, and deal with. I was constantly having to do it all on my feet. The way I ate was the goodness of people who brought these trucks into Hoboken. They were these people -- they were like town criers. They would come around with notes from the city, and information on where all the food caches were; where food was being distributed; where you could get your cellphones charged. They would have to do it all on foot and bicycle. I would get these notices -- somebody, John Carey -- the most amazing person, and his wife, Sandra, stuck by my side through this. He was out and about, doing all kinds of connections, and bringing me this information. His wife was helping. We were at the "admin" of all this stuff. He also helped me set up my makeshift

headquarters upstairs. We just turned everything around, and borrowed furniture from the church that they didn't know they were lending us [laughs], just to set up everything. He was amazing.

So there were these food trucks that somebody -- I heard it was a retired cop, or a cop who came back to Hoboken -- and they were just constantly cooking. My husband would go out -- there was one by the park. One of the stations was by the park, so when we got hungry my husband would get on the line, and come back with whatever it was going to be for the day. I didn't get to see what was going on in the rest of the city, because I was stuck in my spot, in the unsecured building, with all this goodwill going on, all these donations. I had a guard in watch, and freezing, and going home to a totally dark house. I was already frozen for nine days, waiting and waiting for my block to get the electricity.

One night we had this store open on Sixth and Park. It was my first cold soda for days, and days, and days. [Laughs] And there was this other guy who, when he took his first sip and I took my first sip, we just looked at each other and said, "Yes!" I never thought I'd feel warmth [unclear] cold soda. You like cold soda. But when you're addicted to soda like I am (I'm drinking it right

now, Bob), that was really -- to run out of food completely -- because we did. We only had four days of food -- and be dependent, totally, on the coordination of all of this -- I don't know how to say anything else about that, except that they had the Frankenstein storm, the triple play -- a nor'easter, the high-tide, and the hurricane, and then I had the triple: I had the hurricane aftermath, followed by Thanksgiving and Christmas, in helping all the -- we ended up helping more people than we normally did .

But I didn't really have to -- In Jesus' Name has now recovered completely. Because of the donations of people, their goodwill and all, we were able to rebuild everything. I'm shortening that. I gave you the first week -- because that's what you wanted. Right?

BF: No, no, it's great. But I was going to ask you, are you, would you say, back to normal? Is your facility -- you have the freezers working, and you have electricity, and computers, and -- ?

AH: Everything was replaced. People's donations in cash, or money so I could purchase stuff -- I'm used to building everything and doing everything for everybody's donated castoffs. So, actually, when I actually

had to decide how the place should be rebuilt, and decide what to buy and all that, I found it actually hard. But, yes, I got everything. I got everything back, and more. We didn't rebuild the same structure down in the basement. We left the walls just white-washed cement. The church did, through the FEMA insurance and the archdiocese, they put the furnace back; the electrical; we redid the lighting. The church hired a contractor to put a few of the walls back so I'd have my office space, and Party With a Purpose bought me my contents. I bought all-metal cabinets on wheels [laughs], all-metal shelving -- just on the off-chance we flood again. But they actually put French drains and dealt with the fact -- now I don't think the basement is even going to catch the low-level flooding it used to.

I kept operating the ministry on the upper floor, makeshift. I rented storage places in public storage, and slowly drained all the donations back by priority impact to the hurricane, if it was hurricane-donated, and kept the ministry going, food-wise, at least, and clothing distributions. [Unclear] everything. I found that I'm not space-dependent. I'm kindness-dependent; that goodwill can go on without space, if you're connected.

BF: And obviously there's still a need for the service you're providing in Hoboken.

AH: Yes. I thought that went without saying. I'm back up to my normal visitation rate of 200 households a month. And what I did throughout the aftermath and the recovery was so varied, into so many different levels and people, that there's no way to categorize it. We had the hurricane response, and then we had the food-impact response, then we had who-needed-coats, who still needed to celebrate Thanksgiving. But what I found, too, was that the city did a great job in all the different -- everybody was poor during the hurricane. Every baby might be without formula. I think it was an eye-opener for me to find everybody in the same economic crisis, so we leveled back up again afterwards. And what people's impact was, and how it impacted the poor would be different than the different basements that were lost and stuff.

A nice response was somebody who coordinated a gift registry, so that the poor families who lost everything, in the [unclear] housing buildings, and the people who In Jesus' Name already knew, in their files, who actually [unclear] apartments were flooded -- we replaced all their contents. Not their big furniture, but all the

small things that are hard to replace -- because they would never have the money; whereas, people on other levels, who had jobs, and bank accounts, and credit cards would find it -- and different types of insurance -- would find it easier to replace.

So we did that. It was hard work. I'm glad it's over. [Laughs]

BF: And I hate to ask -- if there is a storm again, do you feel the ministry is better prepared?

AH: Oh, it would depend on what degree of storm. I could say that how I'm prepared is forewarned is forearmed. I would never put all my data in one place again. [Laughs] If it wasn't for the miraculous survival of the floating cards, I don't know -- my ability to respond to people couldn't have occurred. To not put as much wood down there and stuff. I don't want to believe there will ever be another storm like that. I really want to believe it's a once-in-a-hundred-year confluence of events. But we are prone to flooding. I've prepared by having metal, and not putting all my eggs in one basket. I'm still retaining storage units. But you know what the biggest thing I have faith in now? The civic community sense of responsibility

and care. I don't know what other people have said, but I felt that under the circumstances, they did above and beyond an amazing thing. You had a way to get what you needed. I didn't go hungry because of all those trucks. All kinds of goodwill things going on. I was only one. I was stuck in my location, and when you're blocked with -- for the first time I put a Facebook up, because I figured I had to tell people what not to bring me. [Laughs]

BF: Sure. What was the wildest thing that someone brought you?

AH: Evening gowns. As a matter of fact, I think I was losing my mind at that point. I had a white satin thing, and a very fancy -- it looked like -- and I thought -- I took it across to the parish's pastor associate and said -- oh, yes, that was the most wild thing. But I want to just say, from out of my prior relationship, I felt sort of -- I don't know how to explain it -- but convicted that -- how did I not know -- just like the gluten-free woman -- that there wasn't a woman who had a special occasion, among the more affluent in town, whose gown was lost. How I would find her, I don't know. But the thing is -- I was a little critical of that. But it may not

have been appropriate for somebody who had an important occasion, but it didn't get to them. I think I might still have it. Isn't that a good place to end? [Laughter]

HOBOKEN
HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, MARY HENRIQUES, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*. I understand that I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on October 29, 2012.

2. The interview will be audiotaped. In the interview I may be identified by name, subject to my consent. I may also be identified by name in any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview, subject to my consent.

3. I understand that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that a photograph of me may be taken or borrowed for duplication, and that if I withdraw from the project, the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to Hoboken Historical Museum, and that the information in the interview can be used by Hoboken Historical Museum in any manner it will determine, including, but not limited to, use by researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy will be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript.

6. I understand that at the conclusion of this particular study, the tape(s), photograph, and one copy of the transcript will be kept in the collections department of the Hoboken Historical Museum.

Interviewee Name: MARY HENRIQUES

Interviewee Signature [signature]

Address 737 PARK AVE

Telephone number: 201-600-3541

Date: 8/20/2013

Archives 2013.039.0012

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: LARRY HENRIQUES

INTERVIEWER: ALAN SKONTRA

DATE: 20 AUGUST 2013

AS: What is your connection to Hoboken? How long have you lived here? Approximately, where in the city do you live? Who do you live with? And what is your profession?

LH: Well, my connection with Hoboken is that I've been a resident for twenty-five years. I moved here in 1988. I live on Park Avenue between Seventh and Eighth Streets. I live with my wife, Diana, and we love being in Hoboken, and are concerned about the city, its citizens, and various aspects of Hoboken.

AS: You have a background in serving the community. Tell us about that.

LH: My profession -- which you asked before. I'm retired now -- but I worked for Johnson & Johnson for

thirty-four years. I spent my whole career there. When I retired in 2000, I had some time on my hands, and I wanted to get involved with the community to help where I could; to use my business experience in helping wherever I could. Before 2000, I just didn't have an opportunity, because I was working, I was traveling, and I just wasn't around much.

So when I retired the first thing I got involved with was the Hoboken Historical Museum as a trustee, and in a very short period of time I became the president of the board. I spent six years, I believe, doing that. Shortly thereafter I also joined the board of the Jubilee Center, which is an after-school program for children in public housing. Interestingly enough, I lived a few blocks from public housing, but in my working life I just never knew where it was, never got involved with it, didn't know anything about public housing and the residents there. And, I had biases, like many people do. When I started to get involved with the children from public housing, and some of the parents, I had a different perspective as to the challenges that both the children and the parents face.

So I got involved there, and became the chairman of that board. At both boards, both the museum and

the Jubilee Center, one of the major issues was fundraising -- raising money. I'm certainly not a professional fundraiser, but I did start to learn about fundraising and the need, in both organizations, to raise money. I got some education on it, we hired some consultants in the Jubilee Center to educate us and help us, so I used that experience to help raise money for both organizations. I spent about eight years with the Jubilee Center, in essentially a fundraising position. That's what the board did, whereas the museum board was more of an operating board, but also our primary responsibility was raising money.

So I really got, by accident if you will, involved with fundraising for those two organizations, which I felt were locally oriented, and they were organizations that made Hoboken a better place to live. Being a resident of Hoboken, I want to make it a better place to live, for the residents and from a selfish standpoint. It makes me prouder to be a Hoboken resident.

AS: When did you first hear the words "Hurricane Sandy?"

LH: I think it was about a week or two before the hurricane actually came. It probably was longer

than that. I think I was tracking it. I know there were rumors that it was coming. I've got an app on my phone that tracks hurricanes. I guess it was more than a couple weeks ahead of time that I heard that Sandy was potentially coming, and that there were forecasts that it might come into the area.

AS: What did you expect the storm to be?

LH: I expected it to be similar to previous hurricanes where there would be a lot of rain, a lot of wind, some minor flooding. Even up until it actually hit, I thought there would be a fair amount of rain and wind. I guess, as it got closer, the forecast for severe flooding came over the airwaves, but I don't think I really believed it would be as bad as it obviously was.

AS: Where were you when the storm hit?

LH: I was in my home.

AS: Did your home suffer any damage?

LH: Minor damage. I live on a block that has many garden apartments, which were devastated. The building that I'm in, the condo that I own -- the ground floor is about three feet above ground level, and there is no basement. The garage is at ground level, and I ended up with about a foot of water in the garage, but no damage to speak of. I did have about a foot of water in my back yard, also; but, yet again, no substantial damage.

However, all my neighbors on the west side of the street -- which is where I am -- were devastated. I watched, as the waters rose and started emptying down the steps into the garden apartments; just watched those fill up with four or five feet of water, and just destroyed them.

AS: When did you first leave your home to survey the damage? Where did you go? And what was your reaction?

LH: I essentially stayed on my block. My wife was not with me. She was traveling at the time, and couldn't get home. She was supposed to come home the day of the storm, and wasn't able to. She didn't get home until Thursday night. So I stayed at home, and walked around my

700-block to see what was happening. I saw the water rising that evening of the storm and the next day. It shortly thereafter started to recede, but there was plenty of water standing in the corners and on the street. Just walking up and down the 700-block of Park, you could see the devastation to individual apartments; they were just filled with water. In some of the buildings there were apartments for people's condos, or they were the kitchens of individual homes. They were just -- it was awful to see four, five feet of water sitting in what was a living space, an active space for individuals and their children.

AS: How did you pass the time in the days after the storm?

LH: I guess in part, in the first few days, it was a matter of trying to stay in contact with my wife, to assure her that everything was okay; to see if there was anything I could do in the neighborhood -- which there really wasn't much I could do; to make sure that my house was okay; to make sure there was no real damage to my house; and just to try to keep up-to-date with what was going on, both in the city and in the whole general area; just get an understanding of the severity of the storm.

AS: How did the Rebuild Hoboken Fund come together?

LH: That's an interesting question. Initially, it was, I believe, an individual named Rory Chadwick, who happened to see Mayor Zimmer in some setting, I'm not sure what, about Thursday after the storm, and wanted to do a fundraising for victims. If you remember, there had been a fire at 300 Washington Street, and seventeen families were displaced. Money was raised for them, and distributed to those families. Rory wanted to do a fundraiser, and the mayor thought that was a great idea. The following Saturday, there was a meeting that took place at City Hall, and involved in that meeting were both the mayor and Rory; Chris Mackin from the Rotary Foundation; Leo Pellegrini, who is the environmental services director; Juan Melli, who is the PR person; I think Dan Bryan, who's the chief of staff, was there; and, certainly, the mayor was there. Scott Delea, I believe, was also involved.

That was the origin. That was where they brainstormed what can we do, how do we do it, etc. From that a decision was made that there ought to be a formalized fund to raise money for victims, and about a

week or so later I was called by Scott Delea -- whom I have known from the past, and he has a charitable organization called Party with Purpose, and has raised money. I had been in contact with him about the Jubilee Center. And he was on the museum board for a while. So we had known each other through those organizations. He called me and asked me if I would be willing to participate in the Rebuild Hoboken Relief Fund.

So that was one step. After that meeting, a couple of things happened very quickly. One is, Scott set up a website for Rebuild Hoboken, an initial website, and Chris Mackin, who was on the Rotary Foundation, contacted the board and set up the Rotary, which is an already-existing 501(c)3, to accept charitable donations. Charitable donations started coming in immediately, evidently, to that PayPal -- it's a PayPal account. That happened right after this meeting. People said, "We have to raise money," but they weren't sure how to do it, or what was going to happen with it. But they decided that money needed to be raised, and donations came in immediately.

There was also a discussion about forming a board of trustees to manage the fund, and determine how to proceed. The sense was that they wanted to get individuals from all aspects of the community, so there were people

from various segments of the community, and I think I was chosen because of my experience on both the Jubilee Center and the museum -- plus, I have maintained a non-political stance as far as local politics -- which is always interesting but not a lot of fun. So I think the idea was to keep it non-political; that's hard, because everyone has some political affiliation. But I had pretty much had stayed away from that, so that was another reason, I think, that I was asked to be involved.

AS: What were your responsibilities on the board?

LH: Initially, I was the vice-chairman. Bernie Kenny was the chairman. There was an initial meeting in the middle of November -- I think November 15th -- and then there was an organization meeting on November 28th. Bernie Kenny's law firm, Florio & Kenny, volunteered their services, both to set up the board and to set up the 501(c)3. So we had good legal representation to carry us through that process. Bernie was the chairman, and I agreed to be the vice-chairman. In that function, I helped set up meetings, and organized the board for fundraising, and worked at fundraising. Some of the other members of the

board -- like the mayor was on the board, also -- but also, being the mayor, it was difficult to go into fundraising for this particular function, although she could make contacts and connections for it. For someone like myself, who was non-political, it was a much easier situation for me to be in, I think, to go out and try to raise money, and ask people for money. Also, from my experiences previously -- I had some ideas about how to organize, etc.

AS: What goals did the Rebuild Hoboken Fund have?

LH: The goal (and it took a little while to establish the goal) was to be transparent, number one; to be fair; to raise approximately $1 million, which was what we were shooting for. If we got more, great; if we got less, I guess that would be okay. But that's what we were shooting for. And to get the money to victims as quickly as possible. There are many charitable organizations that are very effective about fundraising, but, as you might know from the 9/11 Fund, and previous efforts to raise money for victims, it takes a long time for victims to get money. There are many lawsuits, and disagreements and so forth. So we wanted it to be fair, we wanted it to be quick, we

wanted to get money into the hands of people as rapidly as possible, and to do it with a minimum of confusion and misunderstanding. So when the money was distributed, everyone understood how we were doing it, how it was being distributed, and what the process was.

AS: What challenges did the fund face?

LH: Well, getting organized in a short period of time. It's not easy, setting up a 501(c)3. Again, fortunately, with Florio & Kenny working on it, it expedited that -- although it took to the end of January to actually become a legal 501(c)3. In the meantime, money was coming into the Rotary Foundation, and it wasn't until we were a legal foundation that we could accept that money from the Rotary Foundation.

So getting that going -- getting organized in a short period of time; contacting people, and coming up with the process for how were we going to distribute the money. What was the process going to be? That took a fair amount of time to establish. Then, how to communicate that? How do we get the word out about what the process is, so the community was aware of it, and that victims who were

affected by the hurricane could, in fact, apply and hopefully get some relief from the flood.

AS: How did the fund raise money?

LH: There were several ways it happened. Number one, there was a gala that was held in February, and a volunteer named Chris Mackin took responsibility for setting that up. That was a large fundraiser. In addition, there were local organizations -- restaurants and bars -- that had fundraising events, and they contributed the proceeds to the fund. Finally, the way to really raise money is to make individual asks; to go to organizations, individuals who have the means, and are supportive in the community, and ask them -- with a compelling story -- to make a donation. That's essentially the way we raise money. An example is Haven Savings Bank, a local bank, and John Wessling, the president, donated $250,000. That was because they were local; they'd been successful in Hoboken; they wanted to do something for Hoboken. It was not only John; their board had to approve it, and they did. They donated that money. They helped sponsor the gala, and there were several other organizations. The Robin Hood Foundation. We went to large foundations, and asked them for donations,

too. Some money came in unsolicited. Major-league baseball donated, I think it was, $50,000, just unsolicited. The check showed up. Individuals within town, who might not have been affected (some who were affected) made donations.

So it was an all-out effort. We identified all the businesses and various trustees were assigned to contact those businesses, to make an ask; to explain what the process was; what we were doing; what our objectives were, and how we were going to do it. It's a lot of work. You have to set up meetings with individuals, follow up and explain the process. Nobody likes to give money to an organization they don't understand. A lot of people don't like to give any money at all, to anything. So it takes a relationship. It's called cultivation -- cultivating the individual and the relationship; having them trust that we were an honorable organization; that we weren't spending any money. There was no administrative cost in the board. There was no hired staff. We were all volunteers. That was a compelling story, and I think for me, being on a block that had people devastated -- my neighbors, some I knew and some I didn't know, were totally devastated. I could tell people what the problem was. If you weren't affected by it, you were lucky. And if you were affected by it, it was a disaster, and it was a disaster of proportions that were

hard to imagine. Try to imagine coming home and finding five feet of water in the first floor of your house, with your kitchen, perhaps living room, and dining room just devastate. It's quite a shock.

So I was able, I think, to do that, as were others -- to get donations.

AS: How much money did the fund raise?

LH: It was over $1 million, when all was said and done, through all the various ways that I mentioned previously, in fundraising. Again, I think the large donations were primarily through individual asks. Several board members gave a fair amount of money, and we made the goal of $1 million. Actually, it was a little over that.

AS: How did the fund distribute the money?

LH: The process, which took some time to develop, decided that there would be an application process; that victims of the flood would have to fill out an application, identify what was destroyed, and the decision was made that we would award grants to victims who

lost more than $5,000, after any insurance -- whether it was FEMA, their own individual insurance, any other charitable donations, etc. So if your net loss -- if you lost $100,000 and the insurance covered $50,000, you identified that to us. Then you would be in the pot, if you will. If you couldn't identify that, or your losses were less than $5,000, then you were not eligible.

AS: Was the money distributed evenly, or on a per-case basis?

LH: It was distributed evenly. What we did is we took the total number of applicants -- which was close to $500 -- divided that into the total pot of money, and distributed it evenly. So we did not look at individual need. Once you get into that process (and some organizations do that), if you start asking people for tax returns, or what their job salaries were, etc., it's very complex, very controversial. Some of that information is private, one could argue, and it takes a long time to work through the process. We didn't have the staff or the desire to do something like that.

Again, one of the objectives was to get the money to victims as quickly as possible. There were

some people I know who were clearly qualified for the fund, but did not put in an application because they felt that there were other people who were more deserving. One of the issues we discussed was fraud, with people reporting fraudulent information to us. That's a difficult issues, too. Even insurance companies have to deal with fraud, and it's hard to eliminate fraud completely. Whether or not people were fraudulent -- I doubt it. I can't say that there wasn't some fraud. Where we thought there was -- and the process was that we had the Hoboken Clergy Coalition review all the applications. If there was a feeling that the information was suspicious, or they needed more, they would go back to the applicant and ask for more information. The clergy did reject some people, based either on lack of information, or what appeared to be inaccurate information, or could not get a response; could not get more information from the individual, when they asked questions. So there were some (and it was a very small number of people) who did get rejected. But, by and large, most people who applied were given grants.

AS: So out of the 500 applicants, you gave almost 500 awards.

LH: That's correct. I think there were twenty-some that were denied, so it was actually less than 500 that actually got the awards. We also decided to keep some money -- it was about $10-15,000 -- in reserve for the fund going forward, so that, in the future, we'd have some foundation to advertise, or if there was another disaster we could spring into action even more quickly, and figure out what we wanted to do in that situation.

AS: How much money did the gala raise? How many people attended, and what was the atmosphere there?

LH: There were about 400 people who attended, so it was essentially sold out. The gala -- it depends on how you look at it. There was sponsorship -- for example, Haven Savings was one of the major sponsors. They had given $250,000. If you included all the sponsorships, and some of the donations we identified as sponsors, then the gala raised about $500,000. If you take that out, one might argue that Haven Savings Bank would have made a donation whether there was a gala or not, but their money helped support the gala.

The gala cost about $60,000. Much of the entertainment, etc., was donated, but there were some basic

costs -- waiters, etc. -- that needed to be paid. The atmosphere was very upbeat and positive. It was expensive (because we were trying to raise money), and the proceeds were going to the victims. Obviously, not everybody could attend, but it was a very upbeat, positive event. I think it was good for Hoboken. Wherever we could, we tried to use local vendors to help support it, to try to support local businesses that were affected by the storm, and get them back on their feet, or help them get back on their feet.

So we tried to do everything we could to rebuild Hoboken, or help the rebuilding process.

AS: Based on the goals that you've previously outlined, do you consider the fund to have been a success?

LH: I consider it to be a magnificent success, for the reasons that we met the objectives. We organized amazingly quickly. We distributed the funds amazingly quickly. We did it with not much controversy. There were some people who might have been upset, but very few. I was talking with the Robin Hood Foundation, who had made a donation, and they were extremely impressed with how quickly we were able to organize. As a matter of fact, part

of the donation from the Robin Hood Foundation was that they wanted to come and (as they said) see our operation. Well, by the time we wanted to come -- first of all, we didn't have an operation; we had a board of seven people who did all the work. There was no office, per se. I said, "You can talk to the individuals," but the money was already distributed by the time they got in contact with me. I talked to the main contact there, and she was extremely impressed that we were able to do it so quickly. I think we got money into the hands of victims faster than any other organization.

There were some victims that it was a life-saver for. Some people who called me, that I spoke to, who wanted the money as quickly as possible, that they needed it and when was it going to come? -- again, we had to go through the process of when do we cut off donations? When do we say that was the amount we were going to donate. We have to have the checks cut. There were some 500 checks that had to be distributed, mailed -- all that had a cost to it -- and get them into the hands of the victims. That takes time; but, again, we did it very, very quickly.

So from all the aspects that we thought, all the goals we had set, it was a tremendous success.

AS: Are there any unsung heroes involved with the fund, whom you would like to thank or cite?

LH: Well, certainly, the seven board members -- without them, none of it would have happened. Certainly the mayor -- Mayor Zimmer -- was a driving force in the whole process. Once Rory had had that discussion with the mayor, she really pushed, I think, and supported the process wholly. She really cared. I know some people think that it's all about politics, but I saw her speak, and was with her a couple of times when she spoke to victims. She really felt the impact of it, I feel, and really wanted to help, not for political reasons but for humane reasons -- because they were citizens of Hoboken, she had a responsibility, and she wanted to help them. So I feel that she was a key part of it.

Bernie Kenny and his law offices -- we couldn't have done it without them -- or, we couldn't have done it, certainly, as quickly without them; or we couldn't have done it as cheaply, since they didn't charge of anything -- without them. So that was extremely important. The other board members -- Father Bob from St. Peter and Paul; Tony Tomarazzo; Scott Delea; Joe Mindak all contributed in many, many ways. We really came together as

a team. And I think the donors, the individual donors -- Haven Savings Bank -- who really wasn't looking for a lot of publicity. They were a primary sponsor for the gala, but they weren't looking for much in return. They made a huge donation to the fund, and really weren't looking for much in return. I think all the people who donated, there were some thousand people, over 1,000 people, making donations of some sort. There were school groups that sent in $5.00, did some kind of fundraiser in school -- sold cookies or whatever -- and sent in money. Girl Scout troops, etc.

So the community really, in my mind, came together -- as best it can. It's a very diverse community, and a lot of different interests, but it really came together in this event, to be supportive of both the fund and the victims, and tried to do all it could to help the victims.

AS: Is the fund still active?

LH: It's not active per se. We're not actively fundraising. One of the things that has happened is, additional money has come in after we had a cut-off. I'm not sure what the amount is. I think it's roughly $50,000 at this point. One of the decisions the board has

to make now is what to do with that $50,000. We are in the process, the board is in the process of discussing how do we act as a board, going forward? Do we continue actively fundraising, for some potential disaster? Do we sit back and wait for a disaster, and then spring into action, because we now have the model for how to do that, and we can do it even more quickly. I think the desire, certainly, is to keep the 501(c)3, active, so the board will continue to meet on a regular basis, at least several times a year. How much more active we'll be will depend on what the board decides, and that's being discussed now.

AS: So in the event of another disaster, do you see this fund, this group, reorganizing in some capacity, to get involved?

LH: Yes, I do. I personally see it, and I would think the board would agree at this point that if there were another Sandy, another event like that, that we would immediately go into fundraising mode; that the website, which is still active; the PayPal account, which is still active; the board is a functioning board. We would spring into action. Obviously, we'd review what we were going to do, and probably follow the same format. We would

probably have an event of some sort. We would certainly go out and make individual asks. We would ask people for donations, restaurants and bars to hold events for the fund, and go through the same process, because I feel the process worked very well. I think the board would agree with that.

Obviously, it's not my individual decision, it's the board's decision.

AS: How does the hurricane's aftermath and the fundraising after that impact you personally?

LH: Well, it certainly seems that the disaster that occurred to neighbors and other members of the community was impactful. You realize how vulnerable we all are. If anyone has any doubts about climate change -- certainly if I had any doubts -- it put them to rest. It's clearly here. The question, going forward, is what do you do? What's the solution? Is there a solution, and how do you minimize the impact of it? Do you move to higher ground? Do individuals move to higher ground? What do you think the chances are that it's going to happen again?

So it had a significant impact, the event itself, on me. The fundraising activity is fairly intense.

The board met on a weekly basis, for, I think, three or four months. Four months, including telephone calls and conference calls, and so forth. Many of us worked, really full-time. I remember having a conference call on Christmas day, just to make sure things were moving along. It was a very intense time, and fundraising for people that don't do it is not easy. It's not always a lot of fun, but the results are very rewarding.

So it's a draining exercise. I certainly hope we don't have another event soon, because it takes a little time to recover emotionally and psychologically, from the whole thing. But, certainly, if it happens again, I know a model that worked and was successful, and hopefully it would be successful again.

AS: What did Hoboken learn about itself, as a city?

LH: Boy, I'm not sure I can answer that question. From my perspective, it certainly seemed that, for a very diverse community, with very widely-held opinions on almost any conversation that you have, in any aspect of political life or city life, it showed that when the need was there the city could come together; that

people from all these diverse background and opinions could join hands together, and help neighbors. I think not only from the fund but all the other activity that took place -- the emergency response groups, the National Guard was here -- all the other organizations that helped out -- it was really quite remarkable, in my opinion. I think it just showed what people can do when they become unified.

There were things that could have been done better, I'm sure. There were people who might have been neglected who shouldn't have been. There's a lot to learn. I know the city is working on ways to try to minimize future floods, and the state and federal government. Hopefully, that will come together and help, but it's a significant issue that needs to be addressed. But I think the lesson learned is that if you really focus on something, it can get done. Unfortunately, it sometimes takes a crisis to make that happen. It would be better, obviously, if we could happen beforehand, to avoid the crisis, but that doesn't seem to be the way things work.

AS: Do you think Hoboken has recovered, and if so, was there a moment that made you think, "Hoboken is back."

LH: Well, if you look at the 700-block of Park Avenue, there are still people doing renovation. So, from that standpoint, no, it has not recovered. I think, though, there was a resiliency that, within a short period of time -- some businesses opened; some businesses stayed open during the flood. There were restaurants that gave food out, that were cooking food for people, free. They were giving it out free. If you look around town -- and I used to tell people -- in the first month or so after the flood, my street was just filled with trash bags. Every night the city would come through and take them away; or, maybe they had contractors doing that, but the fact is that it got removed. After that stopped, after a month or so, if you walked around, it would look like everything was normal. But if you looked down into the apartments that were flooded, it wasn't normal. They were vacant. They were empty. They were stripped. The floors were up, the siding was down, everything was removed from them. And that still exists. There are still renovations going on, at least on my block and I'm sure elsewhere.

Businesses I can't really comment on. It seems like they're okay, but a lot of them that I speak to or talk to still feel that it's not where it was. So there is a ways to go. But it appears that the real estate market

is doing well; that houses are selling. My neighbor sold his house for more than he was asking. I said, "Did you tell them there was a flood?" He said, "Yeah, I did. They knew about it. They still wanted it."

So Hoboken is still a very desirable place; so, from that standpoint, I think those are good signs, and that should help businesses, and hopefully help the whole community.

AS: Is there anything you would like to discuss that I didn't already ask about?

LH: No, not that I can think of. I think you covered the points that were important to me. Again, I can't thank and appreciate both the city government, all aspects of it -- not only the office of the mayor but all the police, and fire, and environmental services people who worked endlessly to get back to as normal as one could; all the businesses and all the individuals who donated their time, and their money, and their effort, to try to make things better for everybody. But I think you've pretty well covered everything that was on my mind.

AS: Thank you.

LH: Thank you.

HOBOKEN
HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, EDWARD MADIGAN, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*. I understand that I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on October 29, 2012.

2. The interview will be audiotaped. In the interview I may be identified by name, subject to my consent. I may also be identified by name in any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview, subject to my consent.

3. I understand that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that a photograph of me may be taken or borrowed for duplication, and that if I withdraw from the project, the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to Hoboken Historical Museum, and that the information in the interview can be used by Hoboken Historical Museum in any manner it will determine, including, but not limited to, use by researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy will be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript.

6. I understand that at the conclusion of this particular study, the tape(s), photograph, and one copy of the transcript will be kept in the collections department of the Hoboken Historical Museum.

Interviewee Name: EDWARD MADIGAN

Interviewee Signature: [signature] TH

Address: 63-11

Telephone number: 201 486-3125

Date: 8/7/2013

Archives 2013.039.0013

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: EDWARD MADIGAN

INTERVIEWER: BOB FOSTER

DATE: 7 August 2013

Track #1

BF: I'm sitting here with Eddie Madigan, inside the Elks Lodge Room, on Wednesday, around 7:30, on the seventh of August, 2013. Ed, if you could introduce yourself again.

EM: My name is Ed Madigan. I'm a Hoboken resident, and have lived in the town the better part of my life. I basically live within a four-block radius. I went to school here. I've gotten a lot from this town as far as the community and the experiences I've had growing up, and just want to give back. That's what I do. I do.

BF: If you could tell us again what you do for the Elks.

EM: Right now I'm listed as the house chairman, but I do many other functions, from fundraising, to cooking in the kitchen, to painting, sweeping, mopping, doing whatever is necessary in an organization such as this, because it is all volunteers.

BF: And when you're in full gear, what type of hours are you putting in?

EM: In busier times of the year, we could be putting in twenty to twenty-five, depending on what's going on. At some points, a little less -- ten -- but you field a lot of phone calls from people looking to use the hall, etc.

BF: So you would be in charge of booking the hall --

EM: Correct.

BF: -- and all those questions, which are endless, I'm sure.

EM: Correct.

BF: Tell us a little bit about how the storm affected you on the home front. What were you first concerns when you saw the storm kicking in.

EM: My first concerns were always of my sister, who is somebody who needed assistance because she is physically disabled. She needed oxygen; so, in that situation, we needed power; but, like many others, there was no power. A shelter was not something I really was comfortable with her, in her medical state, so we needed to get her to a fellow family-member's home, and that pretty much happened within twenty-four hours after the storm had hit.

BF: And once that happened, what was the next stage?

EM: Literally, after I had dropped off my sister and my niece at my other sister's home, I was back in Hoboken. I went back to her house to check on two of her neighbors. She made me promise. There was a woman there who was eighty-four, and there was another woman who was in her seventies that I had to go check on. They were okay. Then

we got them to their family members. Then the ball started rolling at the Elks. Emails were sent out, phone calls were starting to be made. Jason Maurer, at the time, was the exalted ruler. He really started the ball rolling as far as getting the ground work out of -- he initially went out and bought a couple-hundred pounds of pasta, just pasta, and people started cooking it up. By the time I had gotten back, we were just putting out pasta. It was the beginning of something that turned out to be pretty amazing.

BF: Tell me more.

EM: Well, one thing led to another. The pasta turned into various donations, that were literally coming in from everybody and anybody. It was people coming by from their houses, dropping off small portions of meat and breads, to churches down the block that came in and dropped off chicken. As far as proteins, I think we were the beneficiary because we were one of the first people really up, and we had a real good organizational system working. Everybody knew their role, we went into the role, and it wasn't a matter of somebody being a dictator; it was more we all just kind of fell in where we knew we had to be.

BF: Do you think that's partly because you're used to working together?

EM: It definitely helped. I've been in the restaurant business for many years, so as far as the kitchen -- everybody here generally knows to just leave me to my devices and it will work out. But it wasn't a one-man or one-woman job, it was a multitude of people who came in from [unclear] starting it to other volunteers, such as Tom Foley, Bill Noonan, there was a woman, Carol Hickman, who has since become a member. Various members of the community who never really stepped into the Elks realized what was going on, and people just wanted to help. People were really just out there wanting to help. They were volunteering their time, their effort, and other people were bringing in goods and things of that nature. When the goods started to flow in, it was pretty wild. It was pretty amazing, the amount of donations we were getting. By the first night, we basically had depleted our inventory of food, and then it just snowballed, where there were companies were delivering, whether it was to schools or to various institutions -- these institutions were closed, so now they had cases of bread. Bread companies had already

made their bread for the week, and nowhere to deliver to. So we became a drop-off center. That was due to the mayor, the OEM group, etc., and once that happened -- somebody showed up with literally twenty cases of [unclear] rolls. Another company dropped off frozen goods -- green beans, carrots, and potatoes. Now we had the signs, so to speak. We had your vegetable and your starches, we had pasta. Then proteins kind of came in. That was our biggest concern, believe it or not. We had plenty of starch, we had vegetables -- which would have been suitable in any situation. You're hungry, you'll eat. And we did. But we started getting deliveries from -- there was a church on Ninth and Bloomfield, and they had chicken that was going to go bad. I shouldn't say it that way; I apologize. It wasn't going to go bad, but it would have gone bad before they could use it, so they needed to find a home for it. They did, and it was good chicken. We cooked it, and that happened. The donations, from breads, to rolls, to these vegetables, to pasta -- there wasn't a moment when there wasn't a protein, a starch, a vegetable, and a soup, and a pasta, at all times. We were feeding people here at the Elks, at any point from 9:00 in the morning until about 9:30 at night. We were feeding people. People stayed. We didn't ask them to leave. But we had no electricity here,

either. We were actually cooking with Christmas lights that we had run from an extension cord from one of our members, Dale Monaco and Lenny D'Elia. They live on Hudson Street. They had power. Their electric bill for the following month was probably a little more than they bargained for. But we ran power from their home, with extension cords, to keep our refrigerators going.

So we were cooking with Christmas lights, and that was it. This entire hall, if you go around the rim, was Christmas lights, white Christmas lights. People just came in, and it became an area where people could come, congregate, and be with others who were in the same boat. Not only would they eat here, people would take food home. We let them take food home. We were sending meals down to two senior centers, to City Hall, where the National Guard was. We were feeding them. The shelters we were feeding, seniors, and feeding people here. And if anybody called and asked for food, we found a way to get it to them. We had guys like Tom Foley put it in his van. He works for the city, and he made sure that seniors were being fed in different areas -- because that's what Tom does: takes care of people.

It was truly the best of times and the worst of times. It was a bad thing that happened, but from it so

much good came. It showed how resilient a town this is, and when push comes to shove, people can really be good. Things were terrible all over this tri-state area, and some areas still are pretty bad. But in this situation, this town was up, running and moving quicker than anybody would ever have imagined. I think it was a benefit that many of us didn't have TV and radio, because we didn't know how bad we were. Everybody kept calling on their cellphone, when you weren't trying to charge it somewhere, telling you how bad it is. I had multiple people from work, "Come stay with me." I just felt compelled to be here -- no heat, no electricity. That was a mild slap compared to what many people have endured. You can put a blanket on. You can get by, and you did.

The donations -- I got off topic. I apologize -- but the donations -- there was a point where social media came into it. I've never been the biggest social-media guy, but it came in -- there were a couple people -- Ryan Mitchell from the Hoboken chamber, Councilman [Unclear], a couple of other people put things out there, whether it was their Facebook page -- Hoboken Happenings page -- the Hoboken Chamber. Bryan asked me what do I need and I just told him, "I need protein. I've got everything else, but if you want to get me protein." He asked me what, and I said, "Just get me chicken. Get me

heads of chickens, get me whole chickens, I'll butcher them up, and we'll make this work." Sure enough, he came in one day and he had about 320 pounds of chicken. Everybody was going, "Oh, that's amazing." And it was amazing. It was great. But for what we were putting out, it would have gotten through a day. Then the next thing I know, the emails from the Hoboken Happenings site, people saw that, whether it was a Facebook page, or Twitter, etc. I don't even know. But we got another 300 pounds. We were cutting chicken, butchering it, and all the while it wasn't like it was a lunch hour. Food just continually flowed. It got to the point where the National Guard was now coming up here to eat, on shifts. It's hard to imagine. The gourmet cheese shop, and he's bringing in these gourmet cheeses. We were making soups, and when I say "making soups," I was making in the neighborhood of forty to sixty gallons of soup a day -- soups and chilis -- all food-donated product. It's truly -- I can go on about it, and I can tell people about it, but people don't understand that I was really fortunate. My job was so understanding with what I was doing. They actually said -- because the whole area was shut down from four to six days, no matter where you were. But even on the weekend they told me, "Just stay where you are. You're doing more good where you are." So I was fortunate that I

had employers who were just so kind and understanding. I've been with them for years. It was fortunate. So it worked out for everybody. I know I went on, because --

BF: I'm not saying anything because I want you to go on.

Any idea of how many people you served?

EM: Well, to get an actual count -- nobody was standing here with a clicker. Rumor has it that we're talking over 5,000.

BF: When did you start? What day did you start, do you think?

EM: I'm trying to remember. It was late Tuesday, early Wednesday, I think. I believe it was early Wednesday. We went from Wednesday to Wednesday. So we cooked for eight days.

BF: So you say maybe 5,000.

EM: Minimum. It's hard to put a number on it. Because we were just sending trays of food out --

literally sending a chafing dish or hotel pans full of food. People would call up, "Can we have some food?" At a time like that, I was very fortunate to have the years of knowledge that I have in food, and people here to help. There were people organizing food, people delivering food. It just became its own entity, and I think it worked out well because the powers that be needed to be focused somewhere else. I think nobody believed we could do what we did, but once they saw it, then I think it was a burden off people's back. I truly feel that. You didn't have to worry about, "Okay, well, this soup kitchen is feeding a couple of people, they're doing a couple of people, and the Red Cross is coming in with the ready-to-heat meals," which are, hey, they're great. What the Red Cross did was phenomenal. But if you can put some really warm food into some people's bellies, there's something to be said about comfort. And that's what it was: it was comfort food.

BF: You've got to start somewhere.

Yes, to me it was just amazing that as you walked down Washington Street, it was dark, it was shut down, it was pretty bleak. Then you'd walk through these doors, and it was like all of Hoboken was here.

EM: It was people -- I don't use the term -- I use the term people who have maybe just moved in, or people who have been here a long time -- I've never been a guy who would use the, quote/unquote "born and raised." I don't particularly care for it. It was people who were here for forty years and people who were here for four years. I met some people -- all of a sudden I see them on the street, they see me, it's a hello. You go somewhere -- I have a pretty big list of people I know in this town, but it expanded, and it expanded in a good way, from neighbors who lived two doors down, who never really set foot in the Elks Club, who were here, to people who came into the Elks and didn't know what the Elks was about. They just kind of had the idea that the Elks was a place for middle-aged men to congregate and have a couple beers, in the quote/unquote "old man's" world. People didn't understand that what we do is this: we give back to charity. These are charitable endeavors. It's a benevolent organization. That's what we're here to do, is to give back. Our primary care is to give back to handicapped kids. That's what the Elks are known for.

I found out something that I didn't know -- that the Elks are actually the second biggest donator to charity in this country. I thought, "Wow," when I heard

that. Tom actually told me that, and Tom's been here so long. He's on his second stint as the exalted ruler. He did it twenty years ago; now he's doing it again this year, because it stepped in to do it. That's what we've been trying to do. Membership has been on the rise in this club. That really brought to light what we're about, and it's not, quote/unquote a "good old-boys" club. It's a place where, "Yeah, you can come down and play pool, and play ping-pong, or have a beer, or have a soda, do whatever you want -- watch a ballgame and just sit; or, you can get involved in, say, how can we help others out, whether it's can we raise money for the Hoboken Ambulance Corps? Can we raise money for the American Legion, which was wiped out -- which we did. We started our own Sandy fund, and we donated to the Hoboken Ambulance Corps; the food pantry on Third and Bloomfield; St. Matt's church, with Mark Singleton, who does a world of good; to the American Legion; to the Hoboken Catholic schools; to teachers who lost all of their little things. We donated to the teachers, so they can buy a little decoration for their schools, and make their schools, when they do come back next year -- which will be a good thing -- they will be able to do that.

We raised somewhere in the neighborhood of $25-30,000 that we gave out privately, and that's not

counting things that people found out, like, "Wow, you guys do that?" We gave that money. We give scholarships out to kids all the time. That's what it's about -- giving back to the community.

BF: Going back to the storm -- I think what was amazing to me is how quickly you reacted. Because most people were thinking about their home, their car, whatever it was, and how do I get out of here? Should I stay and assess damage. You guys went into full force here. It did take a while for the Red Cross to get here, or the National Guard. It was almost at the end of the week until you saw a lot of that -- the power was still out. But you guys were, in a sense, feeding the town within twenty-four hours.

EM: Correct. This is true. And I think a lot of that realization comes to us that it's a good core of people, who understand about giving back. There's a good core of people who have talent; everybody has a different talent or niche. Find what you do well, and that's great. So people will get on the email and get people down here. Then when people are down here, then they need direction. When you can give people direction in ways like -- everybody wanted to help.

That was the other thing. There was such an outpouring of people who came to help. People who just, "Hey, I got two hours. I can help." There may have been twenty people, fifteen people who showed up throughout every day. But then there were other people who came in, "I've got five hours." We had people who came from West Virginia. We had people who came from the Upper East Side of Manhattan. These are people who had nothing to gain, so to speak, because it didn't help somebody else. But finding your niche. We were fortunate I said, again, becoming a drop-off station. We were also fortunate because we have the space, and we have the facilities to do something of this size. This is a big building, it's a big room. But, in the same breath, we realized what we could do. There were other places where it could be done on a smaller scale. But this was about giving back, and we opened our doors for people to come in, and they didn't just come in to eat and go. Some people came in to eat, stay, talk, visit, talk to other people with similar feelings. Whether they were good feelings or bad feelings, they got to air out their emotions, so to speak. Then other people came in and stayed. They stayed and they helped, whether it was sweeping at the end of the night, mopping, making sure that there were paper towels in the men's room and the ladies'

room, cleaning mirrors. There were some volunteer arts and crafts people who came in, and they literally became a small little school, and they were teaching kids on the side, over here. People came in. Everybody was good. There was no whining, there was no -- people understood. Everybody here understood. Your problem was not worse than the person next to you. Maybe it was, but everybody was in the same boat.

BF: And like you said before -- it was a great equalizer. It kind of made everyone forced to be around each other and talk, whether you didn't know each other or --

EM: -- whether you lived in a brownstone or you lived in a tenement, or whether you lived on a top floor or a bottom floor. If you had no power, you had no power. You all were without, and when you came here you weren't without anymore. You were here with friends, with new friends, old friends, people whom you made acquaintances. Some people made friends, I'm sure, and some people, hopefully, continued to be friends from that situation.

Every night we talked about it being dark outside. Every night when we got done, about 11:00, I would go for a walk. Each night I would walk with different people, just to kind of soak it in, what it was about. The first night I walked with my friend Bill Anderson. I hadn't seen him for a while, but all of a sudden he was cooped up, he wanted out and I wanted out, even though I was here all day. And we walked. We walked to Washington Street, and it was eerie. It was dark, but it was such a bright night, the second night. It was dark on the ground, it was dark because of the buildings -- it was like you were in a canyon -- but if you looked up, the moon was as clear and the sky was as clear as could be. That was the only little bit of ambient light you had. You walked down Washington, just taking it in. We walked up to the waterfront, and we walked down. There was just silence. It was like we were the only two people in the town.

Each night I would take a different route, to see, okay, who's got electricity tonight? In what area? Did Garden Street get it? Did Park Avenue? Was the hospital up yet? Was this area done? Had any of the waters receded? Not to assess the damage, but really just to take in the town, because we wouldn't have a beginning of how to assess the damage. I just knew it was damaged.

BF: Right. And, like you said, in some respects it was a great week. You had a purpose. You're making people happy. It's sort of an adrenalin rush, to a degree, that kept you going for the next day.

EM: Absolutely. It was a rush, feeding people. I've done large-scale things where I've fed lots of people, but doing it on a shoestring; doing it with what we had -- it was amazing. It was wild. You started feeding people, and people were so appreciative. They were thanking me. They just wanted to poke their head in the kitchen and say thank you. It meant more coming from them than it did from other people, for me. Anybody who thanks you, you should be appreciative; by the same breath, I didn't do it for the thanks. You do it because you want to do it. The one thing you have to give, that you can give to somebody, that nobody else can -- it's your time. I learned that from my mom, and it's big. Everybody can donate money, everybody can do this, but if you can give of yourself, there's nothing more that you can do. There's nothing more sincere than giving your time to a cause or a charity.

It was good, like you said. I was here every morning at 8:00. People might not have been showing up.

We'd tell everybody, "What time are you coming in tomorrow?" Everybody would always ask me. I would say, "Just come in about 10:00. It's okay. Come by about 10:00." But I was here between 7:30 and 8:00, because that's how I am. I wanted to make sure everything was set; that coffee was ready for people -- for everybody -- for the people who were volunteering, as well; that they got a hot cup of coffee, or something like that. I think it was good. I don't know. I don't drink coffee. But it was good stuff. [Laughter]

BF: Well, let's put it that way: it was the best coffee in town that week.

EM: True, true, true. You got to meet so many, various people. I was fortunate. I met some people -- and I'm normally a back-of-the-group person. I'll do the work and have fun; I'm not, honestly, somebody who does things like this. I volunteer and I'll do everything, but I don't need adulation or admiration. I do it because it's the way I was brought up. I got so much from the town, like I said earlier, and that's why I do what I do.

But from the leaders of this town, from the mayor, to the council people, to locals who are busy in the

area, to meeting the Director of Homeland Security, to the governor, to senators. It was interesting. You're meeting these people and you're talking to them. You meet the governor. When am I going to meet the governor? I'm not a political guy.

BF: Remind us about that. It was toward the end of the week?

EM: It was on a Sunday, actually. It was a Sunday.

BF: Did we have power back by then?

EM: We got power back literally about twenty minutes before they got here.

BF: A coincidence?

EM: [Laughter] Perhaps. You know, but we got the power back on that Sunday, and it started coming back more and more. But meeting these people --

BF: And you're pretty tired at this point, too, doing the whole week.

EM: Honestly, no. I've got a lot of stamina, I can go -- I'm a person who needs to be active. So I can go on very little sleep for long periods. Like you said earlier, you had the adrenalin rush. I had the purpose; I needed to do this. I started it, I wanted to finish it. I wanted to finish it well.

It was captivating, meeting some of these people. Like I said, from the senators -- he's deceased now, but Frank Lautenberg. Senator Lautenberg. Incredibly charming. Tremendous -- a great line he had. He goes through the buffet, and at that point someone had dropped off short ribs, and somebody had dropped off flank steak. I had made beef stroganoff; I cooked it down, and it was good. It was very good. He ate it, and he made a point -- he came in, and he goes -- I'm trying to understand -- and he did use the term: "I've been to many smorgasbords." I kind of chuckled. And he goes, "But this is very good." Graciously, I said, "Thank you very much." He goes, "No, no, no. This is *very* good." He made a point.

As I said, the governor could not have been more charming. I got to speak to him, and when he was

speaking to me, I should say, I truly felt like I might have been the only person in the room. He sat there -- he's got that personality -- and I'm born in Hudson County, so I don't need to go any further. But yes, he was that charming. Senator Menendez -- same thing. The Director of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano -- same thing. Also, at the same point, you see their secret service come in, and you have a little trepidation, of "I'm not going to move." Her secret-service agent asked me, quietly, "Are they all your tools?" By tools, he meant my knives. I said, "Yes, they are." And he goes, "You can keep them out, leave them on the board, and keep your hands on the table." I was like, "Wow!" And I listened. [Unclear] The cheese-monger, so to speak, whom I spoke of earlier -- he did the same thing, when he tasted the food, he kept making comments, like, "No, no, this is *good*." And I said, "I understand. Thank you." He goes, "No, no, no, you could charge for this. You could make money." I was like, "That's not what it's about." He was making a polite compliment.

So we were giving out food that was truly -- it was restaurant-quality food.

BF: And a good restaurant.

EM: Yes. Absolutely. Absolutely. There were reporters from all over. Naturally, locally, from TV, that were here. Various TV reporters were here throughout the week. They were interviewing you while you were cooking. Some of them weren't as pleased, because I won't stop while I'm cooking. I said, "If you want to talk, we'll talk and go about our day." Most of them, they were all very good. They said, "Go ahead, [Unclear]." I said, "I'm not going to stop. So you'll get a picture of the back of my head." "That's okay." But there were other people in there. I said, "Talk to them." There were other people who were willing to talk, and spoke very well, from Sherry "Parasino," [phonetic] to Carolyn Hickman. "Do you need the other [unclear]." I said, "Please, speak to them. They're in here. It's not just me, stirring the pot. There are other people here."

BF: But you were the main cook.

EM: Yes.

BF: You were the chef. You ruled the kitchen.

EM: People listened to me. "Ruled" is a tough word, but yes. People definitely sought out my advice, and I pretty much -- yes. I did say, "This is how we're going to do it." I expedited everything that was coming out. But as food came in, we set it up where the people I spoke of -- the Sherrys, the Carolyns -- there was a gentleman named Rega, who was born in Hoboken. He was up in Boston. His mom is a senior citizen. He's a gentleman who worked in kitchens his whole life. He came down because he wanted to check on his mom, and once he realized his mom was okay, in a senior building, he came up here. People like that -- it doesn't work with one person; you need all of them. He would break down [unclear]. Other people would say, "What do you need?" "Well, cut this up. Show somebody how to cut it up."

Okay. Now we had everything cut, so when we needed to make something -- in ten minutes I could make a thirty-pound pot of food.

BF: So you cooked with gas.

EM: Correct.

BF: Then you had a little bit of power from the extension cord from Monaco. Then eventually you got another generator?

EM: We got a generator. The generator was used as a charging station. It didn't do any lights in here. The generator became more of a charging station --

BF: -- for people's cellphones.

EM: People's cellphones, their computers, and it was needed. Because we were okay cooking with the Christmas lights. It actually kind of fueled the fire, so to speak; it made us want to keep going. The amount of people charging their cellphones, like I said, from the extension cord in the back, to here -- we were fortunate, again. Jason was involved in that, and we were able to procure a generator from a fellow [unclear] who works with the city, as well -- Ricky Repetti. And because we became so big, they had no problem giving it to us.

But that generator stayed outside, all night.

BF: I remember.

EM: It was wonderful to have it. It was great, because it provided such power that other people could then communicate with their families, and let everybody know, "We're okay," whether it was sending them texts, tweets, pictures, and letting people stay in touch with the outside world.

BF: And let them know where the best food in town was.

EM: Perhaps. [Laughter

BF: Do you remember the week afterwards? Did you kind of crash at a certain point? Or did you get out of town? Was there a void, from transitioning?

EM: No, it wasn't a void. Actually, it took a couple days, because we actually still had some food. We had so many donations, that we were trying to find homes for it.

BF: Most people got their power back by Sunday.

EM: The bulk of the town -- I was going to say maybe about 70% of the town was probably back on Sunday. Correct me if I'm wrong. But even at that, there was still nowhere to *buy* food. Because the A&P was closed and out of product. Shoprite was decimated. The A&P could not have been nicer. John Bincoletta, who's the manager there -- just his acts of kindness, what I saw him do for certain people -- really touched me. So many adults needed adult products, and he was just, "Take it." Whatever people were needing -- if somebody walked in and needed something that wasn't food -- he couldn't give them food because the shelf-life was tough on it. But if it was a [unclear] product -- "Here." So seeing certain things that he did was great. But, as I said, the Shoprite was done. All the small stores couldn't sell their product because now they'd been out of refrigeration for a week, and all of the larger warehouses in the area -- again -- couldn't get their product into town.

So we were getting things back a little at a time, but we weren't fully functional. We were probably running at about 60-70%. I know toward the latter part of the week, by Sunday, you couldn't find chicken anywhere in a twenty-five mile area, and you couldn't drive more than

twenty-five miles, because you couldn't get gas. So people who had got out of Dodge, so to speak, weren't coming back yet, and the people who were here weren't moving their cars. You could find a parking space anywhere you wanted; you just didn't want to drive there.

BF: Or you had to find your car because it floated away.

What about -- do you remember anything particular from the week after? Once you stopped?

EM: The thing I remember most is finally going back to work, and when I went back to work -- I work in restaurants, so what were we doing but feeding people? Which was interesting. But so many people, clients I knew, all knew I lived in Hoboken, so I had to rehash the story. I found it wonderful to tell the story, but I didn't want to leave things out, but every time you'd tell it you would miss something. I was like, "Oh, I forgot to tell them about So-and-So. I forgot about this." And you didn't want to forget anything, because you wanted everybody to know what the town went through from its lowest point to how well we came back, at the high point. When you told the story -- you would tell it -- I would tell it to the people

I work with, to purveyors who came in, customers who came in and knew this, to family members, and friends. I didn't go on my computer. I didn't check my emails or anything like that. I was here.

BF: Well, it's true. Most people hear about what's happening in your town, like they're hearing the news in Hoboken, and we just see that one moment of the worst. That's frozen in their memory. You can put it in context, with sort of the good spirits that came from it, too. So you don't want to leave those out, negative.

EM: I mean, it was Halloween. Again, there was a patch on Eleventh Street that had power, because in some quirky way, they're on a grid for Union City. Mr. and Mrs. Calligy -- when they say lifelong residents -- Mr. Calligy has since passed --

BF: On Eleventh Street.

EM: Correct -- and Audrey -- Mrs. Calligy was my eighth-grade teacher and an amazing woman. I know the family. That's Tom Foley's mother-in-law and father-n-law. So we went over to their house for a moment, on

Tuesday, and they had power. I think it was Tuesday. Maybe it was Wednesday. I don't even remember. Whatever Halloween day was, we stopped for a moment. And Mrs. "Callaghi" had all her Halloween treat bags made up. So even though they were pulling their extension cord out like everybody else on Eleventh Street, any little kid who walked by, Mrs. Callaghi was still handing out Halloween treats to. That's what made me proud to be from this town. I've been blessed to have been taught by people like that; been coached by her husband; and to be friends with her children. It really put things in perspective of I've been pretty fortunate in my life to have had some really nice people around.

BF: That's sort of a good ending.

Is there any other experience you want to reflect on? Do you meet people on the street that you connected with during that time?

EM: Oh, yeah. I've met people that I've connected with. I've met people that I connected with afterward, in a way from it. There was a CERT class that was taught -- you know, Community Emergency Response Team, taught by Lou Casciano, Tommy Molta, [Unclear], Maggie Shields. These gentlemen and women put this class together,

and they actually did it downstairs, here. And I said, "You know, this sounds like something I'd like to be a part of. Or at least know what's going on." I would through the class. It was a ten-week class. It was every Tuesday night, for a couple of hours, like three hours every Tuesday. In their first class, Lou said, there were like fourteen, fifteen people who took it; after the storm -- the class started in January, right after the New Year. There were seventy-seven people, I believe, in the class, who went through this training.

So that in situations like this, it's a community emergency response. So I've met people like that. Like Lou Casciano, who puts a wealth of hours into the ambulance corps, and what they did, and Tom Molta. What these guys do is amazing. I got to meet so many different people. Everybody would say -- give introductions -- who you are and what you do, and you were meeting people who were pharmacists who became makeshift -- not makeshift. They were pharmacists, and they were doing what they could do to get seniors their meds -- to people who were just going around knocking on doors, making sure that people *had* their medications. I met people -- it still comes up from time to time -- there are times that I still think about it. Yes. You think about it, but as bad as everything

happened, a lot of my memories are positive from it. And that's bizarre, maybe, to some, but some good came from the bad. I know people, I had friends, family who had houses down at the shore that were just decimated, they were lost. But they were here. They lost their home down at the shore. They're sitting -- they're not even sitting in their home because they have no power. They're flooded here. Their house down at the shore just burned down, and these people are here. My friend's buddy, Janice Matthews -- they're here, volunteering.

So, again, it kind of goes back to people that you meet in your life that you're fortunate. A buddy who was a camp counselor of mine, he was a group counselor at the YMCA when I grew up -- he was my counselor as a young boy. He taught you how to play baseball. He's taught so many kids. And here's this guy, still giving back. He's a retired person, and he's still giving back. So when you see things like that, it puts a little warmth in your heart and makes you smile.

BF: Definitely.

Okay. Should we conclude?

EM: I'm good.

BF: Okay. I think you did a great job.

Track #2

BF: -- pretty amazing.

EM: As we also said, as we did the conversation -- I'm telling this story, and I can envision it in my mind -- and you just said the same thing -- of how not only we were literally brought back to that week. My week was probably in a smaller area, but I can still see the people, the faces, everybody who stopped in and said hello, to every aspect of this hall at the Elks, where it was basically like a big TV show or a big stage, where it all happened for me, the whole week. It was here. Knowing how people walked in, how they talked about what they did the night before; when they went home; how they laughed. We had just laughs all day. It's vivid in my mind. So whenever I rehash the story, the picture comes with it.

BF: I think also, since you went into action so quickly -- like everyone -- I think people are basically good and they want to help out, but they don't know how to do it. They don't know how to focus it. So something like

the CERT is a great way to set something up, so when something happens you know what to do. That would be the same that you guys did, because you're an organization already. You know each other, and you have the place. You've got the kitchen, and you can focus it all here.

EM: I agree. We have the tools where we can make it happen. The CERT has now become something that can make something happen. I took the CERT class, and, ironically, if something ever happened, if it quote/unquote, "hit the fan again," I probably wouldn't be with the CERT group. I would be right here, doing what I do best -- feeding people, making sure people are taken care of.

Now if that weren't the case, and I needed to be outside, then I would do that. But if it happened again, more than likely -- we talked about knowing your niche -- my niche would be here. This is where I could do the greatest good, instead of telling somebody, "Don't walk down that block. How about walk up this block, and we'll feed you."

HOBOKEN
HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, THOMAS F. MOLTA, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*. I understand that I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on October 29, 2012.

2. The interview will be audiotaped. In the interview I may be identified by name, subject to my consent. I may also be identified by name in any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview, subject to my consent.

3. I understand that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that a photograph of me may be taken or borrowed for duplication, and that if I withdraw from the project, the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to Hoboken Historical Museum, and that the information in the interview can be used by Hoboken Historical Museum in any manner it will determine, including, but not limited to, use by researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy will be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript.

6. I understand that at the conclusion of this particular study, the tape(s), photograph, and one copy of the transcript will be kept in the collections department of the Hoboken Historical Museum.

Interviewee Name: THOMAS F. MOLTA

Interviewee Signature Thomas F Molta

Address 10 Church Towers 7K, Hoboken, NJ 07030

Telephone number: 201-704-7320

Date: 8/15/2013

Archives 2013.039.0014

HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: TOM MOLTA

INTERVIEWER: EILEEN LYNCH

DATE: 15 AUGUST 2013

EL: This is Eileen Lynch, and I'm speaking with Tom Molta. He is the president of the Hoboken Volunteer Ambulance Corps. Tom let's get started. One of the things I want to ask you to talk about is when you first became aware that there was going to be a giant storm, and what were some of the preparations, if any, that the Hoboken Volunteer Ambulance Corps started to take.

TM: Our first notification was probably the Tuesday or Wednesday prior to the storm. We were following the weather forecast. It started to ramp up, and we saw that -- they were saying that we were probably going to get a direct hit. The first thing we did was we made sure that all three of our ambulances were in working order. The medical vendor that we deal with for our supplies is [Unclear], right here in "Kearny," so we had ordered additional supplies. We overstocked our ambulances

somewhat. We also had our Special Operations team come in the Thursday before. We made sure all our tents were in working order; we made sure that all our oxygen was filled. Standard preparation. In our building, we made sure that we had battery-powered flashlights issued to our members, in the event of power failures. As it started to get closer, we were included in all of the meetings with the city -- with the Office of Emergency Management, the mayor, and you started to see, as -- a lot of people, having gone through Irene the year before -- a lot of people were like, "Well, yeah, they said there was going to be this big storm, and [unclear] it was a washout. Some people got flooded, but it was nowhere near the magnitude they said it was going to be." As it started to get closer, following the weather reports, it was like, "This is going to be the real deal. This isn't going to be a near-miss; this is going to be the real deal. This is the direct hit. This is the hurricane they've been talking about for fifty years, that's finally going to be in this general area."

One of the biggest concerns during all those meetings -- we're accustomed to flooding. Hoboken has had a history of flooding, so we're accustomed to the flooding. It's the storm surge. When they started talking about twelve-, fourteen-, eighteen-foot storm surges, it was

like, "Hoboken is going to be inundated with water." We had made some provisions that in the event we had to evacuate our building, we had already made arrangements that we would have to go to high ground. So we were going to take refuge, and run our operation possibly out of City Hall -- never expecting it to get to the magnitude that it did (and I'll talk about that later). We ultimately ended up in Stevens Institute of Technology. We didn't just evacuate; we bumped out of our building.

EL: Did 707 get flooded?

TM: Oh, my god. Our main floor was blown in by the water. We had five and a half feet of water in our building.

EL: Wow. At 707 Clinton.

TM: At 707 Clinton Street, in our headquarters. And in the thirty-three years that I'm a member there, we never had water come in from the outside. That's the first time we ever had outside water come in. With some of the flooding, we've had our sewer drain back up, and we pushed it out of the building. But we've never

had water from the outside come in -- and it literally blew in a bay, our wooden bay door. It shattered it like toothpicks.

We had also been in contact with the hospital, because that area, again, was prone to flooding. They had evacuated the hospital during Irene, and they were able to return those patients in 2011; they were able to return those patients within a day or two, because the hospital really didn't sustain that significant of damage. We were able to reopen our ER, I think, in thirty-six hours after the storm.

EL: After Irene.

TM: After Irene. With this storm, they waited, they waited, and our operation actually started on Sunday, the 28th of October, because Angelo Caprio, who is the Disaster Services OEM -- Officer of Emergency Management -- for the hospital -- he turned around and said, "We need to evacuate the hospital."

That was pretty much the prep of it, and our operation, as we were still preparing for -- knowing the storm was coming on Monday -- as we were still preparing,

we kind of got put into action because the hospital pulled the trigger and said, "We need to evacuate."

EL: So the Hoboken Volunteers assisted with that.

TM: The Hoboken Volunteers was the coordinating EMS agency for the evacuation. The way it works is, we need to call the county Office of Emergency Management -- EMS -- which is the emergency medical services coordinator, and that is Mickey McCabe from Bayonne. Then he, through his channels in the Office of Emergency Management, on a state level, he was able to contact multiple ambulances and a coordination team that sat with us. It's a big undertaking to evacuate 138 people. They're already ill. You have to find a facility that's going to take them. Certain patients have to go to certain hospitals. So it was almost a twelve-hour event.

We started moving the first patient I would say about 6:00 in the evening --

EL: -- on Sunday?

TM: -- on Sunday, 6:00 in the evening on Sunday, which was the 28th of October. We finished up about 4:00-4:30 in the morning. I told everybody at that point, "Go home. Get a couple hours of sleep. Tomorrow's going to be a long day," never, ever thinking it was going to be what it was.

We brought a lot of people back on Monday morning. I was doing some riding around with the Ambulance Corps chief's car, and at the first high-tide on Monday morning, I had gone up to the waterfront. And I was like, "Wow. I've never seen the river like this." The river was angry. I couldn't believe it. It looked like the Atlantic Ocean, it really did.

EL: All white caps.

TM: White caps, and --

EL: And the wind is coming from -- you know the storm is coming from [unclear]. I felt it was like a science fiction movie down there. This is going to be bad.

TM: It was awesome. I have a newfound respect for the power of water. But it was absolutely

breathtaking to see the river like that. The river had come over a little bit in the morning high-tide, down around the PATH station area. There was a little flooding, but cars could still go through it if they had to. The police were keeping everybody back. I was talking to a couple police officers and saying, "This doesn't look good." He turned around and he goes, "I was here for Irene, and it didn't look anything like that." I said, "Yeah, I agree with you."

So we had gone back to our building, and we had made provisions for 15:00 hours -- which is 3:00 in the afternoon. That's when we were going to start staffing additional ambulances and our Special Ops. Everything was going to be up and running.

EL: On this Monday.

TM: On Monday the 29th. We were sitting in the building. All in all, with the entire storm, it didn't really rain that much. We were waiting for the torrential downpours. It never came to that. It was raining, there was some minor flooding, but the wind started to pick up. Later in the afternoon, the wind started to pick up. We had our three ambulances, and Hoboken High School also has an ambulance. They had mobilized their personnel, so we had an

ambulance from the high school in our building. We were manning four ambulances at the time, with the anticipation that the 3:00 crews would go off at midnight. Then at midnight we were going to do twelve-hour operational periods, so the next crew would be on from midnight until noon.

Well, that never happened.

EL: Those people couldn't get in.

TM: The guys who were in our building just kept going, and going, and going. If you asked me what happened Monday -- I could tell you what happened Monday, because that was the starting date. But if you asked me exactly what happened Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, I couldn't tell you exact dates and times, because, to me, it was just one run-on day. It never ended; it was ongoing.

About 5:30-6:00 in the evening, on Monday the 29th, one of the first calls -- the wind was really starting to pick up. At that time of year, it was just getting dark at 6:00. The first call that came in was a report of an overturned construction trailer at Fifteenth and Washington Streets, with a man trapped underneath. So one of the ambulances was dispatched.

EL: Was it in that parking lot?

TM: The construction lot across from the [Unclear] building. That had a construction trailer. We had noticed a spike in our call volume from 2:00 in the afternoon. We were starting to see the ambulances getting more calls than they normally would, and there were a lot of people who still thought Hoboken University Medical Center was open. So I think what they were thinking was, "It's probably better if I get in an ambulance and go to the hospital. I'll be safer in the hospital than I will be at home." But then we had to tell them that Hoboken University closed. At that point, we were still able to get in and out of Hoboken, so we were starting to distribute patients. First we went to Jersey City Medical Center. Then we went to [Unclear]. Then we went to Palisades General. You try not to overflow one hospital.

As I said, this distress call comes in for the overturned construction trailer with the man in it, a victim in it, and the police had said on the radio -- we get dispatched by the police department. They said, "We don't have any police officers to send. You're on your own. Let us know what you've got when you get there." So the

ambulance responded, and myself and the captain -- his name is Mark Harris -- we responded in the chief's car. The construction trailer itself was up on cinder blocks, and it had been knocked off the cinder blocks.

EL: By the water?

TM: By the wind. So one side of it was off the blocks, and the other side was still up on the blocks. Mark said, "I'm going to go see if there's anybody in there." So I kept the crew back from the ambulance, and I had a flashlight. We had these big Rands. I had a big Rand, and I said, "I'll stay at the fence. This way you can see the light from my beam, so you can get back out." As he went over the fence, to head toward the trailer, a gust of wind came up and picked up a twenty-foot-long, eight-foot-wide, twelve-foot-high construction trailer. It picked it up and turned it upside down. I can't gauge wind, but it had to be eighty miles an hour if not more. It moved us. Where we were standing, it pushed us. It just moved you. There was no way you can fight this; it just moved you. Like I could move this chair, that's how the wind moved you. So I screamed a couple of expletives: "Mark, get the *** out of there!" He says, "Let me see if he's in there."

I said, "If he's in there, he's dead. If he's in there, he's already dead." Well, he made it to the trailer, he looked in the windows, and thank god, the trailer was empty. It was a night watchman; he had bailed out. I said, "Come on. We've got to get out of there."

While all this is going on, we didn't even realize that just maybe -- it was dark now. Maybe 500 feet north of us there was a raging river on Hudson Street and Washington Street. The water was white caps -- white caps, in the city streets --

EL: -- from the cove.

TM: -- coming right over the cove. That's where it was coming in from. I looked at Mark and I said, "We've got to get back to the building." So we took the crew, we went back, and my wife -- when we got back to the building we were listening to the police radio, and they started saying, "Here it comes. Observer Highway being taken over by the Hudson River. Newark Street is impassable." It was just getting worse and worse. "Sinatra Drive is underwater. Nobody can get near Sinatra Drive." So my wife called me. I live right across street from the hospital. I lived in 10 Church Towers. So when I look out

my living-room window, I look at the emergency room driveway. My wife says to me, "Tommy, you can't believe this. Fourth Street is a raging river. There is water coming down Fourth Street with white caps on it; it's actually moving the parked cars." And that's only three blocks from the Ambulance Corps. So I said to her, "You guys are safe." They're on the seventh floor. I said, "You guys are safe. Anticipate the power going out, but just stay put. I'll be in touch [unclear]."

EL: At this point we still had power.

TM: Yes.

So I looked at the captain, and Mark and I worked -- I felt like I was married to him for a week! [Laughs] We were together more than we were with our families. I looked at Mark and I said, "Four streets impassable, and it's coming this way. We have to make a decision. Are we staying or are we going?" He turned around and said, "I think we better go." He said, "Because look." I said, "What?" He said, "Come here." He was standing at the threshold to the door. When we looked down Clinton Street, the A&P parking lot was underwater. It actually had current to it; it was moving water. Swift water. We call

it, in the rescue business, swift water. It was swift water.

So we got our members -- we had thirty-seven people in the building, including Mark and myself, and we told them, "We're bailing out. Get everything you can possibly carry, load it in an ambulance, and go to Ninth and Washington Street. We'll figure out where we're going from there." We had nowhere to go. We're going to high ground.

So the guys did the best they could. They grabbed whatever they could. We did a head count. One of our other officers, whose name is David Docherty -- he's one of my lieutenants -- Doch, myself, and Mark, the captain, stayed at the building. We got everybody out into the vehicles, and I said, "All right. Here's what I want you to do. Doch, you go to the third floor. Sweep the third floor, make sure there's nobody up there. Mark, you go to the second floor. Make sure there's nobody left in the building." They ran up, they cleared the building, they came down, and I said, "Okay. Now you two guys stay right here." I went up, I did a secondary, to make sure there was nobody in the building. I said, "All right, you guys get in the vehicle." We actually killed our own power in the

building, figuring it would go out anyway, but we would protect the computers and stuff. We shut down the power.

So we killed our own power, and we closed the door to the Ambulance Corps, and we were like homeless. We got in our chief's car, and we met the other ambulances up on Ninth and Washington. By this time it was raining a little harder, and the rain was coming down sideways. The rain hurt. When it hit you, it actually hurt. You were being pelted, and you could start hearing and seeing the transformers popping all over time. So Doch turns around and he goes, "What about Stevens?"

EL: As a place to put yourselves.

TM: We were contemplating, in the vehicle, in the chief's car, "Where are we going to go? We can't stay in the middle of Ninth and Washington." And City Hall, at that point -- that was where the emergency operation center was. There was a lot of activity going on down there. The last thing they needed was ambulances parked all around City Hall. So we said, "Well, you know what? It's worth a shot. Let's go up there." We went the wrong way up Eighth Street, with the whole contingent of ambulances. There was a Stevens police officer coming down Eighth

Street when he saw us all coming up. He's a friend of ours; we know him. His name is Junior. He got out of the car and he went like this to me. He said, "Tommy. What's going on?" And I said, "We got no building. It's underwater. Is there anywhere we can stage these ambulances?" He says, "I've got one better than that. Let me make a call." He got in his radio car, he went on the radio, and he says, "All right, they're opening up the Shaffer Gym for you guys." I'm sorry. The Walker Gym. We were in the Walker Gym. He says, "They're opening up the Walker Gym for you guys. You guys stay there as long as you need to."

EL Wow. That was great.

TM: [Unclear] We had two means of egress, in and out. It was a big, open space. The only downside was it didn't have backup power, so the lights had gone out up there at this point. While we were staying up at Stevens, again -- you're almost star struck. We were looking out from Stevens, which is high ground, obviously -- we're looking out over Hoboken, and Jersey City, and Union City, and you could see the blue flashes going off all over the place. The wind is howling, and explosions going off, and there's no lights.

EL: The transformers.

TM: Yeah -- and no lights.

Mark and I had gotten called down to the emergency operation center to have a meeting -- because now it was starting to get really bad. By now it's about 9:30-10:00 on Monday night, into Tuesday, and the fire department had lost all their communications. Because when Stevens Institute went out, the backup generators didn't kick right in. A couple of our guys are comms guys.

EL: What is "comms" guys?

TM: Communications technicians, and ham radio operators. Actually, one of the guys who was already interviewed -- Lou Casciano -- Lou and another member of the Ambulance Corps, Alex Chadis went to Stevens, to try to get the fire department repeater back up and running. They went there with a generator and a bunch of tools, to see what they could do to get it up. So I guess we spent about two or three hours at the emergency operations center, and then we went back to Stevens. When we got back to Stevens, Dave Docherty and another lieutenant, Michael Bruno, had

transformed this gym into a "cached" collection point; a triage area.

EL: A place to actually bring people?

TM: Because, at this point, now, it was impassable to get out of Hoboken to a hospital.

So, while all this is going on, we're in the emergency operation center, and we hear one of our ambulances get dispatched to a call. They said, "All right." I don't remember -- the call sign was probably 134. They said, "One-three-four. We're going to be transporting a male victim to -- we'll try and make Christ Hospital. He's having an MI." An MI is a myocardial infarction; it's a heart attack. He said, "He is actively having an MI right now."

EL: And this was Hoboken.

TM: It was a Hoboken call, and they were trying to get to Christ Hospital. So they were driving the ambulance down Second Street, and Second Street, between Bloomfield and Garden -- there was water, but not a lot at this point. They got down between Garden and Park, the

water was a little deeper, and when they got down to the Willow Avenue block, the water was to the hubcaps on the ambulance. So the driver of the ambulance had his driver's-side window open to let a cross-breeze through, so the windows wouldn't fog over on him. When he got to the intersection of Second and Clinton, something caught his attention, and when he turned his eyes to the left, there was a literal tidal wave coming down the street that just overtook the ambulance. The water came right in through the driver's window, and filled the ambulance with water.

Now they've got a patient in the back, having a heart attack. So the four members who were on the ambulance -- one of them, his name is Brandon Escobar -- he did two tours in Iraq, so he was accustomed to dangerous situations. He said, "Okay." He got on the radio and he said, "One-three-four. We've been overtaken by the water. We're in the water -- literally. We have a patient. We need emergency evacuation. You're going to need a boat to get o us. We're stuck on Second Street between Clinton and Grand. There's no way out. The water has overtaken the ambulance, and we're evacuating our patient. We've got a floater."

So they took a backboard (backboards will float), they slid a backboard under this -- now, mind, you, he's *having a heart attack.* They slid a backboard

underneath him, secured him to the backboard. The four members were about chest-deep in water. They slid him out of the ambulance, and had him up over their heads, on their shoulders, trying to manipulate him out. The fire department made it a priority call, obviously, and the rescue company actually went there with a boat. So when they got there, they took the now-boarded heart-attack patient, put him in the boat, and then the boat had to bring him to Third and Park Avenue. That was the nearest place we could get an ambulance.

Now, mind you, we've lost one of our ambulances. The other ambulance meets them at Third and Park Avenue. Now our four members are drenched. They need to be taken care of, and they need to do something with this gentleman -- who, at this point, now, is going into hypothermia on top of -- because he's wet -- he's going into hypothermia on top of having a heart attack.

EL: Oh, my god.

TM: So they couldn't even get him to the "cache" collection point we had established at Stevens. They wound up bringing him to police headquarters, on First and Hudson --

EL: -- because that was closer.

TM: They bring him up to police headquarters; they bring him in, and the cops at police headquarters -- they have no power. They're working with battery-powered lanterns. The only power they had supplied the radio system, and they said, "Well, what are we going to do with him here? We've got to get him out of here. We've got to find a way to get him to a hospital. Otherwise, he's going to die."

So one of the cops said, "Let me go try to find a way out of town for you." They literally stripped this poor guy naked, in the middle of police headquarters. There were blankets there. They wound up getting the wet clothes off of him --

EL: -- and wrapped him up.

TM: They wrapped him up. Now, at this point, they're running out of oxygen -- because he's been on oxygen now for forty-five minutes -- almost an hour. Ultimately, they were able to get him back in the ambulance. They took him off the backboard, they sat him on

a stretcher, which is a lot more comfortable than being on a board. They got him in an ambulance, and the police department found a way that took them down to Washington Street, that took them literally right down the center of Washington Street, with water flooding on both sides. It was passable, but they had to go down the center of Washington. I think they made the turn on Eleventh, and they had to go through the Malibu parking lot to avoid the puddles. Then they had to get to the far side of the viaduct, off Fourteenth Street, and once you got up the viaduct the water was coming down, so it wasn't bad. Once they got out of that area, they were able to get up to Christ Hospital and deliver the patient. After all he had been through -- and this gentleman had a history of cardiac -- after all he had been through, he survived. The four members -- Tyrone Huggins, Brandon Escobar, Valentina Miangolarra, and Damar Grant -- they were the first four members in the history of the Ambulance Corps, since 1971, they were the first four members ever to receive the Medal of Honor -- which is the criteria to receive -- we give awards to our members, and the criteria to receive the Medal of Honor is you have to put your own life in danger for your patient. With that, the four of them almost drowned. They almost drowned. There was no doubt about it.

EL: Just walking through that water.

TM: They could have fallen through an open manhole.

EL: They could have had a cut -- who knows?

TM: Well, that was the other thing, too. All of our guys were out there in waist-deep water, at any given time. Were you in Hoboken during that? There was sewage. There was gasoline, petroleum products -- you had diesel fuel, oil, floating on the water. While all this was going on, we lost another ambulance. We lost a second unit, so now we were down to two ambulances. Yeah. It was overtaken by water, parked at a call. They parked it at the call, and when they came out they couldn't get out of the building. They had to send a pay-loader, a bucket truck, to get them.

There were other calls coming into the emergency operations center, and into our comms center. A woman waited ten hours for an ambulance at 310 Jackson Street. She had difficulty breathing, and we just couldn't get to her. You just couldn't get there.

EL: Yes. Because that was bad back there.

TM: Oh, my god. Ten-twelve-feet deep. Excuse me. When she finally got an ambulance on Tuesday -- she had been calling since Monday night, for chest pains and difficulty breathing. We finally got an ambulance to her on Tuesday, and they had, literally, a pay-loader, a bucket loader -- we put two EMTs in the bucket loader, with a stair chair and a first-aid jump bag, with oxygen. The pay-loader was towing a small boat. They brought them to the building, and raised the bucket to the second-floor hallway window, where our crew members got off the bucket, climbed in the second-floor window -- she happened to be on seven. So they walked up the five flights of stairs, got her, brought her down five flights of stairs in a stair-chair, loaded her into the pay-loader with the EMTs. The pay-loader turned around, brought the bucket down, they took her from the bucket to the boat, and then had her take the boat to Third and Park.

For some reason, Third and Park Avenue became our launch point, for the boats. It was just the way the water flooded in Hoboken: It was a great place to launch a boat, and it was a great place to bring a boat

back to. So we were able to get an ambulance in on Third and Park, and keep taking them out from there. But she ultimately ended up going, like I said, from the bucket-loader into the boat; from the boat to Third and Park Avenue; and it wasn't like --

EL: -- to an ambulance at Third and Park.

TM: -- to an ambulance, yeah. But it wasn't like you were rowing the boat, or it wasn't that people had a rope and they were pulling the boat. These boats had motors. There was enough water that you were able to use a motor. It was deep enough that you could drive a boat from 310 or 320 Jackson Street -- one or the other -- all the way to Third and Park Avenue. We did over 850 calls in a ten-day period.

EL: Were most of them heart attacks, trouble breathing? I would imagine there would be a lot of anxiety out there.

TM: I was just going to say -- there was a tone of anxiety. There were a lot of people -- there's a class that we take in ongoing training. It's called "Sick-

Non-Sick." It teaches you how to evaluate a patient. Are they really, really sick? Or are they not that sick? One of the things we were noticing was a lot of anxiety attacks. I didn't know there were so many people in Hoboken on in-home oxygen. A lot of them don't have regular oxygen bottles, they have what they call oxygen generators, powered by electricity. So people were calling, saying, "I need my oxygen. I have no power." High-rise buildings -- no elevators. Hallways were pitch-black in the middle of the day, and we were taking these people down -- we initially tried to bring them to the "cache" collection point --

EL: -- up at Stevens.

TM: -- at Stevens, to leave them on oxygen. But our generators -- we were using portable generators. They couldn't handle the load. So we ultimately started having to take these people to -- Christ Hospital was the only hospital that was open. Jersey City Medical Center flooded out. We couldn't get out of town to go to Palisades General. So Christ Hospital was receiving not only all of Hoboken's ambulances, but the majority of Jersey City's ambulances, Union City, West New York, Weehawken -- they had beds in Christ Hospital lined up down the hall for as

far as you could see. I think we must have brought 300 people there. We had 850 calls. A lot of them we brought to the "cache" collection point. And, again, with that Sick/Not-Sick theory -- if we could bring them to the "cache" collection point and leave them on oxygen for a little while, get them a hot meal -- a lot of these people hadn't had food in two days. A lot of diabetics -- diabetics not making proper provision for food in their home; or, again, Lou was instrumental -- the CERT team and Lou, when it came to getting these people their prescriptions -- insulin was a big, big thing. Who didn't make provision to have their insulin? You're a diabetic, you need their insulin. Not their fault; they just didn't think it was going to be all that bad.

But was not just the hurricane. There were so many other factors that came into play. You never realize how much you depend upon electricity until you don't have it. Your whole life depends on electrics, and EMS -- the ambulance -- everything is electric. We plug the ambulances in, because we charge our suction units; we charge our defibrillators; we have to charge our radios. We were relying on generator power; then fuel became a concern. Now the ambulances are starting to run low on fuel. We were getting fuel wherever we could. One of our

special services units -- one of the generators we were using was a diesel generator. We couldn't get diesel fuel. The vehicle they had brought to Stevens, that carried the equipment, that was able to make the casualty collection point -- Mark and I again -- said, "Well, that's not moving for a while." He said, "Yeah." I said, "I've got an idea." We got two five-gallon Gatorade containers, that we were never going to use again (coolers), and I said to him, "Do you want to do it, or should I?"

Now I'm fifty. Mark's younger than me. He looked and said, "Do what?" I said, "You have no idea what I'm going to do, huh?" He's like, "What are you going to do?" I said, "Well, all right. I guess it's me. Then tag, I'm it." We call it suction tubing, but it's basically like an old-fashioned hose. I opened the diesel tank, stuck it in, and said, "This is how you siphon fuel." I got a mouthful of diesel fuel, [laughter] I put the thing in, and now you're watching diesel fuel trickle out to these five-gallon containers. Thank god for that truck; it had seventy-five gallons of diesel fuel on it. It became our fuel depot. We were taking the fuel out of there and putting it into diesel ambulances. That's how bad it got -- that we were stealing from Peter to pay Paul.

Then I guess it was Wednesday -- I'm shooting from the hip on this. I think it was Wednesday, Wednesday or Thursday -- it caught up to me. One of the lieutenants -- Mike -- says to me, "You're done." I said, "What do you mean?" He goes, "Tommy. You're like a zombie. You're like the walking dead." I said, "Let me get two hours downtime." We had the gym separated into two distinct areas. We had a casualty-collection point, and then we had an area for our members. A lot of our guys hadn't had a hot meal, they hadn't had a shower in a couple of days.

EL: Why didn't you just walk down to St. Matthew's?

TM: Do you know why? With everything else going on, we didn't even think of it.

What happened was -- there were shower facilities in the next gym over, at Stevens. It's just that they didn't have hot water, and it was in the center of the building, so there were no lights. But a cold, dark shower is better than no shower at all, at this point. [Laughter] But they actually put me down. They said, "All right. You're out. You've got to get some kind of downtime." I

said, "When was the last time you ate?" I said, "I don't remember."

So we were eating MREs -- military -- we were eating MREs, and we were eating pork and beans out of the can; whatever we could get our hands on. When I woke up -- I had really knocked out, and when I woke up there were all these people I didn't recognize, all in yellow jackets. I'm like, "Where did all these bumble bees come from? What the hell is going on here?" So I called, "Mike, get over here." He goes, "Pennsylvania Strike Team." I said, "What?" He said, "The ambulances from Pennsylvania got here, while you were sleeping." We got five ambulances with additional crews that augmented us. Because at this point, you've got to remember -- we were running with two ambulances. Our normal procedure would, obviously, to get "mutual aid." We couldn't get "mutual aid," because everybody else had the same problem we did. We actually did get a couple of ambulances at one point, where we were over on -- "Ampcare" [phonetic] sent us an ambulance or two. Meadowlands Hospital, in Secaucus, had sent us am ambulance or two. But it was sporadic at best. If you call for "mutual aid," they're like, "We've got nothing to send. I'd love to help you, but I've got nothing to send you."

Well, when these guys got there, they turned around and said, "All right. Here's the first thing we're going to do. You guys are going to take twelve hours off. We're going to do your job for twelve hours, so your guys can recoup -- hot showers, whatever you want." They were lifesavers.

EL: Pennsylvania Strike?

TM: It's called the Pennsylvania Emergency Medical Services Strike Team. I still keep in touch with five or six of the people who were there. They were dynamite. They were excellent. Our guys were able to recover, and get themselves -- and at this point, now, whoever was there was there; we couldn't get any additional personnel in. Our guys were able to get some downtime. The guys from Pennsylvania were great. They had their own reliefs. The brought enough people with them that they could relieve themselves. These ambulances were from all over Pennsylvania, some as near as Bristol, in the Philadelphia area, and there were other ones from the Pittsburgh area. There were ambulances from Pennsylvania all over the state of New Jersey, except for like fifty-five ambulances.

EL: That's awesome.

TM: We ended up with five of them in Hoboken. But they were lifesavers. They were the cavalry. I still keep in touch with a few of the guys there. They're really, really nice people.

EL: I didn't realize that.

TM: It's funny. After it was over, they were going back to Pennsylvania. I guess this was about a week and a half later. They were going back to Pennsylvania, and they came to Hoboken. Things were starting to get relatively back to normal, and their big thing was they wanted to go to the Cake Boss; they wanted to see Carlo's Bakery. Carlos was really good to us. Mary was standing in the window; I walked up to her and said, "Listen, these guys helped us out," and she was like, "Come on in." It was great. She took really good care of them.

But the outpouring of support in the community -- when we finally got back into our building -- actually, the first time we got back into our building was on Thursday morning, and we had to go there by boat.

Clinton Street was still flooded, and we had to go there by boat. That was when we realized the damage we had. We knew there was water down there, but it was mind-boggling. Mind-boggling -- that you had to take a boat from Ninth and Clinton to get to 707 Clinton Street. When I saw the door, as soon as I saw the door, I said, "We're screwed. This is not good." We got inside. I had gotten out of the boat, I was probably hip-deep. I'm six-feet tall, I was probably hip-deep. The damage inside -- the electrical panel had exploded. Because even though we killed the power, the water had come in before our transformers blew, so the box is still energized, apparently. Anyway, the box blew. We had racks of oxygen bottles -- that's really what we went back for: more oxygen. The bottles had been lifted up by water. They slid out of the racks, and now the water is starting to recede -- now, mind you, this is four days later, and the water is still up to my hips, and was receding. There were oxygen bottles on the -- we have a stairwell that goes up to the second floor. There were bottles on the sixth and fifth steps -- meaning that they were above that, and as the water started to recede, that's where they stopped. But we had water about five to six feet in different places in our building. Our communications unit, one of our bigger trucks, was in our building, and

when we bugged out, that was one of the vehicles we opted not to take, because it was just another vehicle. If we had moved it, it would have required more manpower. We shipped whatever we could out of it, but the truck was underwater. You could see the watermark climbed -- it was up into the grill. And this was a huge -- it was a bus. It was a twenty-four passenger bus, and the water was up into the grill. We had no electricity. We had no heat. Our hot water heater was in the garage area. That was destroyed. Our garage heater was destroyed.

EL: Let me ask you about how you worked with the city, and the National Guard, and the Red Cross, and all the other organizations that were here.

TM: Well, again, the guys from Pennsylvania were an entity that we worked with. One of the funniest stories about Sandy was -- Mike Nemacc was his name -- he was in charge of -- they sent the supervisor with them, and he was in charge.

EL: Was he from Pennsylvania?

TM: He was from Pennsylvania. His name is Mike Nemacc, and he was in charge of the Pennsylvania Strike Team that was assigned to Hoboken. I says to him, "What do you need from us?" And he looked at me and he goes, "No, no, we're here to support *you*. What do you need from *us*?" I said to him, "Have you ever been in a hurricane?" Because these guys go all over the country, doing this. I says, "Have you ever handled a hurricane this big?" He said, "Yeah, but only three." I said, "Well, you know what? That's two more than me. So what do you need us to do?" And he goes, "Oh, we're going to get along just fine."

But we interacted with the Red Cross. We interacted a lot with the CERT team. The National Guard -- god bless those guys. I don't even know where to begin to thank the National Guard. If it wasn't for them, with those high-water vehicles -- what we did was we put two EMTs with a jump-bag and a stair-chair, a rescue chair, on every one of those National Guard -- they call them "noose-and-halfs." [Phonetic] They're five-ton trucks. As they were doing the evacuations, anybody who was medical -- we had medical personnel on the National Guard trucks.

EL: That's good. And they just went around the city, right?

TM: The way they describe it is -- they call it a "mission." So as the trucks came in, they would say, "Okay, Truck #8, you're going on Mission Whatever." They had to evacuate a specific area, trying to get people to high ground. Again, find out if people didn't have their medications -- whatever it might be -- but they had medically-trained personnel on every National Guard truck. Those were our guys from Hoboken Ambulance, and we worked fantastic with them. They got here, I guess, Thursday morning -- Wednesday night, Thursday morning. The actual operations may have started on Thursday, with the National Guard. But those guys were phenomenal -- guys and gals. They were *phenomenal*. I don't even know where to start to say thank-you to them.

We interacted a little with the Red Cross, for the shelters. But what happened with the shelters was, Wallace School was one of the bigger shelters. Their backup power failed, and then they got flooded so they had to evacuate from there. You mentioned St. Matthew's before -- St. Matthew's and St. Peter and Paul became like makeshift shelters. That was something that nobody -- they had to

move -- they set up a shelter and had to move the shelter. The Red Cross -- they were everywhere. They provided all kinds of comfort measures. Their main gig is like the sheltering, and they were phenomenal.

The city of Hoboken -- our interaction with the police department and the fire department is always -- we're side-by-side with them. We work hand-in-hand every day, but the camaraderie that happened during that storm -- everybody was watching out for everybody else: I've got your back, you've got mine. And the outpouring of support amongst the uniformed personnel -- the mayor, and the powers-that-be, that were running that emergency operation center -- the Director of Public Safety; the Office of Emergency Management -- they couldn't have done any better. They really couldn't have done any better.

You know, they were handed a really bad hand. If they were playing poker, they got handed a really crappy hand. They let it ride, and they ended up doing a really good job. There wasn't a whole lot that you could do. The power of water just overtakes everybody. One of the things I can say to the mayor -- the mayor kept calm amongst the city. Going back to Irene -- she pulled the trigger when she should have. You go back to Irene -- she saved a lot of lives. There was a lot of flooding, there

were a lot of people in basement and first-floor apartments that got flooded out. But her pulling the evacuation trigger then -- she saved a lot of lives, and she did the same thing in Sandy.

I thought for sure, when they started -- when the fire department started to do house-to-house searches, as the water receded -- we had actually one of our special-services trucks -- we carry 500 body bags. Myself and Mark had made the call: we put twenty-five body bags on every ambulance, because we had anticipated, "As they start going in, we're going to find people floating." We thought there were going to be a ton of dead people. And to be able to walk away from that, and have *zero* fatalities -- that's a miracle.

They talk about that plane landing as the Miracle on the Hudson? No. We were the Miracle *In* the Hudson. Because that was the Hudson River, and nobody died here. We were the miracle *in* the Hudson. And that came from planning. That came from early warning, early alerting, not pulling any punches. People have a tendency -- they want to candy-coat it. "Oh, well, you know -- there's going to be a storm, but we don't want to cause a panic." The mayor hit it head on, and she said, "We can't candy-coat this. Let's tell them the truth. Otherwise, we're going to have dead

people. And it's only going to make our job harder, because there are that many more people we're going to have to rescue."

Rescues were -- I can't even count them. The evacuations. Every evacuation was a rescue unto itself, because you weren't just knocking on a door and saying, "Hi. Come with me." It was, maybe you had to go up twelve flights of stairs. They had a call at Marine View Plaza, on the twenty-third floor, the second day into the storm -- a woman having a stroke. She had a stroke the second day, post-storm -- second or third. (Again, to me, it was a big [unclear].)

EL: Did Marine View have power at this point?

TM: No power. The generators -- they didn't even have running water, because it's such a large building, they need electric pumps to raise the water to the upper floors. I think they only had one on the first and second floors, because that was city -- that was something else. We didn't lose city water. A lot of people were concerned about that. We were getting reports into the emergency operations center, "Is it safe to drink the

water?" Nobody had the answer. It took twenty-four hours to get somebody to say, "Yeah, it's okay. You can drink the water."

So we never lost our city water. We didn't lose fire suppression. If you could find the fire hydrant, if it wasn't under water, they could have used it to suppress a fire. Those guys, the Hoboken Fire Department -- the first night of the storm, while it was going on -- every one of them should get a medal. They were out underneath live wires, they were walking around in water, with power lines down, that you didn't know if they were energized or not. They could have been killed at any given moment. Plus, they responded to, I can't tell you, countless numbers of reports of fires in a house: water got into the electrical power; they shorted out; they started fires. And, again, we were right there with them. If they were going, we were going.

The National Guard -- I don't know how to say thank-you to those guys. I keep repeating that, but they were phenomenal. You had the other services, too, that a lot of people forget about: The Office of Emergency Management. Those guys, they coordinated the whole thing. Logistically, they were able to get a lot of the resources that came in -- truck-mounted generators. Public Service

Electric & Gas -- the second day after the storm, the Observer Highway parking lot, behind Office Depot -- they had like eleven tractor-trailers, with everything they needed to rebuild the substations. They knew that the infrastructure was shot. Everything was under water. They had the entire substations on tractor-trailers. They just needed to be able to get the water to go down, so they could get in there and restore power.

We got power back at our building, at 707 Clinton Street, on Sunday afternoon. So when you think about it, we were only out of power six days. There were parts of Hoboken that didn't get re-energized for a week or more, maybe two weeks -- ten days, two weeks -- but we were very fortunate. We're on the same grid as the hospital, and PSE&G's primary goal was to get the hospital up and running. So to get the water out of the town, get the power back on, and we can open the hospital.

So that was huge, when they finally reopened the hospital. They didn't reopen the actual hospital upstairs, but they did open the ER, and by them reopening the emergency room, we were allowed to bring patients there again. What that allowed us to do was turn out ambulances over faster. When those ambulances were going up to Christ Hospital, there may have been five, six ambulances ahead of

them, so you had to wait your turn. But, again, the hospital back up and running -- again, public service -- that was huge.

EL: And the hospital was really damaged.

TM: Oh, the hospital sustained a lot of damage. The whole ER is being rebuilt, in sections.

EL: Because of their, like, MRIs, and a lot of their big machines, were all downstairs.

TM: The CATSCAN was actually in a trailer out on Clinton Street for months. The whole thing had to be rebuilt -- millions, and millions of dollars. Millions and millions of dollars. The Ambulance Corps -- we suffered, between the loss of two ambulances, our "comm struct," one of our special operations vehicles, the damage to our building, the ongoing cleanup -- we had to have a company come in. Before we could put our guys back in the building -- there was sewage and everything else -- we had to have the building -- SERVPRO came in and helped us out. They made our building a priority. Fire houses, and the ambulance corps, and the police station were a priority, so

we were able to get back in our building relatively soon after the storm. We got back in on Sunday. We had power and all that.

EL: So how much damage would you say -- ?

TM: All in all, we had almost $750,000 worth of damage. Our insurance company was fabulous with us. We lost a ton of medical supplies -- soft supplies, and some hard supplies. What happened was, I had been on the phone with the insurance company the first thing Wednesday morning, and the agent that we deal with said, "Hi. I was waiting for your call yesterday." I said to him, "I was a little busy." [Unclear] Linda. She goes, "Well, what do you need?" I said, "Linda, a cash advance. We need to get medical supplies." She goes, "What do you need?" I said, "Everything." She said, "Give me fifteen minutes. I'll call you back." She literally called me back in fifteen minutes. She goes, "I've got a truckload of equipment coming to you. The insurance company is taking care of everything. We're going to get you back on your feet." Within four hours, a box truck pulled up to Stevens Institute (we were still up there), a box truck loaded with medical supplies, from a company out by the insurance company, which is in Short

Hills. How they got to Hoboken I still don't know, but they unloaded $20,000 worth of medical supplies, and got us up and running.

EL: And by medical supplies you mean like bandages --

TM: Oxygen; bandages; oxygen masks; oxygen cannulas; backboards. We lost cervical collars. We lost headblocks. Anything that belongs -- and we were starting to run low, because we were doing so many calls -- you're using your equipment. Suction catheters. Anything you can imagine, that was disposable. You use it once, you throw it out. This is emergency low. They helped us out, unbelievable. The insurance company -- a new ambulance cost $138,000; to replace one of the trucks was $138,000. Our vehicles were insured for their value, which was about $75,000. The company we were dealing with, the ambulance manufacturer, said, "We'll tell you what. We'll give you an ambulance for $75,000; we'll worry about how you're going to pay the rest later on." So they literally built us an ambulance. The dealer that we work with -- DCI, down in Berlin, New Jersey -- Thursday morning flat-bedded a loaner ambulance to us. So we had the high-school ambulance, we

had the loaner ambulance, and we had one of our own. So we were back to full strength, ambulance wise, by Thursday -- plus, we had the five ambulances come in from the strike team. We actually ended up with more ambulances than we had to begin with.

But there are so many different people that we dealt with at FEMA. Unfortunately, we weren't eligible for any FEMA money. We were eligible for small-business loans, but we weren't eligible for any grant money, because the Hoboken Volunteer Ambulance is a private company. It's not a residence, and it's not municipal. We're an independent company that's kind of contracted by the city of Hoboken to provide emergency medical services. So with FEMA, we were kind of like -- pardon the pun -- it was kind of a washout.

But between our insurance company and the residents -- the outpouring that we got from the residents of Hoboken -- this woman called. She contacted us within a week. Her name was Erica "Seedsman," [phonetic] and she arranged a fundraiser for us at Trinity, two weeks, three weeks after the storm -- "Just to get you guys back on your feet." We wound up making $8,000; the money just started coming in.

EL: That's so cool.

TM: Unbelievable. When we finally got in our building on Sunday -- we know our neighbors and they know us. They would come out and say, "You guys are back." They were hugging each other, I was kissing people I never -- I knew them, "Hi, how are you, good morning. Hi, good evening." You're kissing people. The one guy and his wife turned around and said, "What do you guys need? What can we do for you?" And I looked up and said, "My guys haven't had a hot meal in three days. Anything you can do." The woman says, "I know exactly what we're going to do. I'll be back in a half hour." Okay. His name is Brian, and his wife is Wendy. Brian turned to me and he goes, "I've got something for you. I'll be back." He comes down fifteen minutes later with two Mr. Coffee pots of coffee. We hadn't had hot -- I would have killed somebody for a cup of Dunkin Donuts coffee. I would have cut somebody's throat for a cup of Dunkin Donuts coffee.

EL: But you couldn't get milk anywhere. That was the problem. I could make coffee, but --

TM: Two pots of coffee, and he had Cremora, the powdered thing. It was better than nothing. Then his wife, she came down a few minutes later with two trays. She made five pounds of pasta, heated up some Ragu sauce and dumped it on top -- it was the best dish of macaroni you ever had. It was like, "Oh, my god, real food! I'm not eating an MRE."

And now I know why they give the military MREs.

EL: Why?

TM: So they don't have to go to the bathroom when they're out in the field. You eat one of them, it binds you up for three days.

EL: Are you serious?

TM: Oh, my god.

EL: I've been wanting to try one.

TM: No, you don't. [Laughter] No, you don't. The food's not bad; it sustains life. You eat what you've

got. But now I know why they give them to the military. You don't go to the bathroom for three days. It was horrible. It was horrible.

EL: So what do think, like going forward in the future? Do you think it's going to change any of your routines?

TM: Oh, my god, yes. Oh, the contingency plans that have already been -- the Hoboken Volunteer Ambulance Corps has an emergency operations plan internal. We have completely revamped it. We learned a lot. We learned that you can't depend on your radios. We learned about how important it is -- electricity. Now we're getting a backup -- the city of Hoboken is providing us with a naturally gas-powered generator on our building, that even if the city power goes out, it's an automatic; it kicks in, and our entire building will be powered. That's a godsend. We went out and bought a portable kitchen, a portable toilet, and a portable shower unit. It cost us $1,000, all included, but if this were ever to happen again -- when we were up at Stevens -- literally, it's a kitchen in a bag. You drop the bag, you open it up, and you stand it -- it's a kitchen, with propane-powered stoves. It's a tent.

There's another bag that's got a ring in the top. You open the bag, you grab the ring, you pull it -- it's a seven-foot-tall tent that pops out, and it's a real bathroom. We have another one that looks exactly the same; when you pull it out, it's a shower room. There's a heater that goes along with it. You can take a hot shower. Just members, for the members. We realized that our medical supplies -- now everything is raised. We couldn't go up six feet, but we've gone up four. We've built shelving; anything that can perish in water is four feet or higher. And we tried to store most of the stuff way up high in the cabinet. It's a pain in the rear-end to get it down. But you know what? We're not taking a chance. With our vehicles, we learned that we've got to get out of the building sooner.

EL: And take the vehicles to higher ground.

TM: Take the vehicles to higher ground much sooner next time. If there were so much as a hurricane -- once this area, now, was to go under a hurricane watch, as opposed to a hurricane warning, we would start making provisions to move. We would never be caught in that situation again. There are all kinds of contingency plans. One of the things we're going to discuss with the city and

the hospital is, going forward, having the hospital completely shut down -- Hoboken University -- having them completely shut down killed us. So what we're going to do is -- Stevens told us, "You can have this gym anytime you need it." We're actually in the speaking phase now. They have to evacuate the hospital. We understand that. But instead of shutting the emergency room down, maybe there's a way we can set an emergency room up in Stevens, a temporary emergency room. This way, we can bring patients there, and they can at least get emergent care, and we can always transfer them to hospitals later. So that's something we're developing.

We learned, as I said before, about the oxygen -- so many people on oxygen, Sick/Not-Sick; they weren't really sick, they just didn't have their oxygen. And they need it. So, regular shelters wouldn't accept them. A regular shelter won't take them with an oxygen generator. I mentioned it to the mayor, and she loved the idea: we have to find a place in Hoboken where there's power, where we can set up an oxygen shelter, a medical shelter. Maybe it's for diabetics --

EL: I think St. Matthew's took some. But also, what about maybe setting up a database -- finding out who the people *are* in town, who *are* using oxygen --

TM: CERT's doing that right now.

EL: -- so this way you call ahead of time, and you go make sure you have backup. You know that person's on oxygen, so they've got to have some kind of alternate power.

TM: A lot of them have batteries. All those units have battery backups; they're only good for eight hours. The unit comes with an eight-hour battery backup, but we were out of power for up to two weeks. Some people were out for two weeks.

But the CERT team, through Lou Casciano and through the mayor -- I don't want to talk out of school, but I think the name they're using is Hobokenready.org, or Hobokenready.com, or something to that effect. They're compiling a database that we'll all have access to -- the fire department, police department, EMS, CERT, OEM. Everybody can go into that database, and if I want to know how many people in Hoboken are on oxygen, I'll get a list.

Now what I can do, at that point, is I can dedicate one or two of my ambulances, and say, "Okay. You've got this twenty, you've got this twenty. Make sure these people are okay." Once they've finished that, we take two different ambulances. "You guys have this twenty, you guys have this twenty. You two who were just doing it -- you come back, and you recoup." We learned that operational periods became very important. Myself and Mark Harris, the captain, learned that you can't do it all. At one point, you've got to know when to say when. You start to become hazy. You're not thinking completely right.

Another thing that I had on my mind through the whole thing was, my wife is a diabetic, an insulin-dependent diabetic on an insulin pump. So I was calling here. I have T-Mobile, and I never lost cell service. It was amazing. I never lost my cell service.

EL: Someone else said that to me.

TM: I kept charging my phone in the Ambulance Corps chief's car, and I said to her -- she kept going down to our car in the parking lot, keeping her phone charged, keeping her phone charged from the car. I called her every half hour, every hour. My daughter, at the time,

was fifteen, and I said to my wife, Erin, "Put Brittany on the phone." So she got on the phone, and I said, "Listen, Brit, you've got to know how to do something in case Mommy's sugar goes low." She said, "I've got to give her orange juice." I said, "Okay. Initially. But if she becomes unconscious, it's going to take the ambulance a long time to get there. I need you to take the phone, and go into the bedroom. In the night table you'll see two red boxes." She said, "Yeah, I'm looking at it." I said, "Okay. Open it up." She said, "Well, Daddy, there's a needle in here." I said, "Yes. That's called the glucagon injection. I'm going to tell you exactly how to do this. Write this down." I could hear her. She was very serious about it. I said, "This is how you give glucagon. If Mommy's sugar goes low, and you can't get the orange juice in her, you have to inject her with that, and that will wake her up. Then you can get the orange juice into her." And she's going, "I don't know if I could stick Mommy with a needle." And I was like, "Brittany, you've got to call me, and you have to do this. You're sure you're going to be able to do this, right?" Thank god -- thank the blessed lord -- my wife's sugar never bottomed out.

So one of the other things we learned, again, going forward, is we have to make provisions for our

members to make sure that their families are taken care of. A lot of these guys didn't -- I didn't see my wife for seven days. A lot of these guys -- the only communication they had with their families was, "I'm still in Hoboken. I can't get out." A couple of them got evacuated. In Weehawken and West New York, some of the people up there on the waterfront -- they actually got told, "You've got to get out of your house." So these guys had family who had been evacuated, and they didn't even know if their family was okay. So that was something else we put into motion; that we have to find a reasonable way for our members to be able to say that, "My family is okay." It makes you think in a much clearer way. If you know everything is okay at home, you're able to perform your job. So that was something we were going forward -- and what else?

Having been a mutual aid, I think, is a huge, huge --

EL: And by that you mean like from surrounding communities.

TM: Outside the surrounding -- in other words, having mutual aid available from outside the affected area. They called this Super Storm -- Hurricane,

Super Storm -- you couldn't even get mutual aid from the State of New Jersey; you need to have these contingency -- and the state handled -- I have to say, I think the State Department of Health handled it pretty well. They had resources come in from Pennsylvania, Maryland, people in Indiana and West Virginia. Those were four of the states, and they had already gotten these guys mobilized. But I think that they need to get them to the affected areas a little faster next time, so that's something that's being discussed. That's above us. That's a state thing.

But that was a huge concern. Even the National Guard -- the guys were fabulous, but they don't deploy for seventy-two hours. It takes them a couple days to get there. The only thing we learned is we need to be (*we* meaning the city of Hoboken, the Hoboken Volunteer Ambulance Corps and everybody else), we need to be more self-sufficient. It wouldn't be a bad idea for the city of Hoboken to buy one or two high-water vehicles, like those "noose-and-a-half" trucks, those five-ton trucks.

EL: They must cost a fortune.

TM: You can get them from Army surplus for like $40 grand.

EL: Oh. That's not bad.

TM: You buy two of them -- it's an $80.000-investment, but you can start moving people as soon as the storm is over and it's safe to get out. You can start moving people. Now when the National Guard gets there, with seven, eight trucks -- now you have ten. If they come with eight, now you've got ten. That's two more missions you can accomplish at a given time.

So we're still learning. We're still learning.

EL: But that's good. Actually, in a way, it's good that Irene happened a year before, because in a way it was sort of a practice.

TM: Almost. The only thing I really find great is that all of the entities -- no one is saying, "Oh, it went perfect. We couldn't have done better." Everybody recognized that there were flaws, a deficit, and nobody's playing the game where, "Oh, everything went great." Everybody is saying, "Okay, listen. This is our problem, this is how we want to try and fix that, so it doesn't

happen again, and this is what we really need." It takes a good leader to come out and say, "We couldn't do this alone, and there was a deficit here. There was a problem. We need to be self-sufficient for the first seventy-two hours. We need this." We couldn't do that, and it killed me. When you go through EMT training -- and I was a paid fireman for the city of Hoboken. That was my paid job. I was a firefighter for twenty-five years. Twenty-six years. The last ten I was captain. But every day, when you go to the fire house -- and every day, when I go on duty on the ambulance -- you're trained from day one: somebody calls for help, you go. There's an emergency. Once you get there, the emergency is over. Well, what we learned was sometimes you can't get to the emergency, in a situation like this. And you could see the frustration, not only on the EMT's faces, but the firefighters, and the cops -- that they couldn't get to these people. Certain people you just couldn't get to, and you're not programmed that way. You're programmed from day one, the first day you walk into the class -- you're programmed, "You're here, when you get there the emergency is over. You're going to make everything better." And to be standing here and looking, and having people wave to you, "Come help us," and not being able to go -- that is one of the most frustrating

things I have ever encountered. It hurts. There were a lot of tears. There really were.

Guys. There's always animosity. You've always got one guy that don't like somebody else. One of the things -- we had two members of the ambulance corps who haven't spoken to each other -- just personality conflicts. They just don't like each other, and they hadn't spoken -- they were really close friends years ago, and they probably haven't spoken in ten years. They ended up in the casualty collection point, and one was working one area and one was working other area. And I even said to Mark, "You know what? Maybe we should move him further down." They mix like oil and vinegar. And he said, "Oh, they'll be all right." Like a half hour later, [unclear] walked right up to him, and you could see them talking. So I got up. I had to go see. I'm a nosy bastard. I had to go see what was going on. And I said to them, "What are you doing?" Because I'm saying, "Oh my god, I hope one don't hit the other one." "What are you doing?" And they're crying. They embraced each other. Two men. Two grown men embraced each other and started crying. I started -- I said, "What are you doing? Now you've got me going? Now you've got me going. What are you doing?" And he says, "I walked up to him and I asked him, 'Why don't we talk to each other?' And he said the

same thing I said: 'I don't remember.'" They shook hands, and now they're the best of friends again.

So, in tragedy, it brings out the best in people.

EL: Oh, yes. Well, I think that happened all over Hoboken.

TM: People on Hudson Street allowing -- they had city power. They were stretching extension cords, and coffee pots, and letting people charge your cell phone. If you had a charged cell phone, you were golden. It was the only means of communication.

But it brought the best out and the best, it really did. The citizens of Hoboken, they should all be very proud of themselves. They really went above and beyond. It wasn't all me, me, me, me, me. Everybody took care of somebody else. That's what it's all about. And Hoboken has always been known to be a tight-knit community, and that just fortified it.

EL: Right. I agree totally.

Okay. Anything else you want to add, before we wrap up? That was great, Tom. Thank you so much.

TM: No, thank you.

EL: All right. We'll stop.

TM: I really appreciate it.

HOBOKEN
HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, ROSEMARY OROZCO, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*. I understand that I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on October 29, 2012.

2. The interview will be audiotaped. In the interview I may be identified by name, subject to my consent. I may also be identified by name in any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview, subject to my consent.

3. I understand that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that a photograph of me may be taken or borrowed for duplication, and that if I withdraw from the project, the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to Hoboken Historical Museum, and that the information in the interview can be used by Hoboken Historical Museum in any manner it will determine, including, but not limited to, use by researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy will be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript.

6. I understand that at the conclusion of this particular study, the tape(s), photograph, and one copy of the transcript will be kept in the collections department of the Hoboken Historical Museum.

Interviewee Name: ROSEMARY OROZCO

Interviewee Signature: Rosemary Oroz

Address: 911 GARDEN ST. – HOBOKEN NJ 07030

Telephone number: 201-401-2916

Date: 8 /7 /2013

Archives 2013.039.0015

HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: ROSEMARY OROZCO

INTERVIEWER: EILEEN LYNCH

DATE: 7 AUGUST 2013

EL: The one thing I know is that you worked with CERT during the storm. The thing I was curious about was, how long had you been with them before the storm happened?

RO: Okay. What happened was that a new class had started for CERT. The team already existed. I think 2010 was the first class, and they had ten or eleven people who were part of it. They were looking for more volunteers, and I did sign on; or, I put in the application. What I think is interesting -- the first night of the class was the Tuesday before the storm, the Tuesday before. I'm not good at doing things online. I had printed out the registration form and sent it; then I didn't hear anything back. So when I didn't hear anything back, I called -- I think it was Tommy Molta that I spoke to -- and he put me

on to Lou Casciano, who is essentially running the whole thing. I asked him about it.

The thing was, they had gotten my thing --

EL: Online application?

RO: I didn't do it online, because I couldn't figure out how to do it online. I'm not that good. So I may have been the only paper one. But they did find it. They couldn't say it was age discrimination, but I thought, "Maybe because I'm so old, they don't want me." And I had said, in the thin, "I can't do heavy lifting. I just can't. But there are certain things that I can do." So I spoke directly to Lou, and he was so encouraging.

So I showed up. Again, we all met there. It was above the ambulance corps, in the room, and it was just a great beginning, really, really nice people. None of us, again, thought about what was coming up, because you didn't even know about it. So we had our first class. That was Tuesday night. Then I think it might have been Friday that we got either a call or an email that, again, with this coming storm.

EL: So, basically, it had been about a week.

RO: It was Tuesday the same week. The exact same week. Because it was every Tuesday that you would have your classes, for eight or ten weeks.

So we got a call, and they were looking for folks to come down. I can't remember exactly where we met, but for the senior centers, etc., to go out there and give information. We had fliers to put out, and to knock on doors, to let folks know what they needed to do in terms of getting their medication, get water, get food, get so on. There were a couple of other CERT people there, and community folks who came to help out.

See, you think you're going to remember everything, but you just don't.

EL: So you had only had one class?

RO: One class.

EL: Before Sandy.

RO: Before Sandy.

EL: And how many people were in your class?

RO: There could have been sixteen, I think. Sixteen to nineteen. Something like that.

EL: How many classes are in a series, before you complete the training?

RO: I'd have to go back and count, but let's just say eight or ten. There's a topic each time, and we do a practical, as well. And you had to do certain things online. FEMA stuff online.

Anyhow, there were two young men who came with me, and we went into one of the buildings. I don't remember which building it was.

EL: A seniors building?

RO: A seniors building. We had fliers to give out, and we had started going up in the elevator, but many of the doors we went to, there was no one there. Nobody was there, or they didn't answer the door. One of the first places I remember we went into was the laundry room. Some women were there, so we chatted with them -- told them about what was coming; what they needed to do; to

fill up the bathtub with water; have their medications and so on. There was a common room, and we went in there. Some folks were playing cards or doing whatever. Same thing -- we shared the information that we had. We did go on some of the floors and put fliers under the doors. We put them in the elevators, so folks could see them. In the common room they have a little mail board or whatever, and we put it up there. We spoke to the people in the building itself. That was our assignment. We did the best that we could with the information. Some folks said yes, that they were going to go out. And that was Saturday.

EL: That was Saturday.

RO: That was Saturday. Later on, there was a phone bank in City Hall. Again, I wish I could remember the details; I don't remember everything. But I volunteered -- there were other people. We went to City Hall to answer questions. Most of the calls we got -- I'll tell you two things. For me, it was transformational. It turned me into a horse -- because after, I couldn't talk. There were so many calls. Calls, calls, calls.

EL: How many people were there, taking calls?

RO: I would say six, maybe.

EL: And everyone was busy.

RO: You have no idea. It was the fastest thing. You were learning -- you brought this phone down. This phone rang. It was not chaos. I will not say chaos, but it was really busy, busy, busy. Most of the calls -- not all of them -- most of them had to do with cars. People wanted to know what to do with their cars. I do remember one call in particular was a gentleman who lived on the waterfront. The message had gone out for mandatory evacuation of basement and first-floor apartments. So, no, the police were not going to come and bring you out; this was just advisable. And the fact that you're on the waterfront -- what I said to him was, "The river is going to come up and over. So if you have a duplex, then, if you can, move up to the second floor. If you have someplace to go, go." Because there was no guarantees. No one knew for certain exactly what was going to happen.

Anyhow, part of the thing from that group -- I was there until around 11:00. At that time, really, I felt, "Maybe I can stay until midnight," but I really couldn't talk. I'm not exaggerating. This young man next to me was nice enough to say, "You go home." It's a good thing I did, because I had this squeaky little voice.

EL: That was still Saturday.

RO: That was still Saturday.

EL: So Sunday - ?

RO: Saturday night, anyhow -- one of the things -- again, this whole thing with mandatory evacuation -- at that point, I was staying in an apartment, a temporary apartment, and it was on Park. It was a basement. So I had said to Lou, "Well, you know, I live in a basement apartment. I'm going to have to leave anyhow, so I'll work in the shelters."

We had people there, but then you always have people behind the scenes. They were already setting up the shelter at Wallace. They were already doing that. The initial message is that you take care of yourself and your

family, so you're not worried about it. You take care of that person. So it's I'm going to take care of myself. What do I need to do? So what I did was -- it wasn't that night, it was Sunday, I went to the A&P, and you could not believe the lines, for everything. For me, my thought was -- you couldn't get sandbags. There were no sandbags. You could not get sandbags. So I thought, well, I'll get kitty litter, because I'll make sandbags out of kitty litter area, and they had this biodegradable litter which is made out of paper. I bought two big bags of that. I went home, I got plastic bags, and I made sandbags. So my windows, again -- my apartment is below ground, but part of it is up a little bit. So I put little sandbags along the back, where the windows were. Then I put them by my doors, my two entry ways. I put them in there, as best as I could. I moved everything as high as I could. And what did I learn? I learned, in part, that you may have to go higher. [Laughter]

Also, you know those little bins, the little plastic bins that you have everything in? They're not waterproof. [More laughter] But you think, "This should be okay. This should be okay."

EL: You think, "Oh, they'll float."

RO: They'll be okay. They'll be okay. Anyhow, all the pictures, and paintings, and different things that meaning and so on -- I put everything up as high as I could. Anyhow. So that was that.

EL: And then did you go to the shelter>

RO: What I did was I packed up my little go-bag, said goodbye to my little apartment. I put a little note on the door, wishing everyone well -- "Be Safe," that kind of thing -- and left. And once I closed the door -- the way I deal with my life anyhow -- you deal with everything, and then you just let it go. There's nothing else you can do about it; you did your best; you go on your way.

So I went up to Wallace. I don't remember the numbers of people who were there, but there were people there already. There were people, some of them older, some had medical needs. The big thing was the oxygen. We had several people with COPD who needed the oxygen. We had some children there, not a lot. There were tables set up, there was food there, and coffee, and milk. They just really had a good system for something that was so new to everyone.

EL: This was in the gym.

RO: This was in the gym. And the nice thing about the gym -- I'm trying to visualize it because I've been back there another time, and I'm trying to remember what was where, what was when. It's a huge gym. The bathrooms were on the side. There was boys and girls. There was the entry hall, as you came in. That's where we registered people. It was just a simple cot. At that time people had pillows, and we had blankets. Some folks brought things with them; some people didn't have a lot with them. That first night we were staying there -- we were going to stay there anyhow --

EL: This is Sunday night.

RO: This is Sunday night.

EL: Where were most of the people from?

RO: I don't know where everyone was from. They were all from Hoboken, and you had some of the crowd that was homeless. Some of them were from senior housing

because -- I'm trying to remember the number, but I think there were three -- four people -- they were not totally oxygen dependent, but they needed the oxygen.

EL: I see. So this was a worry of the power outages.

RO: Yes. I remember there was this one lady who had -- the other piece is that some of them had a hard time lying flat, because of your age and so on, and the way you're built -- not your building -- your body is [unclear], but it changes over time. So we did the best we could, I would say. I can only applaud -- if there were an applause meter, I would just applaud everyone. Everyone tried so hard, and did the best they could. Also, the staff there -- the custodial staff was there. They really helped. That evening, for a hot meal -- the chief custodian, I think it was; and also, it was Tim Galligy. Tim Galligy. They came in and they used what was in the kitchen there to prepare a hot meal for -- I called everyone guests -- for the guests. So there were Chicken McNuggets, and mashed potatoes or something. I don't remember. But there was this tremendous effort for everyone to do what they could.

So now it's getting dark, it's getting late, and at some point the mayor came in. I'm not sure if we had the lights out yet or not, because it was like, "Okay, everyone. We have to settle down, etc." But she brought in a huge box of flashlights, so everyone had a flashlights to everyone. They were small, and powerful, and it was great. Especially at night, it's a good thing they were there. You know, you need to get to the bathroom, to see, and you had to keep the aisles open in between so no one could trip and fall.

I remember standing outside, because there were other people -- and we would go outside and just look. The world was there. I cannot remember exactly when it happened, the timing, but I remember, again -- Wallace is, I think, on Eleventh or Twelfth. But looking down, you could see -- the river was on Thirteenth Street. You could see the water. Then, all of a sudden, across from Wallace, there was a whole group of buildings, all the lights went out. All the lights went out, and there was one building on the corner, on a different grid, that was still lit. And also the bus shelter was still lit. The traffic light was lit. So different things on different grids kept going, and certain things didn’t.

But, the two things again: We already had the flashlights, which was wonderful. So people didn't even know the lights were out, most people. If they were asleep they didn't even know, and then they could use the lights to get to the bathroom and so on.

In one of the classrooms -- we were in with the CERT people, just to rest. I forgot about the other piece was that -- they had the families with children. That's why I wasn't visualizing it. They were in the children's room, so the kids had little toys, and so on and so forth, that little thing. It separated them from the regular population.

Yes. I laid down. There were other people there, not a lot. I don't know that I slept much at all because you heard the wind; you're in a different situation; you hear the wind; you hear the rain; but you did get some sleep, no question about it. I can't tell you what time it was but it was early. I'm normally an early riser anyhow. I came out, and the night people were still there. And the great piece of this was that during the night, they had worked out with the ambulance corps to transport those oxygen-dependent people up to Stevens. They had set up -- not a First Aid but like a crisis center or something up there -- a triage center. I couldn't think of

it. Yes. That was wonderful. So when we came out, those folks were already taken care of.

Now come to morning, Wallace had been flooded. Wallace was flooded. They had a basement, but they also have a sub-basement, and in the sub- (like we have submarines, that's where all the generators and all this kind of stuff was. I remember asking how bad it was. I went down the stairs just to look, and there could have been four to six inches, maybe more, of water, in the basement. Which meant that the sub-basement was to the roof and ceiling and above. So none of that was working. Again, this whole thing about people in the background doing whatever "blessed" thing you could do. They were working on seeing about transferring people to another site, because this was not going to work out. I don't remember the whole story with the high school, but I think it turned out that the high school would not have been the place. I don't remember why. They had some flooding also, or whatever. I just don't remember now.

So anyhow, with St. Francis and St. Peter's -- we went up to St. Peter's, and they had more or less sorted folks, like families with younger kids and so on, and younger people went to St. Matthew's, and to St. Peter and Paul -- I mean to St. Peter and Paul. At St. Matthew's,

we had the older population. So we got into these vans -- I think it was the HOP that took us. I say Hop but the Hop. The Hop took us. We got there, and I had been to certain things at St. Matthew's, but I was not that familiar, really, with the setup. But they were very good. They brought the cots over. We set them up. The wonderful piece was that they have the soup kitchen, so there were hot meals. There were meals.

Now the first night we went there --

EL: How many?

RO: Gosh. It was wonderful to remember. I can try and look back think about it.

EL: It changed from night to night.

RO: I would say that the max we could have had was forty.

EL: But that first night that you got there, there weren't that many, were there?

RP: I'm trying to be visual because -- you think you're going to remember everything, but you don't. I would say that not every cot was taken. I'll put it that way. They were not all taken. There were certainly more than two dozen, but I can't tell you exactly how many. And there were men and women. Not that many. The women I put up front. I just wanted that separation. And the men were in the back. The first night we were there, we didn't have a way to make a meal. One of the neighbors (this was, again, the whole thing about Hoboken and how great everyone was), this neighbor came in. It was a man. He came in with his son and his friend and said, "What is it that you need? How are they going to eat? What about a meal?" So I said that would be wonderful. I never seen it. But he came back later with three pots of cooked pasta and sauce, so we were able to feed everybody.

I had said this before, that this was not like a spontaneous generation of good will; that it had always been there, but maybe not expressed. We had so many people who came in and did so many wonderful things. It was just absolutely amazing. Folks at St. Matthews, and the community people. We had some consistent volunteers. We had people from Stevens. There was one woman from Hudson Street, from the neighborhood, and she took clothes from

folks, went home, and came back three hours later with clean clothes.

EL: Wow.

RO: There were always people out there doing all sorts of things. One of these people -- I think it was the Sky Club. The Sky Club -- that's where they have the showers and everything. They worked out with them, and they got the [unclear] -- two different days that they took people to the showers, so they could shower. The amazing thing (I wish I had pictures) -- the joy on the faces of these people when they came back. They had clean clothes. Some of them shaved. And there was just this happiness, this glow. Because you're kind of down; you had the clothes on that you were wearing two days ago, and haven't been able to wash. Or people could go in, and yes, they could do a little spot kind of thing. The other piece was that the people, the group within the community -- we always told them what was going on, so they understood, and one of the practices at St. Matthew's was that when the noon meal was finished, all the tables were put up, and the cots -- in the morning we took up the cots, so instead of a sleeping area it became a feeding-site type thing.

When we cleaned -- we would clean. I would ask the population, the people -- the guests -- this fellow, I remember -- I don't know when the last time it was that he had a broom in his hand, but I gave him a broom. "You can sweep." But they would mop, they would sweep, they would take out the garbage. Everyone worked together, absolutely worked together. In the evening we'd leave a couple of tables -- it evolved over time. We left a couple of tables so people could still socialize, or get a coffee --

EL: Sit down and read a newspaper.

RO: -- or whatever. Right. Some of them would play games that don't mean anything to me. But they would play games. Play games. I remember one of the kids -- some of them were young. They wanted a dictionary, because they were doing like a scrabble thing. They wanted a dictionary. The people just got along. We set up rules very much in the beginning to set parameters. Again: no loud talking; no dallying; no this; no that; whatever. Everyone treats each other with respect. Because some of the people in there had a history outside of here. We don't know

anything about anybody, but this is what's tolerated, this is not. People followed the rules.

EL: But you also had people in there who were professionals. They weren't all -- didn't you have people in there who worked 9:00-5:00 jobs?

RO: Not a lot. I won't say that. Because after the storm, if you remember, you couldn't get anyplace. You could not. Even at Wallace, somebody would find somebody, and we would have that. We had that also at St. Matthew's, which was great -- where somebody was looking for their mother, their grandmother -- they would come, they would be so happy to connect with this person. I remember there was this one couple who happened to be in the area. They were from Boston. They were in the area, and got stuck here. A variety of stories, many, many stories how people wound up where they were.

So people did kind of come and go. Somebody might come, somebody would go, and some of the folks, when they got there, even at Wallace, they were calling. If they could call, they were calling, letting somebody know they were there, and somebody would get them, or they'd find a friend, or they went with somebody. At St. Matthew's --

again, over time -- I'm a very visual person, and I just remember -- it's almost like taking snapshots in your head, of different things and different people. One of the situations that really impressed me was we had an older lady who had some care needs, and she had a caretaker with her. Again, my language is leaving me. Home-aid, she had, a very nice woman. But how the shelter is set up is one big open area. There is no privacy at all. She's an older woman, and you wanted to protect her as much as you could. That kind of thing. We would work out something else, if we had to.

In the meantime, as she's coming in -- and it could have been the second day, third day, I just don't remember now. But she wasn't there in the beginning. At the same time these four students came in from Stevens. We never turned volunteers away, but there were points where you just didn't need a lot of people. So we referred them down to the city. There were lots of things going on out there, and so on. But I said, "I do have a problem. This is what we have. This is what our need is. We want to provide privacy for this woman and her caretaker." And it happened to be that they had two room dividers. The students went over there, looked at the thing, and figured it out, creating a triangle where, "Let's put two cots in, her

wheelchair," and she had her walker. This way -- and it was just to the side. We were not taking much more room than essentially the two dividers, sitting there. And she was so overjoyed. I was just so pleased that those kind of things (I repeat myself, but it's true). We had these mini-miracles, where the person you needed, or somebody you needed, showed up. I remember, again, saying to folks, "You know what we need?" and the we turned around, and somebody walked in the door with the thing that you needed. It was almost like a miracle, just wonderful.

At St. Matthew's, again, is a faith-based organization, so were there that following Sunday. That Sunday was All Soul's Day -- All Saints Day, All Souls Day -- and some of the people went up to -- we encouraged them, because there was music -- to get up and go.

EL: Up to Mass.

RO: Up to the Mass. That particular woman I mentioned -- the older lady -- very Catholic, very Catholic. I'm older, but she's even older than me. And at that time, with the Catholic church, you couldn't go into a Protestant church. Oh, my goodness. Oh, no. You couldn't do that. And Lutherans! Oh, no. Oh, no. I don't remember -- I

just don't remember this whole sequence, but I'm telling her that it's okay to go. It really is okay. It would really be okay. To me, one of the most beautiful things was I was sitting on this side -- I wasn't with her, but she went up. She was on that side, the opposite side. I saw her take communion. So, as a Catholic from those times, that was a big deal. Again, I'm not a big crier, never have been, but the tears will come, I assure you. Those were just some of the beautiful moments.

We did have part of our group were folks who had (and still have, unfortunately) mental disease. It's not their fault. It's never your fault. You have no control over your brain. So we had a couple of people who had difficulty staying inside. They would get up and go out. So we gave people freedom. Some could not be close in the group, and there was one particular individual who found a little corner, he had his shopping cart or his cart, so he could put his cart there. But he couldn't stay there all day, and put away his things. As long as he knew that he could go there -- and he was not part of that big group. Again, it was a teeny, tiny little corner -- he was content.

I'm not applauding myself. I'm simply explaining that as someone who's older, who has had a lot of experience in the world --

EL: And a nurse.

RO: -- and a nurse. I'm a nurse, and my experience has been not only but a lot of ERs have very varied experience -- that I was able to defuse things. The other thing, which I tell people, is that I'm a mother. What I would do at night sometimes, for example, I'd say, "I'm the Mom." And see, because St. Matthew's is not set up like a regular shelter, we can't give [unclear] or something. There's no way. So you'd start putting out lights, and, again, you had to keep the aisles clear. Again, we had fire chief [Unclear].

EL: Was there a curfew?

RO: It was around 10:00 or 11:00 that we started putting everything down. We didn't want a lot of transient -- you know what I mean. This is the time -- because, again, we had to be up early and clear up everything, because you're sharing the space with the soup

kitchen. We were a guest in their space, so we followed their rules, from the beginning, setting it down for everyone, so they understood what is was we were doing. The other thing was making that clear to people. This is temporary. This is not a shelter. If you have another place to go, that's where you go. You can come here for a meal if you need to, but this is not going to be a long-term thing.

Anyhow, it's not even controlled, that whole thing about setting limits. Because some folks -- they don't have any internal limits, so you have to create that thing. The rule was the rule. I'll tell you quickly, there was one fellow (different person) who had his cart, and he wanted to put the cart next to his cot. He was there, I think, just for two nights. He was insistent on the cart. I told him, "We can't. We can't block the aisle. We can't block it. It's a fire regulation." Because, again, Mr. [Unclear] was wonderful. He was there. He was really wonderful.

Anyhow, he was kind of resistant. So I said, "Well, you can either sleep in the cart, or you have to move it. But two things can't occupy the same space." Then he laughed, and he did it. But he had to see that cart; he had to know that it was there. Again, with experience, for all of us -- I'm not saying every single person it was a

new experience -- but you take your life experience into the arena you're in. And I have to say that the citizens of Hoboken, the volunteers -- we had people from the neighborhood who came in consistently; people brought things. They'd walk in, and one of those things you don't think about -- we're an older population. Some of them needed Depends. Babies that need this, we had people who needed Depends, male and female. So rather than making their lives miserable -- what do you need? If you have some Depends -- that's what we need. Cups, saucers. Well, not saucers. Cups. Whatever. There was a period there where we were running out of cups, so I told everyone, "You have to write your name. You could have one for your soup, one for your whatever -- for your coffee, your tea, whatever -- and the people did. They understood that everything is for everybody; there's not more for me, more for you.

Now, quickly -- donations, donations, donations, donations. We had volunteers -- the students from Stevens would come and go, whatever hours they could give and so on. There were a lot of donations, so they helped sort them and store them. And one of the things we did was, there were a lot of clothes. So there was a group of volunteers that went up on the stage (there was a stage there at St. Matthew's), set up tables, and they sorted

everything by shirts, this thing and that thing, and then very discreetly -- we had the curtain pulled -- we would bring people up one-by-one, so they could shop. It was like in private. The thing about this was that rather than this crazy grab-grab-grab -- there was one particular woman I remember whose pants were -- she only had the one pair, and they had gotten wet. She would only take one pair. She said, "That's all I need." It wasn't like, "Give me everything." So people got things. And there was somebody else who was looking at gloves. He needed gloves. Because, again, we were approaching winter, and you needed gloves. He took a very thin pair, and I said, "No, here. Look at these," because they were bigger, and they had that kind of thing where it flips over, where you have a little extra warmth -- like a mitten. It becomes a mitten.

So what did I learn from all these experiences? Just basically the goodness of people, which I've always believed in. It humanizes -- and it's not that I thought that homeless people shouldn't be humanized, but -- the other thing we did there, everyone had a name. They knew who we were. I don't remember names, but everyone had a name. You just weren't "you folks" or whatever. It was this one, that one, the other thing. There was just, again, kind of a community built, and it wasn't you're from this

housing thing, and you're homeless, and you're this; it was all together.

EL: Did you have any interaction with any other aid groups, like did you see anybody from FEMA, or the National Guard, or the Red Cross? Did any of those groups come around?

RO: For us, mostly it was volunteers from the city. We did have one, when we were up at Wallace -- we had one fellow -- he's a Hoboken resident -- who was from the National Guard. But we really didn't have the National Guard with us. They were doing their stuff in the city. We did have Doctors Without Borders, Physicians Without Borders, and I remember -- because it's one of those charities that I give to, because they do great work -- and that little squiggle, they have that little emblem thing -- seeing people come in with that little emblem was like, this is great.

But they were wonderful. Okay. I know there was a physician. We had a social worker, I think. Somebody, I think, was pharmacy. We had a psychologist. They did assessments and evaluations. I'm the kind of person -- I've been in management. If you're doing whatever it is you're

doing, I don't step in unless there's a problem. So you're taking care of that, that's fine. But they had such empathy, and knowledge, and understanding, and they were really helpful. They were really helpful. I can just think -- we had some very young people (three of them I can think of right now) who, again, needed help. There was one person they really thought should be hospitalized, but refused that. Some of the folks who are on the streets, young and old, that they have psychiatric conditions that really impact their lives. From the city, because -- I think they had a nurse-practitioner, also, and a physician, so that some prescriptions were written, so they were able to get prescriptions filled for people. I remember there was one young man who had a seizure disorder, and the fact that we could get him -- or he got some doses of Dilantin -- made a difference in his life and his experience. The other thing is that when you -- and St. Matthew's was a unique situation, because they have those couches that you can sit on -- so we were able to put people there who had difficulty lying down or whatever -- older people. We had one person who was over 400 pounds. There was no way he could get on a cot. So by being able to provide what they needed, we prevented having to send them to an acute-care facility. It's a small thing, but I would say there might

have been, let's say, six or eight more people who may have wound up needing to go to the hospital, simply because we couldn't accommodate them, because they could not manage on the meds. My overall experience is that, again, it renewed my faith in people. [Laughs] [Unclear] Gosh. There are so many things. You don't cover everything, but the other piece was that they had the morning meals and the afternoon meals -- within our population we had people who were cooks. "Can I help?" This one fellow walked in and said, "Can I help?" I never said no. It turned out that he was a cook, and he could give a couple of hours. He went into the kitchen and helped, and he would come when he could. We had two people within the homeless group who had kitchen experience. They created meals from the stuff that you could not believe, and we had somebody from the church who did the soups, that was unreal. One fellow came in late, I remember -- and it was just sort of unusual, because we had this soup and we had a little bit left over -- that he had a choice. The fact that you're in this shelter and you had -- "Would you like --?" I'm just mentioning, "Would you like chicken soup, or would you like the beef broth?" Or something. The fact that a person has a choice, that they rarely have a choice. It's like, "We'll take whatever you give us."

So my feeling, looking back -- I know I didn't cover everything. Right now, I focused on bells. But if I could, I would just ring bells. Because it was great.

EL: So what about your apartment? What wound up happening with your apartment? Or the place where you were staying, in the basement?

RO: What happened was -- let's say, now, I really didn't have much sleep on Saturday night, didn't have much sleep on Sunday night. I think it was until Friday that I was at the shelter. So I was essentially there twenty-four hours a day, and when you're sleeping in a different place -- plus, where I was sleeping -- I was sleeping on a cot, but you could hear everything, people moving around. You could hear everything. So you don't really get sleep. One other thing, again, with CERT, is you take care of yourself. It's a maternal thing or whatever, that you feel responsible for these people. You want them to be safe. You worry about them, and so on, but you still have to take care of yourself -- and I have to admit that I wasn't. And when you don't get enough rest, one of the other things that can happen is that you can make bad decisions; you can make poor decisions, and there's one

that I made that I will probably regret forever. But I did, and it's just because you weren't thinking clearly. You do need to rest.

Anyhow -- there was a friend. I don't know if you know her -- Eileen Lynch -- who came up and got me out of there. On that particular day (it was Friday), I had told Rich that I needed to leave for a while. I did come back the next day. But that really helped me, because I think you kind of shut down. Again, I would wash a little bit, but having a shower, and a cup of tea and coffee or whatever, and just even walking around -- because I'm a walker -- that, during the day -- also, it's a shelter -- I would go out and go up and down Hudson. I need that walking.

EL: You were restless.

RO: You need that. I'd go out with a problem in my mind or something, or a situation, then I would work it out, just getting out of that environment. That helped.

I stayed at the shelter, back and forth -- and, again, Eileen was very good with me -- until they left. They left St. Matthew's -- it had to be the fifth. I think it was the fifth, because the next day was election

day, and the schools were going to open. What was happening at St. Matthew's was that some of the folks were finding their way out. Everyone who could go was going, so our population was less. For example, one of the senior citizens' building, with the elevator -- things were getting better. They were getting back, and our population was shifting. So we were getting different people in who were essentially (some of them, not all) the chronically homeless, but a different group. They were not the same people.

So the atmosphere there was shifting, and the decision was made by the city, and by St. Matthew's, that it was time to close. We had fewer people, and what they did was combined people over at Wallace. I went over there with them. Some people were already there from Wallace and from St. Peter and Paul. That first night, we were just kind of resettling people in. They were not just being tossed out; they still had that connection: "This is what's happening here," and the city and different people were deciding what we were going to do next. What were we going to do with this group that we have now, this core group? If I remember correctly, I stopped there, on that Tuesday, just to check on people. There was one particular person who wound up having to go to the hospital. I think

there were two different people who went. There was always the potential. Maybe the environment was not ready for them. They were not ready, so they needed more support than they would get at home. I won't give specifics or anything, but this one person had like a walker, one of these mobile things that has a little cart on it, that kind of thing, and you can sit on it and whatever. I had promised him that his stuff got back to his place. I went the next day, with someone else, we gathered up what we could, brought it over to his apartment and gave it to the building manager -- because we had promised that we would. I essentially stopped in the building at Wallace, to say goodbye to the folks who were still there -- because on some level you do become connected to people. There are lots of stories, but, here again, they come from people who are out there now. I don't see them, but they’re out there, and they're really kind of lost. I do see, from time to time -- there are some folks -- they know me by name, I know them by name -- I always say hello, whatever. They are -- I won't say shadow people -- especially some of the young. They're very young, have had rough experiences, and as a country -- I'm not faulting Hoboken, but as a country, we're letting them down. We just do. The laws -- you cannot make people take

medication, and some of them absolutely need to. Or, they find other ways to medicate themselves; they self-medicate.

Anyhow, I don't know if it was life-changing. It might have been. I don't know. At this point in my life -- it's different.

EL: So what wound up happening with the place where you were staying?

RO: Oh, it was wonderful. No, it wasn't. [Laughs] So anyhow -- that last day. This was one of the volunteers from -- a sweet, sweet woman, Rebecca [unclear] -- we went over and picked up the stuff from them, and she said, "Well, I'll come over with you." I had my little bag with my stuff, my little go-bag. I had no idea what I was going to find when I went there. There was no question that the water had been there, but to me the thing that was funny -- when she saw it she said, "Oh, my god. My god." But I knew what it was. My wonderful sandbags -- they burst. You could see like this huge wave had come through. Two of them were intact, and one of them, I guess, I had really wrapped it tight. It wasn't heavy plastic, it was a lighter plastic, and there was this stuff all over the place. What it was, was the paper had absorbed the water,

so there was no way for me to know, did I save something? But I did make my effort, and I did create -- people must have wondered, "What the heck is this stuff?" and where it came from. These little puff-balls of paper.

We went in and there was muck, because stuff came up through the tub, etc. She helped me. What I had said -- and I have two sons, and I say this -- that sometimes (and I'm not a great housekeeper and all that kind of stuff. Never was. I'm not neat) you do a thorough cleaning, and I did a thorough cleaning. Because it was like -- you just open a little pantry. Everything in it had to go out. Anything that was down. The refrigerator -- I'm of Irish background, and every Christmas we have the Irish sausage and Iris bacon and everything, so that was in my freezer. So all that stuff went out. Everything you had went. It was like, "Okay, I'll think about this --" No. So you just go, go, go, go. So we had bags, and bags, and bags, and bags. And the most disappointing thing to me, again, was that whole thing with those little plastic bins. I thought things would be safe. So I did have some pictures, some letters, some things -- and I had things that belonged to other people, not just me -- my parents and my kids and so on.

I lost -- I had a beautiful new futon. I lost my futon. I lost a big dresser I had that was old, a really big dresser. I had a trunk that had meaning, because it had been back and forth to Europe, to Asia, whatever, on a boat. I wish all the stickers had been there, but there were some stickers. But that was [unclear] my coffee table. But I loved my little things. But it was full of stuff, so that was all gone. That was gone. I had a two-drawer wooden file cabinet. The top was okay, but the bottom was gone. And another wooden piece in the kitchen. That was gone.

So I didn't save everything. I had a lot of tapes. They were all lost, because they were in that -- but, again, I told my son, you can't mourn it. It's gone. You just can't. A lot of this stuff is still in your head. You don't need to handle everything. But there was a sense, again, of loss. But I was just so lucky compared to other people. I think, "God, am I lucky." And going on -- going forward -- I had a lease, because I had temporarily -- because doing work in the house, I needed someplace to be while they were working on the house. Again, I had friends who helped me, because I couldn't live there. I would have had to leave Hoboken. I would have had to leave Hoboken, would have had to stay with my son. And he loves me and I love him, but that would not have been so great. Not for

any length of time. I have no desire to [unclear]. No desire.

So it was the help of friends and friends of friends, that I was able to find a place to stay (it was really until mid-December), and the plan in the apartment was that they would clear everything out, were clearing everything out -- but I had no place to put stuff. Again, it was one of those miracles; that there was another apartment behind the house I was in, where the tenant decided to go home. It was not related to the storm; it was unrelated, and just by chance. So I was able to move into that apartment temporarily, and that was on December 5th. One of the things, in the meantime, was that they had knocked down the wall to my apartment. I remember going in, because I had been sorting things -- again, we threw out most of the stuff in the beginning. But I was sorting through papers, and someone had told me about a way to preserve letters, etc., that were wet. I had these little trays of rice, and I put my little thing in, and put the little rice cover and come back. There was this fellow across the street who must have thought I was crazy. I went and got all these bags of rice to do this.

So anyhow, one day I come and there's no wall to my apartment. The wall is gone, and all the stuff

in the main room had been pushed into the little bedroom. That was another thing. I had a bed which I -- you don't love a bed, but I liked it. It was over 100 years old, an old, metal bed. And that was lost. I tried to save it. But anyhow.

But the folks -- the super, and the people who moved it -- I had some statuary and so on -- they were very cautious, and they laid things down so nothing was broken. I was really appreciative of that. So the story is, again, I had to let go of whatever. I was fortunate -- and, trust me -- I absolutely believe I was fortunate to have found a place, because I know there were people in Hoboken who had to leave, who did not want to leave; did not want to. Again, I keep saying, but it's true -- all these little miracle: the right people; the right chance; the right thing.

Where I was staying -- by chance, again, I found another place. Because the time was running out. The lease was up. I wasn't hearing anything, and the work had not really started on the apartment, so I didn't know where I was. So in April of this year, I would say was a very rough month for me. I didn't know if I was coming or going. I literally did not know. Because I'm one of those people who believe in [unclear], and I [unclear]. I heard about an

apartment that was advertised, etc., etc., and, again, I was the first person who approached, that worked out. So I'm resettled in a different [unclear].

I have been very fortunate. I want to go back again, to Wallace, because that was important, too, that first morning. That would have been Monday morning.

EL: Was it Monday morning? Oh, yes. Because you got there Sunday night.

RO: Monday morning. Nobody knew what was going to happen. There were some folks in there but not a lot. Some people came in -- "What can we do? What can we do?" -- and there were some who said, "What can we do?" I just said, "It would be nice if we could get coffee." So someone [unclear]. But this person went home, had a party coffee maker, and came back with a whole thing of hot coffee. I think we had milk but we didn't have coffee. And that was Phil Cohen. He stayed with his daughters there. I'd never met the man before -- not that you have to -- but that whole thing of a sense of community that people had. That was my little messaged -- shared power -- that I think is so important. That's what we learned. People who had, shared. I think he wound up giving -- not giving it but,

anyhow, it went down to -- it didn't come to us because St. Matthew's had their own, but it went down to St. Peter and Paul. But that meant to so much to the people, to have that cup of coffee. They didn't have whole cups -- they had half, or two-thirds, or whatever -- and nobody was gimme, gimme, gimme. Everyone stood and got their share. But that little bit of coffee made such a big difference. So sometimes, it's the little things that matter. To go back to the mayor -- that little flashlight made a big difference when you couldn't turn lights on. That was a big deal. The fact that the "night" people were able to connect with Tommy Molta, and get those folks up high. The triage center.

EL: Up at Stevens.

RO: Up at Stevens. In order to get all these little things -- the goodness, the generosity -- lots of g's, okay? Gracious, goodness --

EL: Generous.

RO: Generous. Godlike. Folks emerged and, again, the income -- with Superman -- with ordinary folks

doing extraordinary stuff. Whatever they could do to help. Again, some of those folks -- I might meet them on the street or see them, some of them I won't recognize. Because that whole thing about not sleeping -- you're not registering. You're actually, in terms of how we create memory, you're being assaulted; there's too much information and you're not storing it. So I like to ask somebody, even if I don't know them, I appreciated everything that they did.

EL: Okay. All right.

RO: Okay? Okay.

EL: Rose Orozco , thank you for sharing your story with us.

RO: You're welcome. Thank you for sharing your apartment.

HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, Billy Geib, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*. I understand that I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on October 29, 2012.

2. The interview will be audiotaped. In the interview I may be identified by name, subject to my consent. I may also be identified by name in any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview, subject to my consent.

3. I understand that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that a photograph of me may be taken or borrowed for duplication, and that if I withdraw from the project, the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to Hoboken Historical Museum, and that the information in the interview can be used by Hoboken Historical Museum in any manner it will determine, including, but not limited to, use by researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy will be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript.

6. I understand that at the conclusion of this particular study, the tape(s), photograph, and one copy of the transcript will be kept in the collections department of the Hoboken Historical Museum.

Interviewee Name: Billy Geib

Interviewee Signature Billy Geib

Address 3 Willow Terrace - Hoboken, NJ 07030

Telephone number: 201-988-0201

Date: 9 / 2 /2013

Archives 2013.039.0016

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: MARK SINGLETON

INTERVIEWER: EILEEN LYNCH

LOCATION: SHIPYARD CONFERENCE ROOM

DATE: 2 OCTOBER 2013

EL: Okay. All right. This is Eileen Lynch. I am with Mark Singleton on October 2nd, 2013, at the Shipyard Conference Room.

Mark, let me start by asking you what your connection is to Hoboken.

MS: Well, I've lived in Hoboken for most of my life. I've lived here since 1970, actually. I've lived and worked here for most of my life. I was part of the Hoboken school system, and I'm now married with two children. We live half a block from where I grew up, so I live on Tenth Street, between Bloomfield and Garden right now. I love Hoboken, and have loved working here. I'm a partner in a real estate company here in town, where I've worked for almost thirty years. I'm also very involved in the congregation at St. Matthew Trinity Lutheran, up on

Eighth and Hudson, as well as I'm involved in the life of the Hoboken shelter. I currently serve as president of the board of the Communities of Faith for Housing, that administers the shelter. So I've been involved in homeless services, providing food and comfort to homeless people for many, many, many years.

EL: Now when did you first hear of Sandy?

MS: Well, obviously, like everyone else, we went to bed on Monday night, woke up on Tuesday morning, and realized that all hell had, in fact, broken loose. The first thing I did after making sure my family was okay was I went up to St. Matthew's, and discovered that, because of the weird electrical grid issue, that St. Matthew's had power. So we had heat and electricity, unlike most of the town. And because it was a Tuesday, like every Tuesday we were actually serving our lunchtime ministry. Four days a week we serve lunch to between sixty and eighty homeless men and women, or just hungry men and women. Some of them are migrant workers; some are senior citizens; some are homeless people.

So we were in the middle of our lunchtime ministry, feeling very grateful that we had power and would

be able to continue to do that. About 11:00 in the morning, Lou Casciano -- whom I know now as head of the CERT team, which is a community volunteer organization -- came in and asked if he could have a tour of our facility, because he was running around, scouting some locations. He had let me know that the city's planned shelter at the Wallace School had flooded, so their plan for sheltering had gone awry. No one expected the flooding could be that bad; in fact, the flooding at Wallace School had inundated the heating system, so they lost power, they lost their backup generator, and they had nowhere to shelter.

So after looking at our church, and realizing we still had lights, he asked if we would be willing to act as a temporary shelter. I said, "Yes, of course, but we have no facilities for that. We're not a shelter, we just feed." He said the Red Cross would drop off cots, and he asked if we would be willing to shelter seventy-five people or more, for the duration of the storm.

So we said yes, we closed up our lunchtime ministry at noon, and then at about 12:30 cots started to arrive from the Red Cross. By about 2:30, people started to arrive, so that began a week-long sheltering effort at St. Matthew's.

EL: Who were the staff who served these people?

MS: Oh, it was interesting. Of course, CERT said, "Don't worry. We'll staff everything. We'll take care of everything." In fact, as it turned out -- CERT was obviously taxed to the max anyway -- the good thing was that because we had our lunchtime ministry, which operates so regularly, all of my regular congregational volunteers just started showing up. The wonderful thing, also, is that people in the neighborhood started showing up. And, of course, CERT had a team there, as well, primarily Rose Orozco, who was a real stalwart, and really was there pretty much for the entire duration of the place. So Rose was there, and also Rich Tremiditi was there. Then a varying group of people.

So it was staffed by a weird mix of volunteers and pastors -- known volunteers to me, and pastors [unclear] strangers, and CERT volunteers.

EL: They did an amazing job, I thought.

MS: They did an amazing job. Well, what was really amazing to me was the people who ended up in the

shelter. It was just such a typically Hoboken mix of people. The people who showed they were in need and needed to be serviced were everyone from homeless people -- street-dwelling homeless people, in fact, who, strangely enough, have become more homeless during the storm (if there is such a thing, because you need to remember that their usual places for shelter -- like the train station, like the hospital, like the library -- all the places where homeless people might go for some shelter were now flooded), so they had nowhere to go. So, in fact, people who had been out of doors for many years came indoors for the first time, people like the woman who has the little cat, on Washington Street. She hasn't shown up at any of our shelters, for years. She came in and stayed.

So it was some of them. Then we had senior citizens who were flooded out of their senior-citizens' building.

EL: Some of whom had special needs.

MS: Some of whom had some special needs. We also had homeowners, condo-owners, so it was a broad spectrum of Hoboken.

EL: I think you had some commuters there.

MS: We did.

EL: People who got up and went to work in the morning.

MS: Yep. It was really an amazing thing. It was a real cross-section of Hoboken, and a microcosm of the best of what Hoboken is, in my view. But it was a difficult situation because we had people who were very upset. We had senior citizens who were confused. We did our best to serve -- we served three meals a day, at least. We had a continuous flow of food. Restaurants started bringing in food. Volunteers started bringing in food. We, of course, served everything we had, and we really did the best we could. It was an amazing group effort. But some of the other things that came about, which were interesting -- we had more than a few instances where people from out of town had lost contact with a loved one, and they were desperately searching for their family members, whom they hadn't heard from in sometimes two and three days. We had a few of those reuniting that happened, where desperate

family members came in to find their mothers, their grandmothers, and their aunts and uncles.

But you know, some of the other interesting things that happened -- one of the things we didn't anticipate -- that people who were forced out of their apartment were forced away from their medications. So what became clear was -- we had some people who suffered with mental illness, who came on the first day fairly normal, but by the third day were starting to show signs of deterioration. Who showed up, oddly enough, was Doctors Without Borders. Doctors Without Borders showed up -- which is an organization I had always heard of, mostly doing international work. But I think because Anderson Cooper was on CNN, and the story of Hoboken went nationwide, Doctors Without Borders showed up, and they were absolutely a godsend. They got people appropriately medicated.

EL: Because they were able to write prescriptions.

MS: They could write prescriptions. They could get prescriptions, they delivered the prescriptions and made sure everything was fine -- and offered whatever counseling they could. So they were a real godsend to us.

As I said, whenever you have that many different people, from that many different backgrounds, together in one place, in a stressful situation, there will be moments. So I won't say that it was without stress, but I have to say that, for the most part, everyone pulled together and did what they needed to do. I think we managed to provide a really valuable service.

EL: Oh, yes. I was there, and I just thought it was a great group of people. It was just a real nice feeling of community, and what a great bunch of volunteers.

MS: Yes. And again, I think part of the reason we were able to do it so seamlessly was because we had already been doing it. Because of our lunchtime ministry, we were prepared already. So it was fairly seamless. Also, obviously, St. Peter and Paul was the other location, another church in town, which was another temporary shelter.

EL: And was a shelter downstairs in St. Peter and Paul? Because I was upstairs, in the church --

MS: They were downstairs, in their community [unclear]. Yes. So they were acting as -- because they have [unclear].

EL: Also, I wanted to ask you to just talk a little bit about the Bishop Mahurter [phonetic] Shelter, which I think you're the president of.

MS: Yep -- the Bishop Mahurter Shelter, or the Hoboken Homeless Shelter, as we call it now, is located on the corner of Third and Bloomfield. It was in an area that did lose all power and all lights. The Hoboken Homeless Shelter serves 250 meals a day, and we shelter fifty-five people overnight. So we have fifty-five residents, and probably about thirty to thirty-five men, and fifteen to twenty women at this point. So we have our own population that sleeps there, but we also have lots of people who come there for services. They lost complete power, so they were in the dark.

EL: So you weren't able to utilize that space?

MS: Well, we did. We stayed there. Not only did we stay there, but we had our fifty-five, our regular guests, but we also opened the door to anyone who needed to come and stay. So I would say, on the first three nights, we probably had somewhere around seventy-five people, maybe even 100 people some nights, staying overnight.

So yes, we continued to shelter, in the dark.

EL: You didn't have generators.

MS: No. We had no generators until Thursday night. Somebody from the National Guard or Red Cross -- I'm not sure who -- came and brought us a smallish generator on about Thursday, or maybe Friday. So we had power for the last two days of the storm, on a limited basis. What we had to do there -- we were prepared for -- we had huge freezers full of food, all of which were going bad. So the volunteers and the staff at the shelter just started cooking everything in sight -- because we did have gas. Essentially, we just started feeding anyone who came by, any food that we had, because, otherwise, we were going to lose it.

But our staff there. We had one of our members -- Barry -- who was on our staff, stayed there for four days straight, day and night, twenty-four hours a day. He lives out of town, but he was there. Travel was tough, so he just stayed and hunkered down. So we had some of our staff who were very, very dedicated, and really worked hard to keep the place going. There again, we also had -- somebody from the National Guard would come by and check, and I was running back and forth between St. Matthew's and the shelter, sharing whatever food we could share, and other commodities that we needed -- blankets and things like that.

That was the other thing that started happening immediately. Blankets, and clothes, and everything else started showing up at both locations. It was almost overwhelming, so much came in. In fact, on Thursday we got a call from the city, because they said they had a truckload of clothes coming from down South, "Can you take them?" At the shelter we never say no, but we were expecting a small van or kind of a truck, and as it turned out there were two eighteen-wheelers full of clothes, that came. They got dropped in our lap -- as much as we could take. We filled up every available inch of the shelter. Then they really just started -- the city

distributed the rest in the street, down at Observer Highway, which sort of degenerated into a bit of a mess, but -- so it was almost much too much that started coming in at one point. We were just overwhelmed. What was interesting in the shelter -- I certainly expected the shelter to flood at some point -- because the water, as we all know, came in, in the north and the south, and then started coming back toward Washington Street as it got higher. Literally, the water came to just west of Garden Street. So it was within 250 yards of the shelter.

EL: Amazing.

MS: Because we didn't have a contingency plan at the shelter. The next step was, all the people from the shelter would have come up to St. Matthew's and filled up our sanctuary, as people retreated to higher ground. But, luckily, that didn't need to happen. The water stopped. We got a generator to run some basic lights and refrigeration, for the last two days, and we continued operation at the shelter.

EL: Would you say that you've seen a continuing impact on homelessness in Hoboken, since Sandy?

MS: It's always hard to parse out what's what, but I can tell you that our numbers for this past year (and it's been almost a year) are up in all categories. Our [unclear] is up. People are just in need. Because I said, we house fifty-five overnight, but we serve almost 250 meals a day. So those people, many of them have homes but just don't have enough money to buy food, so they come in and eat. So all those numbers are up. It's hard to say what impact was from Sandy and what was from other places, but I can tell you that I think there's an ongoing impact, yes. I think there's a continuation of some people who are marginal -- marginally housed, marginally employed, marginally keeping it together, who are having a hard time since Sandy, in all of those categories.

EL: Do you think some of these people have left Hoboken?

MS: Yes, I think so. Again, I'm also in the real estate business, as I said, and we have seen that there are some apartments that were completely destroyed during Sandy, which are not being rebuilt. So those homeowners have certainly gone somewhere in town. Now, you

know, Hoboken being Hoboken, they're building hundreds of units at the same time. But yes, there's been a movement all right. There are some people who left.

And, of course, any natural-disaster emergency like Sandy is always hardest on the people at the fringes, people at the margins. So yes. I think there's been an ongoing impact, for sure.

EL: Do you think that Sandy has had any lingering effects on real estate in Hoboken?

MS: You know, it's strange.

EL: That's another hard one to answer.

MS: It's another hard one to answer, but I can tell you -- in fact, I got calls from people, relatives of mine in the Midwest, saying, "Oh, your real estate market must be decimated. I feel so bad for you." The fact of the matter is, in real life, the market is up over ten-percent since Hurricane Sandy. So there's no demonstrable effect on the market. Hoboken is this amazing little bubble, and for the most part I think people are operating as if it were a once-off kind of thing, and won't ever

happen again. Whether they're right or not will remain to be seen. It depends upon which climatologist you listen to. But no, there hasn't been a real negative effect on the real estate market.

EL: You don't think that, like people are saying, "Oh, I don't want to live over on the west side, or I don't want to live downtown" --

MS: It's a question every client asks now: "How did this place do during Hurricane Sandy?" They all ask it, and we tell them. Since Hurricane Sandy I've sold units in the middle of the flood zones, that have flooded completely. I've sold units that were completely destroyed and rebuilt. So it doesn't really seem to be impacting decision-making process so much. It is amazing. I find it hard to believe. I've been telling people the story that there was a condo down on Jackson Street, between Observer Highway and First, that was completely destroyed on the first level. It was only "parking," but the "parking" was flooded; the lobby was completely destroyed; the back yard, which was a public amenity, was completely destroyed; the elevator wasn't working. An agent in town put on a unit in that building, a week after Sandy, and I was saying to

myself, "Why is this person putting a unit on the market right now? It's never going to sell. You have to walk up through a construction site." The units themselves didn't get damaged. Sure enough, a week after Sandy, there was a bidding war on that property. It was shocking to me.

EL: Wow.

MS: You had to walk up the stairs, because the elevator wasn't working. All the sheet rock was ripped off to four-feet in the hallway. The tiles were all buckled. So Hoboken is just that kind of weird, amazing place, from a real estate standpoint. But, again, it's also a place where there are very rich and very poor. I think that the real impact has been on the very poor and the marginal. That's where the real impact is.

EL: Did you have a lot of interaction with the city during that week?

MS: They came and checked on us, and did have a continuing CERT presence. But I do think that the city, like everyone else, was learning as they went. I wouldn't say it was seamless, and I certainly wouldn't say

that it was without confusion, but they did the best they could with what they had. All told, I think it was great. But, again, it's really -- these types of issues have always been handled more by the communities of faith in town. The churches have always been the ones who have taken responsibility for the homeless population. The City of Hoboken doesn't donate one dime to the Hoboken Shelter. They did recently give us a one-time donation, but the Hoboken Shelter is funded completely by volunteers, by the local communities of faith, and by some state and federal money, and county.

Anyway, I think what became clear in Sandy was that when all hell breaks loose, the city relies on the churches and other community organizations to pick up a lot of that slack -- which we did.

EL: I think our national government is sort of the same way.

MS: The same way. Yes.

EL: I was going to ask you -- you said from the city you got a one-time donation. Anything that maybe the shelter can get from, maybe, Rebuild Hoboken.org?

MS: Well, at the shelter our needs are always the same. Our needs are always for basic toiletries. That's very hard for us to fundraise for. Things like toilet paper, believe it or not, are a real commodity.

EL: And feminine hygiene.

MS: Feminine hygiene, toilet paper --

EL: What do you do if you're poor?

MS: Absolutely. Razors and soap. Soap is huge. We offer showers to the homeless population five days a week, and soap is obviously -- so people donate a bar of soap, and we take a big knife out and cut the bar of soap into six pieces, and give it to six people. That kind of thing. And food. All those basic kind of things are always important for us. The other thing I always like to tell people is socks. Socks are gold to the homeless community.

EL: Because they have problems with their feet.

MS: Right. A homeless person walks miles a day, and in a wet pair of socks that's not a very comfortable thing. Last year, in the All-Saints Episcopal Day School -- the church and school there -- they raised money and donated 2,500 pairs of socks to the Hoboken Shelter, and we donated them out in sixty days. So that gives you an idea of what the need is like. It's almost unlimited, how many socks we can give out -- especially warm, large socks.

Anyway, that's something I always like to highlight for people who don't know what they can give. Buy an extra bag of socks when they're at Target. That kind of thing is important.

So it was an interesting experience, Sandy, altogether. It brought out the best of what Hoboken is, in many ways, but also highlighted some of the areas that we really need to work on.

EL: The fault lines. Yes. All right. So going forward -- what's something you might do at St. Matthew's? Or has it changed any of your routines?

MS: It's interesting. Yes. I think one of the things we're thinking about more at St. Matthew's and

at the shelter is keeping an emergency store of basic supplies, like water, and blankets, and things like that.

EL: Outside of your location?

MS: No, no. In our location, just to be available. St. Matthew's, being on Eighth and Hudson, is pretty high ground. So I think there will always be a place there. The other thing, oddly enough, is that we're also the backup emergency, off-site location for about six other organizations, like the Hoboken Charter School, and the All-Saints Episcopal Day School. So if there's a school lockdown, or an emergency or a fire, like there was --

EL: -- they will come over to St. Matthew's.

MS: That's exactly what happened.

EL: There are so many schools.

MS: That's what happened during the fire at the old Sacred Heart building, which is the Hoboken Charter. So a year ago, they all came to us. So yes, we're trying to really keep a backup supply, to act on an

emergency basis. I think the city is obviously doing some planning, and really expanding the CERT organization, which I think is wonderful. I have to say that one of the really beautiful things about Hurricane Sandy was the volunteers who stepped up, many of them from CERT, who came by and worked tirelessly and really, really well, in all aspects of the shelter. And also community volunteers. There were people who came (and I could name names), people who came and just went above and beyond.

A couple stories I thought were touching. We had an older, older gentleman who was separated from his family. He was confused. He was in this late eighties, and he had some special needs. By the third day, he really wanted a bath. He wanted to be clean. Obviously, we don't have showers at St. Matthew's. So a woman who came by to volunteer took him in and washed him. Now that's really going above and beyond, as far as I'm concerned. And there was another woman named Jennifer who came and asked a homeless man if he needed anything, and he said, "I could really use some socks and shoes." She came, and instead of just giving him the socks and shoes, she actually knelt down and changed his feet -- changed his dressing, and changed his shoes and socks. Which I thought was really, really touching. And the people -- acts of generosity like

that, that were exhibited throughout the shelter, that were really very heartening to me, and made me remember why I love Hoboken, and why I love living in Hoboken.

EL: I remember something that Rose told me about the clothes. She said when the clothes came in they were dividing them up, and some people were saying, "Oh, this looks like this fits so-and-so, and this fits so-and-so." And Rose said, "Let's let them come up here and choose their own clothes," because you never get to choose when you are reliant on services like that. You take whatever is handed to you. And Rose was like, "Let's let them come up and choose, because they really don't get that."

MS: And that's important.

EL: It's a little tiny thing, that people just don't think about.

MS: And people felt very out of control during the entire experience. They were separated from their homes. This weird, catastrophic event was happening, and they had no control. Something like that is just a little bit of personal autonomy that we can give people.

EL: That's what I liked about St. Matthew's. There really was a feeling of community.

MS: I guess the other thing we never talked about was the charging, of course -- what I called the iPhone zombies; people wandering the streets, looking at their dead iPhones, and they were needing a plug. We had dozens and dozens and dozens of people who were coming to ostensibly charge their iPhones, but also they came up for some company. People like Sada Fretz came up. Sada came up to visit, just to spend some time with other people, because they were alone.

EL: You're isolated.

MS: Yes. So it became a community center. And there was one man who had a laptop plugged in, and he was actually keeping one of the New Jersey websites going from St. Matt's. He was keeping an online blog. It wasn't New Jersey.com or one of those places. He was here from the minute we opened in the morning until the minute we closed at midnight, running his blog out of a chair. He was doing

his thing. It was an interesting group. It was an interesting group of people.

And, of course, as we all know, everyone who had power was throwing power cords out their windows, and offering food. It was a funny time. It was scary, but it was also -- people came together.

EL: Well, it forced you to get out of your comfort zone and talk to people. It was funny how everybody had their favorite little charging station. "I always go around there, because I like talking to those --" It was kind of funny, because even when it was all over, like in the next couple of days after it was over, it was like, "Now am I going to go out and charge my phone?" You almost felt nostalgic for being able to go out and hang out with the crowd of people, and find out information.

MS: More than a few people have related it to the days of September 12th and 13th -- remember? -- right after the tragedy there, where people were still figuring everything out and coming together. There was a real sense of togetherness. It was kind of like that, in a way. People had survived a common peril, and were doing the best they

could. I heard almost no incidents of problems, or looting, or anything like that.

EL: Nothing like that.

MS: People just came together, did what they needed to do, and helped each other.

EL: So, on a personal note, how did your family hold up?

MS: Well, it was interesting. I have two young kids. I have a twelve-year-old and a fourteen-year-old; and my wife; and also my mother, who lives around the corner; and my sister and brother-in-law. What we did -- we made a decision early on to say, "Look, we're going to be out of communication here. Every day at 5:00, no matter what we're doing, we're going to come back and meet at my house, and we'll have a meal, as best we can." It was a way we could check in. I was spending most of my time up at St. Matthew's. My sister, Jill, was worrying about her school community. But every day at 5:00 we got together, told stories, and cooked whatever we had. My barbecue grill still worked, so we cooked meat there, and we did the best

we could. I would say the kids were probably excited about the idea of living in an age without electricity for about twenty-four hours; after that it was just purely annoying to them.

My family did fine. My house did fine. We took in a little bit of water in the basement; nothing compared to what happened --

EL: I'm surprised -- Tenth and Bloomfield.

MS: Yes. We did really well. Again, the water never made it up that flight. But then, of course, we all were witnessing the days after, when everyone's belongings were in the street, and the piles of furniture and clothes were higher than the cars. That was a scary time -- scary for my kids, because that was --

EL: It was so unbelievable to see. I remember going with Rose to see her apartment. She hadn't seen it. That was Friday, after the storm. Walking over there, the streets were lined with debris, piles of debris. I said to Rose, "I feel like I'm walking through a war zone." All of a sudden, it hit me. I hadn't been over there, and I hadn't seen that.

MS: Yes. And the other thing to remember -- for me, personally, and for other people I spoke to -- we didn't know what was going to happen, in the sense that was Hoboken changed forever? Was it ever going to be normal again? Would the water ever recede? This big catastrophe that we've been hearing about?

EL: Are we writing off sections of the city?

MS: Right. So we just didn't know, and there was a lot of uncertainty. Again, that's what we did on a family level. Then, of course, we had some friends who were lucky enough to still have power, so we went to their house for refrigeration and for watching the news. It was interesting -- people throughout the country knew more about what was going on in Hoboken than we did, because we had no access to television. They had radio and television.

EL: I had friends calling me, going, "Your mayor's on TV." And I'm like, "Well, how am I going to know that? What's she saying?"

MS: And social media, interestingly enough. Because I had a computer at St. Matt's, I would log onto my Facebook account, and I would post updates about what was happening in Hoboken and at St. Matt's, on my Facebook account. People afterwards, relatives and people throughout the country, said how grateful they were for those little updates. A reporter from the *L.A. Times* walked into St. Matt's on the fourth day. It was shocking to me. We were just doing what we needed to do, but apparently we were a national story, as well.

Afterwards, I feel a little bit, a year later, like Hoboken's done pretty well, and we're kind of back to normal. But I can't say the same thing for areas on the Jersey Shore. The devastation that happened in Monmouth and Ocean County is just beyond belief. So I've been telling people, "Concentrate your efforts down there. We're okay in Hoboken. We're doing all right."

EL: Anything you'd like to close with?

MS: Just that, again, I always say to people, Hurricane Sandy was an interesting week, and it was an experience that I don't want to relive again, anytime in the near future. But, like all catastrophes, there were

silver linings, and there were moments of real togetherness. Again, it really did bring out the best of what Hoboken is. I wish I could have filmed that little microcosm that was living in St. Matthew's for that week, because it was a real, heartwarming, touching -- a little microcosm of Hoboken's best. Not that I'm looking to go there again; not that I want it to happen again. But we did what we needed to do, and it was great.

EL: All right. Well, Mark Singleton, thank you very much for your time.

MS: My pleasure.

HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, Maria Torres, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*. I understand that I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on October 29, 2012.

2. The interview will be audiotaped. In the interview I may be identified by name, subject to my consent. I may also be identified by name in any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview, subject to my consent.

3. I understand that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that a photograph of me may be taken or borrowed for duplication, and that if I withdraw from the project, the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to Hoboken Historical Museum, and that the information in the interview can be used by Hoboken Historical Museum in any manner it will determine, including, but not limited to, use by researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy will be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript.

6. I understand that at the conclusion of this particular study, the tape(s), photograph, and one copy of the transcript will be kept in the collections department of the Hoboken Historical Museum.

Interviewee Name: Maria Torres

Interviewee Signature Maria Torres

Address 560 marshall Dr. Apt 3A Hoboken, NJ, 07030

Telephone number: 201-667-6692

Date: 8/30/2013 Ms.MTT29@gmail.com

Archives 2013.039.0017

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: MARIA TORRES

INTERVIEWER: EILEEN LYNCH

LOCATION: JUBILEE CENTER, HOBOKEN, NJ

DATE: 30 AUGUST 2013

EL: This is Eileen Lynch. I am interviewing Maria Torres. It's August 30th. We're at the Jubilee Center. Maria, let me start by asking you, when did you first find out that it was going to be a pretty big storm?

MT: It was in my sister's house at that time. I was living in my house --

EL: -- at 560 [Unclear].

MT: Yes. But my sister said that the weather is going to be so bad, and I realized -- she said stay in the house. I live at 560, close to her house -- she lives at 540 -- and she said, "Let's be together, so you won't be alone in the house with your daughter." So me and her, we

are close sisters. So that day I went to her house, and stayed. It's the same [unclear], so I stayed at her house. We shared the food, put it together. We don't have no lights, for it's dark.

EL: Let me ask you a question. So you and your daughter went and stayed with your sister.

MT: Yes.

EL: Who was there with your sister? Does your sister live alone?

MT: No, my sister "was with my cousin." My sister is Carmen Torres, and my cousin is [Unclear], who was staying at the same place, and was me and my daughter and Merari my daughter, and it was only "four."

EL: Did you prepare together? Did you go out and get water together?

MT: Well, in the beginning -- this is a "weird" thing because I make the [unclear] food the day

before, and I have all the meat in there, all the food in there, and just --

EL: -- in the freezer.

MT: -- in the freezer. Everything. So I take the whole thing, putting [unclear], and try to close the refrigerator, so the things don't get --

EL: Oh, you took bags of ice, and you put it in the freezer.

MT: Yes. And put it in freezer, and nobody opened the freezer, because everything was frozen, so it's more easy to go in there and not be getting -- and all this day was cooking and doing stuff, like in the morning, lunch and dinner. We was doing that. My sister buy the candles, and I buy candles, too, so we was like -- and then some people give stuff to us.

EL: People came around with ice.

MT: Yes. Ice.

EL: And who was that, the Red Cross?

MT: The Red Cross was here. They helped us a lot -- even though I [unclear], it was right here, too. I think it was Chris --

EL: The governor.

MT: The governor, and the [unclear] --

EL: Carmelo Garcia.

MT: Carmelo was here, yes. He came to see us, outside, but people helped a lot to us, giving us blankets. At that time, it was cold. They brought us food, toothpaste, stuff, and a lot of things that we -- food, too, and ice water. We were walking to get water where the place -- I went to CVS to get water and stuff, and we passed all these things while we were [unclear] at that point.

EL: What floor were you on? What floor was your sister on?

MT: Third floor.

EL: So you could go up and down the stairs.

MT: People helped, you know? I mean, my neighbors -- I'd seen my neighbors, say hi and bye, but this time [unclear] we communicate. I feel like we communicate with the neighbors, because that's why [unclear]. My neighbor, "Ellen Sultana," [phonetic] went to my apartment and gave us stuff. She said, "Look, they're giving water in that place." I said, "Wait for me," and we go together, and help each other to move and put it back up, because there was not nobody to help us. We share -- like [unclear] neighbors, because, I swear to God, I didn't know my neighbors until that point. You get to meet somebody and help us. Sometimes guys that I knew -- because [unclear] my daughter said, "Can I help with the water to [unclear]." That day was difficult for us, for everybody who lives over here. I was walking around, there was water. I came over here with my boots, and there was water -- all these places, water.

EL: I was going to ask you, how high did you think -- ?

MT: Oh, my god, it was like --

EL: So about four feet. At least four feet.

MT: Because I have my boots over here [unclear] to see all that. I forgot to bring the camera, because I have pictures [unclear] from this side to see the Jubilee, and [unclear] it was high water. We could not go around, even to go that way, we could not wade from the water. All this time we stayed in the house.

EL: And how long were you in the house, for? With the water? How long did it take the water to recede?

MT: Because we think more is going to be "backlog" [unclear] buy water, I always buy water, so that's why I do the shopping before. I was doing the shopping, and I got water and stuff. I didn't think it was going to happen, but I got [unclear] in the house and we shared. My sister's neighbor upstairs, she came -- Laura -- she came down, and helped us, too. She'd bring food, too, and we'd cook together, and we do a lot for all we can then. We shared.

EL: Everybody got together and shared everything.

MT: Even the lights. We'd take emergency cord, like in the hallways, and put it all together so we could have light, and charge the phones to call everybody.

EL: Oh, so you did have a little bit of electric.

MT: Yes, but from the hallway. [Unclear]

EL: From the emergency lights in the hallway.

MT: Yes. We're not allowed but we did to see, so some kids -- the neighbor had kids in the apartment, they did that for the refrigerator. But we had only the light, and then come out. So we did that, and for a little while to hold the candles to be warm in the night. Then we played cards. It was boring.

EL: How old is your daughter?

MT: My daughter is sixteen.

EL: So she's not a real little kid. Because I was wondering what did you do with the little kids.

MT: [Unclear] two little kids that's not with me. That time they was with his father. But [unclear] with me, she helped me to carry the stuff, going with me, looking for ice. When the water went down, we were going, my sister and me, and Laura, and went to the local [unclear] ice, because sometimes we don't have ice. Every time we go upstairs in a store, the ice -- we'd bring big bags of ice. [Unclear] because they knew there was no ice, so trying to sell more expensive [unclear] upstairs [unclear] looking for ice, and sometimes they don't have ice. So we came back with bags and put it in the refrigerator, water, [unclear] whatever we had, and then [unclear] with the meat in the freezer, to hold down the meat.

EL: Or it would go bad. So you had gas. You could cook.

MT: Yes. We'd cook. We'd do the dishes. We'd clean whatever we needed, because we had water. The only thing we don't have is electricity.

EL: Could you flush your toilets?

MT: Yes.

EL: Okay. That's not bad. So are you in one of the big buildings?

MT: Yes.

EL: What about the people who were way up? What did they do?

MT: Probably some kids from --

EL: The elevators weren't working.

MT: They [unclear] up and down. Some kids, some people left the projects and go to families or friends in those times.

EL: So the elevators were working, or they weren't working?

MT: No. Everything was not working. They had to go up and down.

EL: Are they working now?

MT: Yes.

EL: And this went on for seven days -- six days, seven days.

MT: [Unclear] more. I don't know exactly the time. We passed through all that -- because sometimes -- because they [unclear] for the lights. After the put the lights, they need to take out the water, because it was [unclear]the light. They clean up real good.

EL: So after the lights came on -- about how long was it before they fixed the elevators?

MT: When the light come on, I think the elevator was working.

EL: Okay. That's good.

MT: But I live on the third floor, so I don't mind if I do the shopping. But that time they fixed [unclear] first they have to take out the water, [unclear] the light in each building. In each building they flooded in a couple buildings.

EL: Was that parking lot -- ?

MT: Yes. Everything. Everything. Everything. The two buildings probably -- I think [unclear] it was behind -- it was my building, my sister's building, because the water stopped raining, it stopped flooding, because it was beginning to flood in back, from the back side. You cannot see, but all that -- it was flooding, except my building.

EL: So were you looking out the window? Could you see water coming in?

MT: Yes, yes.

EL: Oh, my gosh. And where was it coming from? From here? From there?

MT: It was coming because my sister -- the window is from that side.

EL: It faces east.

MT: Yes. And then my building [unclear] --

EL: -- faces west.

MT: -- in the back, so my back, it was dry. Only the parking lot on that side --

EL: The north side.

MT: Yes. This building, all flooding in the back. It was all flooding. My building -- in the parking lot -- on one side of my building it was flooding. Only a little bit on my building, and my sister's building. It's closed off. Because people were putting cars in the top, moving the cars, to not get so flooding. But it was a lot.

EL: So you stayed with your sister the whole time.

MT: Yes. She didn't want me to go. My apartment was safe, but she didn't want me to -- every day I went to check my stuff and everything. Because I know putting ice -- if I need something I go and get it. Because she has stuff. My friend has -- her neighbor has some stuff, so we were trying not to open -- to be cold -- because it was frozen, and getting the ice in that. Some stuff I cannot -- I have to throw it out, because that was too longer. Yes.

EL: Does your sister have kids?

MT: They are big. But they were leaving.

EL: They went somewhere else.

MT: Yes. They weren't even around here. They were living over there, where my brother lives, in Jersey City.

EL: So how long was the water around? Two or three days? How long did the water stay in the street?

MT: Oh, my god. It was not easy. Probably four days, four or five days? It was probably more. Because it was getting out, everybody, and then the whole week everybody going out, because we need to wait when the water was coming down a little way, so we could walk -- because we could not walk. We need to walk like -- over here -- I don't come walking over here, I can't walk because it was so flooding. It was over here, so a couple days I had to wait for it to come this way.

EL: But you saw a lot of police.

MT: Yes.

EL: Did the governor come over here?

MT: Yes. Yes. Yes. I see the Army. The Army came to rescue people --

EL: -- people who were on the top floors.

MT: Yes, and old people -- they need more help than us. At least I'm [unclear], so I can help in some way. They could help -- they need more help than us. At least we trying to hold on, and the neighbors, we've got each other, but some people, they need more help than us, the [unclear] stuff they need to take it out. Some people were stuck, and they [unclear].

EL: Were you guys afraid?

MT: No, I was not afraid because I come from Puerto Rico, and yes, I'm used to hurricanes, water flow, or something like that. And what we do is each other calm each other, we're with the family. We are stuck in there, but we try to have fun and not scary, and help each other, what we need. That's what make us like that. We're used to doing that. So that's why I was not scared.

EL: I want to go back to Hurricane Irene. Did it flood back here in Hurricane Irene? I don't think it was as bad.

MT: It was not so bad, like the last thing that we had happen to us. It was not so bad. I know I was

right here at that time, but I believe that I never see something like that from this time.

EL: And it floods back here a lot.

MT: Yes. No, nothing like that. It was so bad in, like, what I see -- it was flooding in the park, it was flooding -- sometimes they flood, but this time the [unclear] I see we stuck in here -- no phone, no calls, no nothing. At least we had somebody to help us, and give us help in the beginning, because it was cold by that time, and everything was off. We had blankets.

EL: You didn't have any heat.

MT: No.

EL: Because it did get very cold.

MT: Yes. It was in the night getting cold, and we needed blankets. At least we were home, and what we had was [unclear] each other.

EL: You shared.

MT: Yes, and shared. And I was close to home, I could get like socks, and clothes and [unclear].

EL: So you got to know your neighbors a lot better?

MT: I think yes, and that's a good thing.

EL: People don't realize that. That's what you have; you have each other, and that's it.

MT: You have each other. That's it. Because in the beginning we don't have -- even saying -- sometimes I see my neighbor -- like one of sometimes, a couple of months, say six months, seven months -- I didn't see her, because she worked a lot. And I started -- and come here, and probably I'd go home [unclear] I'm here. So when I see my neighbor -- it's like in Christmas: "Oh, my god, how are you?" So that thing -- and then the beginning of that -- that's only [unclear] know each other. When I see her at that time, I just like know each other -- because I used to just go home and that's it. I open the door, I see somebody, I say hi and go inside. I didn't even know my

neighbors. So at that time, to see a girl, a young girl lived across [unclear] -- I know each other in that point, that we was close -- "How you doing? Where you going?" And walking to find our water and everything. Every time, if you know something tell me; if I know something.

EL: So you shared information?

MT: Yes. And we did that.

EL: So do you feel better about your neighbors now? Do you still talk to them?

MT: Well, I see her like, I think, Monday or Tuesday. I don't see her for a long time ago, because the way I said I come to my house. When I see her and say hi, and she said, "Hi, long time." [Laughs] Because she [unclear]. But I was glad to see her. We become more closer, because before it was like we'd say hi, and now when I see her it was like, "How you doing?" and we start talking in that point. And then, "Okay, I see you later." I may see her [unclear] too. At that point it was good. I'm glad. I need some part of that [unclear] good for us that meet the neighbors, because I realize at some point of

that, it's bad if you don't know neighbors, and you don't have close friends and close family. At least you know some neighbors who help each other and share, you know?

EL: That's a really good point. Yes, at that time, you really do need your neighbors.

MT: Yes. And we used to -- like, I come from Puerto Rico, and something would happen here, like [unclear] help and get close. I'm glad that my sister [unclear] my mother-in-law, she went in the other side, because they'd been living in the "four" projects. It was around water, so my sister living there, my mother-in-law live -- my sister-in-law live there, so they move there to --

EL: -- Jersey City Heights.

MT: Yes -- when my brother leave, and they come back to my niece's house and stayed there and shared all the food together. Because it was cold for that time. They don't have milk. The kids don't have milk, and there are meals. So I have to -- I was going that way to bring meals for the kids.

EL: Up to Jersey City Heights.

MT: Yes. For the kids. And they gave them water, to the water thing. And we need to -- if I go over there I always call, "Do you need ice? Do you need meals for the kids?" And this and this, I always like, with my family, or share with [unclear] and neighbors. [Unclear] and we going in the car, with my sister's neighbor.

EL: Now up in Jersey City Heights -- did they have electric?

MT: In some place they have, in some place, don't have. Because I call my sister-in-law, she live in upstate, like [unclear], and she said, "Well, over here I have lights." I said, "Oh, my god, I don't have light." And then over here in Hoboken, when they put the light -- so [unclear] they had light, and some did not.

EL: Washington Street seems like it got it first.

MT: I think we were last. They put the line over here. It was like, "Oh, my god, we're stuck in here." [Laughter] Trying to hold on to get, but [unclear] survived.

EL: So your lights must have come on when? Sunday or Monday? You forget the dates.

MT: That's what I'm going to tell you [unclear] know what day was bad, because it was like everything changed in one -- open your eyes and you don't know what day was that, what day they come to fix everything. The lights in some place come in. The lights when I leave -- it was the last one. I didn't [unclear] the last one, because I went place and had light someplace, and don't have the light. I realized at that point I don't know what's happening. I mean somebody told me what day is today, and I said, "Huh uh. I'm here, but I don't [unclear]."

EL: Like the prisoners do. [Laughter]

MT: When they come back, I feel like that sometimes.

EL: So when the lights came on, you went back to your apartment.

MT: Yes. My sister know that everything survived, helped to clean all that, and fix everything. [Unclear] clean my [unclear], because it was like, oh, my god -- it was like throwing out whatever it is. It was throwing out. I take whatever I can, and the other one, I throw out.

EL: You can't take a chance.

MT: No. [Unclear]

EL: So what kind of food did you have? What kind of meals did you prepare?

MT: Chicken. [Laughter] [Unclear] and cook together. I do this, I share. I think we had fun, at least in that point, because we could have the meals together. Someone would do the dishes, someone cooked, someone helped cut and work in the kitchen. I did like chicken [unclear]

for breakfast, like eggs -- whatever we've got in there. We shared pasta [unclear].

EL: And there were four of you, right?

MT: Four in my family, and my sister and my cousin. My neighbor -- my sister's neighbor was Laura, with her daughter. She have two daughters and two boys.

EL: So you did have some little kids around.

MT: No, they are big. They are big. But we cooked together, and we shared the meal. She said, "Oh, Maria, you cook so fast." And I said, "I don't have time to think about it." I cook early. I could see the light.

EL: You had to cook when it was daylight.

MT: Yes. [Unclear] This was the time I cook, and clean everything. Everybody who came, eat, and they had warm food, and I had everything [unclear] breakfast, I would do breakfast and clean everything. My sister [unclear] so I go out. Sometimes my daughter helped me in

the kitchen, too, so at the time I went out I went to the Big Banner store, full of [unclear] water and --

EL: Oh, you went to Big Banner?

MT: Yes.

EL: Oh, my god, you're so nice.

MT: [Laughs] help for cleaning, and helping with all the food, putting it together, and throwing it out. It's sad, because my daughter, even when she was little, throwing the food out, because there are people who need more. Thank god we've got, but some people, they don't have. And I always tell my daughters, my kids, that [unclear] when some people don't have, we have something. Don't throw the food out. So it was sad to see all that in there. I went to help and stuff at the Big Banner. We get communication with friends and stuff, and I'm going every time that I go -- when I need some "milk," and he say, "Okay, Maria," because I was [unclear]. I think I realized that people care a lot, when we had that. It was difficult, because [unclear].

EL: Do you [unclear] in Spanish?

MT: {Speaks Spanish) But it's like when something happens, at least we have each other to share, and [unclear] no worse than someplace, some country have, like they have the [unclear] in water, in the [unclear] water, when they take everything in some place. So for me, that's worse. We have to think that we had "life," and we have neighbors, and we have what we've got. We don’t have nothing but we have each other, like our families and stuff. I think that nothing compares, that people need more than us, and for me that's [unclear]. In my heart, I think about everything that I've got, for my kids.

EL: Maria, thank you so much.

MT: Thank you.

EL: Thank you so much for telling us that. I just want to ask you one last thing. So you [unclear] from Puerto Rico. Have you ever experienced anything like this in Puerto Rico?

MT: Yes. I got involved with Hugo. It was like mostly --

EL: Oh, you were in that.

MT: Yes. It was flooding. We don't have water. We don't have lights. We don't have [unclear]. Yes. [Unclear] And I think that experience made me [unclear] a family share -- family, friends, neighbors -- and we [unclear] each other -- stayed together. Everything -- if you pass through something like that, you never forget. [Unclear] I give it my best, like a person. I give it my best to help, because I think the life is more important than anything. One day you have it and one day you don't have it, but at least you have each other. Because that is more important than anything. I can see a [unclear] I can see nothing, like I just think of what we've got now.

EL: All right, Maria. Thank you. Thanks for sharing your story with us.

HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, Mark Singleton, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*. I understand that I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on October 29, 2012.

2. The interview will be audiotaped. In the interview I may be identified by name, subject to my consent. I may also be identified by name in any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview, subject to my consent.

3. I understand that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that a photograph of me may be taken or borrowed for duplication, and that if I withdraw from the project, the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to Hoboken Historical Museum, and that the information in the interview can be used by Hoboken Historical Museum in any manner it will determine, including, but not limited to, use by researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy will be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript.

6. I understand that at the conclusion of this particular study, the tape(s), photograph, and one copy of the transcript will be kept in the collections department of the Hoboken Historical Museum.

Interviewee Name: Mark Singleton

Interviewee Signature Mark Singleton

Address 159 - 10th St.

Telephone number: 201 659 - 6474

Date: 10 /12 /2013

Archives 2013.039.0018

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: BILLY GEIB

INTERVIEWER: BOB FOSTER

LOCATION: 3 WILLOW TERRACE, HOBOKEN, NJ

DATE: 2 SEPTEMBER 2013

Track #1

BF: I'm sitting here in Billy Geib's house, at 3 Willow Terrace, on September 2nd. It's Labor Day, and it's about a quarter of 4:00. Billy, could you kind of introduce yourself? Just give a little background. If you could just tell us a little bit about your background -- how long you've lived in Hoboken, and your current employment.

BG: Okay. My name is William Geib. I've lived in Hoboken fifty-one years. I'm an electrician for New Jersey Transit, and I've been there, currently, four years.

BF: And were you on duty the night of the storm?

BG: Yes.

BF: And -- just backtracking a little bit -- the storm really started to kick in -- what? That Monday night?

BG: It was Monday night, around 9:00 at night.

BF: And what do you remember from that night?

BG: I remember the scene like -- I was in the engine house. I remember seeing water coming down the tracks, almost like a small tsunami.

BF: What do you mean by that?

BG: Just water coming towards us.

BF: And that was from the river?

BG: From the river.

BF: Had you ever seen that before?

BG: Never -- and I've been here a long time. Fifty-one years.

BF: And can you talk about (for people who don't know) where the yard is?

BG: I was situated at Observer -- a little south of Observer Highway, near Bloomfield Street. Our yard begins between Hudson and Washington Street. I saw the water coming more or less when it was at Washington Street. We said to each other, "We'd better get to higher ground."

BF: And did you have any warning, like when you came on duty that day, that people expected something like this to happen?

BG: We were warned that there would be a storm and a lot of rain, but we never thought the Hudson River would submerge like that; come up like that.

BF: Right. But even the night before, wasn't there a lot of water down by the station? Did you notice any water? You know, it was kind of high-tide, and so on.

BG: Yes, there was high-tide, and when we get high-tide, the tracks go underwater in the depot. That's like River Street. Yes, we did. I did hear on the radio, on the transit radio, that the trains couldn't pull in all the way because of the high-tide. Whenever we have high-tide, like a two-inch downpour, that always happens.

BF: So the train can't pull all the way into the platform. What happens? Do you stop like a hundred feet?

BG: They stop like a hundred feet from the block. The block is the actual depot.

BF: So people can still get off on the platform --

BG: Yes, a hundred feet away.

BF: -- but if it's quite a few cars, they might have to enter through the cars at the end, to exit off.

BG: Right. It is a little dangerous. They don't want the electrical cables on the train to go under water. That’s why they have to stop further out, before they can come in.

BF: So there are electrical cables on the train, on the underside.

BG: Yes. On the carriage.

BF: How much clearance is there?

BG: I would say about three to four feet.

BF: And how big is your crew?

BG: My crew -- I'm in the engine house. There are like twelve of us. But on that night, I would say there were six of us, because we had three different shifts.

BF: And which shift do you work?

BG: I work 4:00 P.M. to Midnight.

BF: So his happened around 9:00, that you started to see the water surge into the yard.

BG: Yes.

BF: So where did you go for higher ground?

BG: I went to the service shack tower. We have a tower there. My foreman looks out at all the tracks. They can keep an eye on us. The we have another tower that's on Washington Street, that's called the Yardmaster's Tower. They knew to get out of there around that time.

BF: So you go up in the tower. You've got a stairwell, or an elevator, or -- ?

BG: We have an elevator. We have two stairways. We have a fire-escape kind of stairway that we

most often use. Then we have an indoor staircase that we use.

BF: So it's 9:00 -- and how many more hours do you have on shift?

BG: I had three hours to go but they asked me to stay. I stayed the night. But we went from the engine house to the service shack, and doing that we ran across the tracks. That's when the water was still coming, and it swept my friend off his feet, and took him about twenty feet. He was like floating. He hit his "head" on one of the steel beams.

BF: Say that again?

BG: The water took him about twenty feet -- swept him off his feet -- and he's a big guy, like 220, 6'2", a pretty sold guy. It took him off his feet, swept him about twenty feet -- and he was behind me. I just made it across. His "ribs" hit a steel beam, and he lost his cellphone, soaking wet.

BF: Obviously, nothing like this had ever happened before. He had been on the job for a number of years?

BG: He had been there twenty-five years; never saw anything like it.

BF: So what happens next?

BG: So we go out to the tower, and during that time there were engines running, and trains plugged in, with lights on the cars. My co-workers went to each train to try to shut them off, so they could save the engines. They were in water up to, I'd say, their chests -- and they're my size: 5'7"-5'8", and the water was up to their chests. These are plugged in -- they're plugged in. They're 480 volts. It comes off the generator on the engine, to provide lighting and air-conditioning to the cars. I was yelling from the fire escape, "Get out of the water. Some are $11 million for a new one. At that point he tried to climb from car to car -- because the engines were close to each other. He was using his key to stay out of the water. I was afraid he'd get electrocuted, because of the power. It was a "you don't want to drop a battery-

operated thing in your bathtub" kind of thing. My co-workers were able to shut off some of the engines out of the yard. And pull knife switch.

BF: What would they have to do to shut off an engine?

BG: You pull the emergency stop in the engine itself.

BF: So that wouldn't be underwater; that would be in the engine car.

BG: Right. But to get to these engines -- they were in water, and the cables were underwater.

BF: And where are the batteries?

BG: The batteries are a little higher. They have helped them. The batteries are in the engine, a little bit higher -- I would say about five feet higher -- because when we opened it we had to pull the door down, to access the batteries. We put water in the batteries every ninety-two days. We service the batteries.

BF: And I get a sense that these batteries are big.

BG: We have about thirty-two batteries, and they're bigger than the car batteries. They're like truck batteries. I would say sixteen inches.

BF: So no one got hurt -- except for my friend, who got washed away -- carried with the floodwater. Did they talk about it afterwards, what they did?

BG: Yes, we were talking about it. Who lost their cellphone; who was into the water up to their chest; "You're crazy for doing that, risking you life for an engine." But some of these engines we get attached to, because, you know, they all break down. We love the ones that don't break down, obviously. It was quite a night, I'll tell you.

BF: Do you have names for the engines?

BG: Not really, no.

BF: So you figure they were able to shut down -- you said, what? Three or nine?

BG: I would say maybe six out of ten.

BF: And so why did they stop? Were they just physically exhausted, or -- ?

BG: At that point it became a danger. The water just kept coming, and it was moving dumpsters; it was picking up containers; we have trailers that we store stuff in, that that was being picked up; we had garbage cans coming in from the depot; a lot of debris. We were wondering what was in that water at this point, and better get out.

BF: It wouldn't move an engine, though. That would be too heavy.

BG: Yes.

BF: And what would be the cross street of Hoboken, from Observer Highway? Would it be Willow Ave?

BG: Well, the yard -- yes. The yard is Bloomfield, Park, Bloomfield Garden, Willow -- I'd say around Park and Garden is where they were shutting the engines down.

BF: Gotcha. So then you all went to the tower?

BG: We went up to the tower, and I'd say maybe -- I think John and I went out -- the water did submerge, or recede. I can't remember exactly when. I remember looking out of the tower -- I looked outside four corners -- Observer Highway -- I saw the stop sign. The water was, I'd say, two-thirds up on the south side. That was crazy. I never saw that. And [unclear] was underwater.

BF: So it would be around Newman Leather, where you saw that.

BG: Yes.

BF: Okay. So that's Willow. Right?

BG: Yes. Willow.

BF: So there are six engine house electricians on duty, and you're all up in the tower?

BG: Right. But we also had cleaners, laborers, car inspectors. So upstairs we had, I'd say, about twenty-five guys.

BF: So it's a big space.

BG: Yes. It's like a big cafeteria. It's fairly new, too. I think it was built ten years ago.

BF: And how high up is the tower?

BG: I would say about forty feet.

BF: Okay. And you can look over Hoboken, in general.

BG: Yes. The million-dollar view of Manhattan, looking north. We only have these little windows, where we punch out. But looking west, that's the foreman's office, the training office. Those offices we

don't have access to. But that night we did. We have windows on west side.

We kept seeing big, red -- like you could tell transformers were blowing on the west side. I guess that's where our main grid is.

BF: In the west side of Hoboken, not in the train yard. You're talking around --

BG: Yes. You just kept seeing big, red flares.

BF: Yes. Around Second Street, I think.

BG: You remember that?

BF: Yes. I mean, I heard about it, and I know where those units are.

BG: We heard a little [vocalizes] -- I don't know if they were explosions or --

BF: And I guess the lights went out at that point.

BG: We did have a couple of -- we had emergency night lights.

BF: Just those little ones, on the wall.

BG: Right -- which burned out. But we had the generator for the -- that's why we went to the service shack tower. We have a generator -- it's pretty big -- I'd say it's the size of this, from here to the end of that wall, that tall.

BF: So like 4' by 5'.

BG: That powered -- I think that powers a hot-water tank for showers and some lighting, some office lighting.

BF: So did that just kick in? Or you knew how to turn it on?

BG: That automatically kicks in, because with the yard we shut the power off a lot, because they do

work on the [unclear], and sometimes it's affects our electricity, as well.

BF: So, obviously, no trains are coming into the yard at this point. Like after 9:00, is there much activity of trains coming down -- ?

BG: The last train was like 7:30.

BF: Because they knew the storm was coming, and they probably stopped.

BG: Yes. What happened was, when we went to higher ground -- it was funny, because the one yard goes like this. Then we have the B yard, which goes kind of up, upgrade, and this is like a downgrade. The Days yard is lower than the B yard. So in the B yard, see, that's what they did. They put a lot of trains on the B yard, to make sure that they were covered. We set up some trains to keep warm in, and to set up an office or whatever. We had little outlets where you could plug in your laptop; so we kind of made that home base. We did that with four trains.

BF: This is the next day?

BG: The next day, and that night. And in the morning.

BF: That night. So you worked right through. You came on what time?

BG: I came on at 4:00.

BF: Four o'clock. So you're working until --

BG: I worked until 1:00 the next day, in the morning.

BF: So what is there to do, in the morning?

BG: There's nothing to do, but I don't know. I guess they wanted us on hand. Some people tried to make it home to their -- because they had houses that were under -- I was concerned about my house and Janice. Janice was calling me -- "Are you okay." Yes. The house was like on an island. Did you get water?

BF: I was okay. It was close, but we did okay.

So when do you realize what type of damage is done to the trains, themselves?

BG: That took a couple weeks. We had to tow everything. But we were out of commission for a couple of weeks. But they still had us come in. At that point, we were picking up garbage -- because there was garbage everywhere. Whatever was in that river was now on our tracks. So we grabbed a garbage bag and gloves, and we filled up -- I don't know -- 500 garbage bags, with the crew. We made like a line --

Track #2

BF: So Billy, I just wanted to go back -- and tell us a little bit more -- you said that you went back to work but there wasn't that much to do. So what did you do?

BG: What we did was to get "foremen" set up gloves and garbage bags, and we went out to the yard, with gloves and garbage bags, and picked up a lot of debris. A lot. There were things -- there was everything but the

kitchen sink out there -- and I think we even came across a kitchen sink.

BF: So it's a while before the damage is known. Do you remember how many train engines you lost?

BG: I think we lost, in Hoboken, a lot.

BF: Wow. And do you remember what that represented, financially? It's got to be a lot.

BG: Yes.

BF: That's okay. But millions. I think you're right. And did anyone talk about "insurance will help pay for that?" You're in the trenches, so you wouldn't maybe know about that type of stuff.

BG: Yes. The foremen might know.

BF: Then when would you say the yard was ready to go, and you had train service. Do you remember how long that took?

BG: I think we came back about two and a weeks -- we came back maybe running one line. We came back at maybe twenty-five percent. Then in a month we came back at sixty-percent. Then a month and a half -- well, our electrical grid system -- that took -- I remember they said April. That took about six months to get, because when the grids blew up, they had to wait for parts. They actually had to rebuild it. They were trying to wait for the same part, but they figured it better to just go with a new system.

BF: And when you say "the grid" -- what's that?

BG: The power system for transit -- the "catenary," [phonetic] which is 25,000 volts. That's the wire on top, that takes care of the electric trains.

BF: So all the trains are electric. There's a wire on top that connects it, and hooks it in with the battery and --

BG: That's probably twenty-percent of Hoboken, the electric trains. But we have diesel. We have

diesel engines, that are called the "push and pulls." So we were just strictly on that after the storm.

BF: Do those trains also have batteries, the diesels?

BG: Yes. They store -- they have the batteries for capacitors.

BF: So they run the system from the train -- like the electrical on the train, and the air-conditioning?

BG: Yes, but it's run by diesel. The batteries store the power that the diesel generates. At that point, the water was gone, so we could run the diesels. But we couldn't run the electric, because they couldn't turn the power back on.

BF: I remember there was some talk about that the trains were really supposed to be relocated to higher ground, like a storm plan and things like that, that probably went back to Irene, the year before.

BG: We did. The [unclear] manager and some of the other -- I guess we had these type of engineers on the job -- from the Irene experience, they did bring engines to higher ground.

BF: Because, I guess, ideally, you would have taken all those engines, except for maybe one, like an emergency way out -- you would have taken them to higher ground. What would be considered higher ground?

BG: Well, all the electrical trains they brought to the tunnel. You know when the trains leave Hoboken --

BF: This would be back by Hoboken Avenue and the motorcycle club?

BG: Yes. Yes. That tunnel. We actually filled that tunnel up with the electrical cars. We brought them there. And none of the electric trains were damaged.

BF: But there were some in the yard that got damaged.

BG: Yes.

BF: How many trains would fit in that tunnel?

BG: I would say --

BF: Engines, I mean. How many engines?

BG: Well, electrical -- their cars, electric -- we do have an electric engine, as well. I would say three trains, unless the tunnel is a two-way -- six -- we'd have six -- eighteen, maybe?

BF: Where does that tunnel go?

BG: It goes toward Secaucus.

BF: Is it a long tunnel?

BG: I'd say it's about a ½ mile.

BF: Really? That's a really old tunnel, too.

BG: Yes. Let me see. I go in there -- have you taken the train?

BF: I haven't, because that means like trains from the Secaucus transfer station come through there, and go into Hoboken.

BG: Yes. I would say three-quarters of a mile. I never take the train.

BF: Okay. I think that's pretty good. So do you think, if there's another storm like that, your crew is better prepared?

BG: I think we are, yes. But that was like a tsunami. I don't think we'll ever see that again. Hopefully not.

BF: That's the big question, right?

BG: Yes. There was five feet of water on Park Avenue. I felt sorry for everyone on First Street. And, again, our neighbors on Sixth Street -- Seventh Street. Oh. At the end, when I came home the next day, I walked home. I took Bloomfield Street and walked all the way to Sixth Street, and made the rest. On Garden Street, it was up to my ankles. On Park, it was up to my knees. So

I said, "Let me go --" because Sixth Street was high, Sixth between Park and Willow. I said, "Let me go to Seventh Street, it might be lower." Big mistake; at that point it was up to my waist. I came home, and I passed your house. I was so afraid of stepping on a manhole cover and going down -- so I was kind of like testing the street -- the sidewalk before my next step on the street.

BF: Your fear was that the manhole cover would have been popped up, because the water was coming up from the sewer.

BG: Yes -- because that happened to someone in Brooklyn or something.

BF: Did it happen to anyone in Hoboken? I don't think I heard of that. But it could have, like you said. Apparently, there were enough other places where it could come up.

BG: I've seen them pop up in Weehawken, just from a torrential downpour. The water comes down from the mountain, or the hill, and you know that long, steep hill in Weehawken, by the Bank of America ATM machines?

BF: The Shades.

BG: The Shades. Those manhole covers pop. They come right off. I've seen it.

BF: In Hoboken, of course, the water is coming up -- if you had a basement apartment, it's coming up the sinks, it's coming up the toilets.

BG: My friend lives on Ninth and Park, and he was worried about his front window. It was coming up behind him. It sounded funny, but it really wasn't. Because his electrical panel was submerged. They were all worried about me. I left at midnight the next day. They actually drove me to Third Street. They were looking for us -- some food. That was the other thing. We couldn't find food.

BF: This is while you're on-duty at NJ Transit. But Public Service set up an emergency center; FEMA; trucks were coming in with water. I actually have a dinner from that night. I think I'm keeping it for memories. It's what the Army military uses to feed their

men, I guess during war. Right? It's really crazy, how you do this, too.

BF: Did you eat one? Did you have one?

BG: I tried one, yes, at the job. Not here. It was crazy. The water was going, and people didn't know what to do. You couldn't go to the bank. You can't access money. We had no time clocks. I guess there were some stores open with flashlights, selling food. The A&P, they had flashlights to look at the register. Remember that? And I love how Hoboken came together. People who did have power on Hudson Street were helping people out -- "Charge your cellphone here." And gas. No one could get gas for their car. It was pretty crazy.

BF: And your car was okay?

BG: My car was okay. Oh. What happened by my job was a tall building -- they have a parking garage, and the cars were floating under the building, in the garage, and they were hitting the columns that hold up the building. Those people couldn't get back for months, like six months. They had to make sure it was safe.

BF: What building is that?

BG: It's on Henderson Street, right next door to the coffee --

BF: Oh, the Kolbrick's --

BG: Kolbrick's.

BF: That building called the Zephyr?

BG: The Zephyr. Yes. They were shut down. They couldn't exit there.

BF: That's fairly close to one of the train overpasses.

BG: It's right next to the overpass. Yes.

BF: It's actually Jersey City. Right?

BG: Probably right on top of the border, yes.

BF: I didn't realize that.

BG: But then we were all up there in the service shack, and that became our new home base. But we had trains to stay warm -- because we didn't have heat at that point, on the service shack. We had body heat. There was a lot of people. Transit did us a favor. To keep us going, they said "Clean up." And that's what we did. I thank my foreman every day for letting me work.

BF: Do most of the guys live right in this area? Because I guess you had the advantage. You lived in Hoboken.

BG: Well, there are a lot of guys in Jersey City. I'd say, probably, in a ten-mile radius, there's a lot of us. But some of us are south. There's one guy who comes from Red Bank, which is forty minutes. Another guy's from Woodbridge. Edison.

BF: Probably some of them couldn't even get here.

BG: Right. Some of them couldn't get here. Hoboken wouldn't let them in. It was a rough time. And when we got paid -- because the time clocks didn't work, and the timekeeper couldn't -- we had to go everything on paper.

BF: And on the home front, in Willow Terrace, it seems like this terrace did a little better than the North Terrace. Is that true?

BG: Absolutely. Yes. I noticed that the water came one inch -- one inch from coming into our living room. I believe Mother Nature was good to us, because I feed the birds.

BF: Number one through thirty-two, right?

BG: Yes.

BF: And did anyone get it bad in this terrace?

BG: The people across the street lost their boiler, hot-water heater. Our whole crawlspace was under.

BF: Do you have a sense of how quickly it disappeared from the crawlspace?

BG: Yes. We have a guy who does swimming pools. He builds swimming pools. He had these pumps that were awesome. When you do one house you do them all, because they're all connected. He pumped it out, but it really couldn't go anywhere. These drains worked, and I'm wondering if the pump worked. The only thing is, it would be pumping it back to the river, which was coming back. So it's almost like a water fountain, that recycles its own.

But it did disappear -- what? -- a day or two days, it was gone? Yes.

BF: We still had power out.

BG: Oh, we didn't have power, I would say, for fifteen days. Fourteen days. You?

BF: I thought it was more like nine days, but I could be wrong.

BG: No, it was fourteen. Then we got power back, and we didn't have cable. [Laughs] We love TV. But,

I'll tell you, that's when you know -- we are so fortunate. We take so many things for granted -- electricity -- they could have turned our power back, but it was those buildings across the street -- because when I came back from work, about a week later, they started turning the power back on, and we were getting brownouts here and there. The firemen said, "This panel is burned, and we've got to shut it off." So they turned the main grid off. I said to the fireman, "Just shut that panel off. Shut that main off, and you can turn the others on." And he said, "Are you a licensed electrician?" I said, "No." He goes, "Then you can't do it." The neighbors wanted to kill that fireman, because we'd had it.

BF: I guess the fear was -- you could turn it back on, but people would probably just flip the switch in their building anyway, even though they weren't supposed to, and cause a problem. Because anyone could flip the switch.

BG: Unless you lock it.

BF: Did you hear any other stories of people's situations, that stick in your mind?

BG: Well, my friend who lives at 1st and Park, yes. He lives right next door to a deli on 1st and Park, and he said he was up to his chest in water, where he shut his power off, and he saw arcing -- which I thought was crazy. Why would you even go in there? It's his house. It's a house. But he said he didn't get electrocuted. I find that strange, but maybe he just didn't know what he was doing, and maybe it was already out.

BF: So how did that work? What if you were wearing sneakers or insulated boots? Would that prevent you from getting shocked, if you were dealing with -- ?

BG: If it's in the water, you're going to get electrocuted.

BF: I don't think we heard of anyone getting hit in Hoboken.

BG: No. No one got electrocuted.

BF: Which is pretty amazing, actually. So no one in the trains, and no one [unclear].

BG: Well, with us being underwater, climbing on an engine -- and you saw the lights go dim, underwater. The water came and covered the lights, and my friend was right there. I was like, "God!" I was praying he wouldn't get electrocuted. Engine on First and Park, but a lot of my friends on Bloomfield Street were okay. My friend lived on First and Harrison. She said that the people behind her there -- First and Jackson -- the National Guard were here, pulling people out on boats. I didn't see that, but I heard.

BF: Some of the buildings would have an elevator, the power's out --

BG: -- and it's seventeen stories. And I guess she had two kids --

BF: Or you're in a wheelchair. Something like that. They were taking people through windows.

BG: I remember seeing a convoy, I guess you would say, of ambulances from all different towns, coming

down Willow, to transport the people, I guess up to Christ Hospital.

BF: The night before, they closed down the hospital. That meant that everyone needed to be relocated. As I understand it, the mayor insisted that happen. So I walked by the hospital the night before, and you had like three blocks of ambulances, right down Willow, and Clinton. They were just coming in, and, like you said, every town in New Jersey, it seemed like, was represented. Every one is flashing lights. I had never seen that.

BG: They brought a big generator I remember seeing, like wide-load. I think it was a generator for the hospital, just to keep stuff cold.

BF: Medicines and things like that. Blood.

BG: Not for the building, but for certain [unclear] that are probably designated for generators.

BF: Sure. Sure. Okay. I think we got it. I think you gave a really unique perspective, that -- not too many people were on-site, in the yard, when that happened.

BG: It was like a tsunami. And it was weird. You saw the Japan tsunami. That was before, right?

BF: Yes.

BG: I remember watching that on TV. You just saw things picked up and moved, and that's what I saw in the yard. It was like the Delaware Water Gap, but twenty times worse -- because the Water Gap is pretty mellow. It was like white rapids. It was unbelievable.

I might be incorrect -- we may have shut down at 3:00 that day.

BF: Because you were expecting something.

BG: Yes. It was the 29th. I remember signing in that day.

BF: Well, you can clarify that when we look at the transcript. Okay. We're signing off.

HOBOKEN
HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, SUSAN O'KANE, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*. I understand that I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on October 29, 2012.

2. The interview will be audiotaped. In the interview I may be identified by name, subject to my consent. I may also be identified by name in any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview, subject to my consent.

3. I understand that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that a photograph of me may be taken or borrowed for duplication, and that if I withdraw from the project, the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to Hoboken Historical Museum, and that the information in the interview can be used by Hoboken Historical Museum in any manner it will determine, including, but not limited to, use by researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy will be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript.

6. I understand that at the conclusion of this particular study, the tape(s), photograph, and one copy of the transcript will be ~~kept~~ in the collections department of the Hoboken Historical Museum.

Interviewee Name: SUSAN O'KANE

Interviewee Signature 35 / Susan O'Kane

Address 35 Hackensack Ave / Weehawken, NJ 07086

Telephone number: 201-583-0855

Date: 10/11/2013

Archives 2013.039.0019

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: SUSAN O'KANE

INTERVIEWER: ALAN SKONTRA

LOCATION: 35 HACKENSACK AVENUE,
WEEHAWKEN, NEW JERSEY

DATE: 11 OCTOBER, 2013

Track #1

AS: What is your connection to the Weehawken Shades? How long have you lived in the area? Who, if anyone, do you live with, and what is your professional background?

SO: Well, my connection to The Shades is that I'm a resident here. I own a home and I live here, and who I live with or don't live with, I'm not going to make a comment on. I've been here for many, many years. I lived in Hoboken for eighteen years before I moved over here.

AS: When did you first hear the words "Hurricane Sandy?"

SO: I didn't hear them, I read them. There was a document, or a letter, from the city that was left in

the vestibule of the building, about 3:30 on October 29th, saying that we should evacuate. But I hadn't heard anything about it before then.

AS: Based on hearing that notice, a short time before the storm actually hit, what did you expect to happen?

SO: Almost nothing. Around 7:00 the fireman who is my next-door neighbor, was on the street outside, on Hackensack, and he as in his combat uniform, with big heavy boots. And he said, "Susan, you have to evacuate. Look down the street. Look at all that water." And I said to him, "Joe, I don't have to worry. I've never had a drop of water in my basement." The water just stood there. It didn't go anywhere. But it was going down toward the Palisades and into the back area here, in the Weehawken Shades. I came back in the house, and just minutes afterwards the water began to pour in the house; just began to pour in the house.

Track #2

AS: So when the storm hit, you were home?

SO: Yes.

AS: Did you feel that you had enough provisions and supplies when the storm hit?

SO: No.

AS: So how much water did this area and your home get during the storm?

SO: About eleven feet.

AS: So, in other words, were you trapped in your home?

SO: No. I live on the corner here, and it went about six and a half feet in my basement, and then came about four feet into my house. But I have a three-story building, with tenants there, and this is the one-story extension. So I got out quickly, quickly then up in the front.

AS: So what was your reaction, as all this was happening -- in terms of the water coming, and feeling it surrounding you?

SO: I was amazed, dazzled by it, but a certain kind of calmness came over me, also -- because I knew it was a real calamity. I'm not one, when I'm in the middle of a calamity, who falls apart. I knew I had to keep my wits about me, to be able to get through this, but it was such an astonishing event. I saw the water just pouring into my house. It came underneath the floorboards, and just rose so rapidly. I mean, the ocean really poured into my house. Within a minute or so it was feet-high.

AS: Did you lose electricity.

SO: Yes. When I went out into the hall, some of my tenants came down and said, "The mayor is looking for you. The mayor is looking for you." They said he was across the street. But he was trapped there because the water was up so high. He did wade through the water and come knocking on my door here, just to make sure I was all right.

AS: How else did that interaction with the mayor go? What did you tell him?

SO: Well, I didn't have to tell him anything. He could obviously just see. He just inquired about my

security, and that I was going to be all right, and where am I going to stay, etc. As a senior citizen. He just coddled us and took care of us -- I found out. [Laughs]

AS: What kind of damage did your building suffer, and the surrounding neighborhood?

SO: The damage to my house was almost total. When the ocean came in, it broke the foundation of my extension here. I had termites in my foundation that I didn't know about, and when the ocean came in it broke the studs, and the beams, and the joists. The salt water was so high it corroded all the electricity. It ruined the boiler and the hot water tanks, and I had to replace all that. It took my clothing, it took my furniture, it took my address book, my telephone book, all my records. I was homeless for about three and a half months, until I was able to get the foundation taken care of. I'm just kind of moving back into my house, and I've just had a cable and a bed for some time. I didn't move in until they could get my hot water and my furnace in. But I had to put in all new plumbing, and I lost a lot of my books. I didn't lose any of my paintings, but it was total -- for the neighborhood -- the man next door, the whole back end of his house was removed, because the ocean

just poured into my garden and went -- here in the Shades we have about eleven feet of water. I was able to walk out the front end of my building. However, that night they were taking people out in rowboats, and the Northampton Fire Department didn't have any more boats, and the Boat Island Fire Department came down with their boats, and they were taking us out of the second-story window here. There was much, much more water in the Shades than there was in Hoboken. In Hoboken, I'm told, there was about three feet of water, but it covered 1,000 homes. Here, it covered every one of the homes, and there are about 150-200 homes here. But it affected everyone -- except for one family I know, who wasn't affected.

AS: So if I understand correctly, you were evacuated during the storm.

SO: Yes. Well, I stayed here with one of my tenants, and then went over to the Sheraton the next day -- which is the hotel where the mayor put us up. I stayed there because I couldn't come into my house. I mean, the water was so high -- the kitchen, the bedroom, the living room. Everything.

AS: In the days after the storm, for example, let's say, a week after the storm -- did you feel that you were getting enough information about the situation?

SO: I don't understand the question. What information? I'm the one who would give the information out. What information? Are you talking about FEMA and companies like that?

AS: Yes, in terms of the city relief agencies informing residents about "This is where the water is. This is how much water's left. This is when we think power will be restored." Things of that nature.

SO: Well, I think the administration here, under Richard Turner, our mayor for twenty-three years, was remarkable. He came and ate breakfast, lunch, and dinner with us at the Sheraton, and then set up a similar kitchen for us over here at the St. Lawrence Community Center. He was sort of like a cheerleader for us during that period, making sure that we kept our morale up. Very shortly after that he brought in his building department crew, and all the directors, then brought in FEMA people; set up tables over here (that was about a week, a week and a half later), so we

could get registered with FEMA; we could get registered with the buildings department, with all the departments, like plumbing, electricity, and demolition, etc., to help us. The fire department had many of their firemen come down and help us to get rid of all the wet mattresses and books, and the Department of Public Works came down and began to evacuate all the rubbish that was put out on the sidewalk. There were a lot of scam artists who appeared; a lot of people who are professionally geared to responding to disasters. Because I lost all of my address books, records, my telephone, everything -- I was kind of hopeless. I couldn't reach out to anybody. Who do I contact, like construction people, plumbers and electricians that I'd worked with in the past. I kind of had to reconstruct my life. Even with telephone numbers, I had to use my muscular memory, in dialing a touchtone -- like, "Is this the number for my best friend? Is this the number for my favorite cousin? Is this the one to dial to get in touch with him? I'm all right?" Because I lost telephone numbers on everybody. That was really very difficult.

AS: So how did you begin to recover those numbers, and reconnect with people.

SO: I had a friend of my from Stevens who brought over a telephone book to me, and as a gift, he and his wife brought me a cellphone. I had people who had done work for me before just appear at the door. That's kind of how things began to get reconstructed. I did take out of the trash a notepad that I had, that was absolutely soaking wet, but it was a very good calendar book. The paper was very good, and I put it out to dry. It took about three weeks, where I could begin to separate the pages, and I was able to go through that, and start collecting the numbers, and telephone numbers of people. That's one of the ways I began to reconstruct my life.

AS: What was the mood in this neighborhood? Were residents angry? Distraught? Optimistic? What were people feeling here?

SO: People were remarkable. The cohesion, the optimism, the resilience was just do remarkably shining. I just want to say one little thing that was interesting. When we were all at the Sheraton, which is just five buildings away from here and on the waterfront -- it had suffered, just like we did here. There was no hot water, no electricity, no heat. I met a couple from Canada who were

there, and the very last day he said to me, "You people really are resilient. Had this happened to us in Canada, we would have just been saying, 'Oh, my. I'm so depressed. I'm never going to come out of this.' You, as Americans, are just having a good time. You look so optimistic and resilient." That's a generalization, but isn't that a remarkable observation -- the difference in our attitude.

The mayor was very much like a cheerleader, and he would just not allow us to -- not that we had to be guided in that way -- but he helped get us through this, very much. So that was good.

No, the people here, they knew they were going to get through it. There's a big family who lives down here, and they have a brother who was up in Boston. He came down, and did all the electricity things. We all knew, here, that we were going to get through. My next door neighbor's family have been here in this little community for 153 years. That's the man whose back end of his house was blown out. He's a fireman, and volunteered -- he took out so much of my wet junk and threw it on the sidewalk for me. He had moved away, with his family, down to Ocean County, but he was very unhappy down there -- unhappy because everybody in the neighborhood was a stranger to each other. Here, everybody seems to know each other. On the fifth day after

this, he was standing outside in all the rubbish on the street, and the back end of his house was gone. He looked up at me, he put his arms up in the air, and said, "Susan, I'm so happy to be back." I thought that was just a remarkable comment. So even with all this devastation he was happy, because really what makes life is the people that you're around, and he was very happy to be back here -- even though his father-in-law had just died, who lived across the street, and he was there with him, trying to get his house taken care of. His father-in-law died; ten days after Hurricane Sandy, his mother died, and she just lived around the corner here.

So that's the way people are here. Many people say, "I don't want to move down here," because it's kind of like what Hoboken used to be years ago: Everybody knew each other, helped each other, and stayed together.

AS: I want to circle back and ask, how long were you in the Sheraton?

SO: I was there until Saturday.

AS: How did you pass the time there?

SO: Well, I listened to a lot of meetings being conducted by the mayor. We were served breakfast, lunch and dinner, and I took the ferry twice, during those four days, five days I was there, and went into New York City, and toured New York City along the waterfront, to see what had happened there. Then I rode back and forth between here, at the house, to get clothing that maybe I could take to the laundry, and get -- could you excuse me for a moment, please?

Track #3

SO: Am I using too many words?

AS: No, no. You're doing great.

How did you pass the time while you were in the Sheraton?

SO: Well, as I would normally -- taking a bath, and eating. They were serving us breakfast, lunch and dinner over there. Then the mayor came, with updates as to what was happening, how we would proceed, and what we could do to facilitate cleaning out our houses. Then, also, on two days I took the ferry, went into New York, and went down to the waterfront areas -- down to the Battery, just to see

what was going on there. I came over here to the house to get laundry, anything I could. That's more or less how I spent the time.

AS: How did the areas in New York City compare to here, in terms of damage?

SO: I thought the damage was much worse here.

AS: Approximately how long did the cleanup effort take, in terms of your building and the neighborhood as a whole. How long was there debris laying about? How long did it take for the physical removal of that debris?

SO: It took weeks, because every basement was flooded down here, and some first floors. There was an awful lot of debris. The Department of Public Works (Bobby "Barse" [phonetic] is the director of that) was down here to help us. They brought in big trucks, and took all the debris. It went on for weeks, I would say three to four weeks, and we had volunteers who came in. The North Hudson Fire Department brought a lot of their volunteer firemen down t help us, and a few of just-people, from the Hoboken Housing groups down there on Jackson and Marshall Street; crews of those guys

came over, and we hired them. One of the fellows at the electrical place across the street brought his brother and a crew in from Newark, and they helped us to clean out things. Because we had to take down all the sheet rock. We had to take the floors out -- because we had to replace all the plumbing, all the gas lines, all the electric lines. So there was a lot of demolition going on, besides removing a lot of our things.

AS: Do you know how long it took for the water to go away?

SO: Well, it took about two days here on 19th Street, because the cars here were floating. Back here on Grand and Chestnut, it took about a day longer. But I met a man who came here on Friday, he came with a video and he was interviewing us here on the street, on 19th. So the water was totally gone there.

AS: Is this area generally flood-prone? For example, in certain section of Hoboken, even during rain, there will be several inches of flooding on the street. Does that happen here?

SO: Well, I've never had water in my basement, never here at all, ever, and I've had the house for a few decades. But I know in the back, a few houses there will have water come up from the sewage. I know a few of the houses in the back, at the base of the Palisades, may have sump-pumps back there. This area is called The Shades because we're right at the base of the Palisades, and there used to be a waterfall that would come from Union City, down to a pond that was here in the back. Before the automobile era, there were horses that used to be brought in from Hoboken, and they would go back there to drink water, and then stand in the shade of all the trees from the Palisades. The flooding for some houses back there may be bad, but I've never seen it on the street, like you will in the back end of Hoboken.

AS: You had mentioned attending meetings where representative discussed, for example, applying for FEMA relief. Did you apply for anything like that?

SO: Yes.

AS: And what was your experience with that process?

SO: I thought it was pretty efficient -- and certainly helpful. Yes, they brought in FEMA people, along with all the building department representatives from here in Weehawken, and they gave us a registration number. People from FEMA, from offices in New Mexico and Pennsylvania came up. I met them in the garden here. My garden was -- all the "furniture," everything was just thrown here at the back end; the fence was torn down by the impact of the ocean coming in. They were all very reassuring. A man from FEMA came in on a Monday and did the evaluation of the damage here, and by Thursday of that week a check was sent out to me, and I had it put in the bank in a matter of a few days. So I thought the response was remarkable.

AS: Did you do anything similar with any insurance companies?

SO: No.

AS: So a year later, do you feel as if you have recovered, in the sense of both your home and just your state of well-being? And do you feel the same way about The Shades as a neighborhood?

SO: Well, actually, it has turned out to be rather a blessing. I kind of felt that at the time. You asked me how long I stayed at the Sheraton. I stayed there from Tuesday to Saturday. The man that I told you came down to interview here, on Friday -- he invited me and other people to come to his house. His house was on top of the Palisades -- "Crestview" and Weehawken. He works with the Christian Rescue Agency, and he's worked in China, Tibet, and Afghanistan, helping refugees. That's what we all were; refugees from this Hurricane Sandy. So I went up and I stayed with them. I had an emergency operation in December, when this happened, and I was taken to the Palisade Hospital and operated on. I hadn't been in the hospital since I was three years old. I've always been healthy, and never sick. So I went to that, and the mayor made sure everything was all right. The mayor sent down, from the North Hudson Committee, the action -- the health agency -- with a mobile truck down here, to have everybody examined for blood pressure, for diabetes, whatever else may be a problem, and to make sure that, mentally, we were strong and could get through this. The people I stayed with were very, very warm and very helpful, and gave me great comfort during that period. I just had tremendous benefits from this.

You know, as you go along in life you kind of collect an awful lot of stuff. [Laughs] Life can get cluttered. Well, the storm came along and kind of de-cluttered things. So when I say this was kind of like a blessing, it sort of cleared things out, and kind of made you concentrate on what was *really* important. Important things like letters from my parents I've lost. Photographs of my family, who have been here in this country for hundreds of years -- I lost a lot of that. That's really hard. But just seeing how people got together and helped each other, and how the government representatives did not abandon us, but really helped us get through this as smoothly as possible was helpful. I just had great health benefits that came from this also. So I would say it was a very good event.

AS: When did you resume living in your home, after the storm?

SO: About three and a half months afterwards. Almost February.

AS: And are you still making repairs to your home now?

SO: Yes, I am. [Laughs]

AS: How much do you estimate that you have left to do? Or that you would like to do?

SO: Well, I hired a structural engineer to draw up plans to rebuild my foundation. He fixed the foundation in the [unclear], but not underneath the kitchen. On Tuesday I'm meeting with a department head of the building department, with my contractor who did the work and the structural engineer, to do the remedial work for the foundation under my kitchen.

AS: Do you feel The Shades, as a neighborhood, has recovered? Does it feel like it did before the storm?

SO: Yes.

AS: And have the people here recovered, in terms of repairing their homes? Or do you still see work being done on the homes here?

SO: A good many of them have been repaired. I just yesterday talked with one of the ladies -- her sister's house down here in The Shades has to be demolished, so that has to be rebuilt. So some people just haven't been able to come back, because they didn't have the money to restore their house. And for some, it's taken so long to get the insurance money, to get going. And there have been a lot more deaths that have happened this year than I've known before. The stress has been difficult.

AS: Have you felt stress during this time?

SO: Remarkably, I have felt very calm. I have said to this family [unclear] family, that I was for a period of time kind of in a state of grace. [Laughs] I'm not a religious person, but I do know what something kind of remarkable overcomes your well-being. I don't know, otherwise, how to describe it.

AS: What do you think the people of The Shades learned about themselves, having gone through this experience

SO: Well, I don't know if they learned it. I think they might have already known it. I think they understand that nothing is so important as another human being, and that as a community, if you stick together and help each other, you can get through it. My next-door neighbor, as I said -- Joe "Rovito" [phonetic] -- he's been here since 1853 [sic] -- the man who put his arms up and said, "I'm so happy to be back." People are very inter-related down here. It's a very cohesive group. I know people who live in many other areas who want to move down here. In fact, I have to tell you -- a seventh-generation Hobokeniter lives back here. His father was the superintendent of schools in Hoboken, and he lives back here in The Shades, and he says he lives here because this community has the feeling that Hoboken used to have, years ago, before it was so gentrified.

AS: Is there anything you would like to add that I didn't already ask about?

SO: Well, Alan, I think you've just done a terrific job. I'm very impressed with you. [Unclear]

AS: Thank you. Thank you.

Track #4

AS: What steps has the local government taken to protect The Shades?

SO: Well, they have [unclear] the township of Weehawken with the North Hudson Sewage Authority, which is at the northern end of Hoboken. It's just on the other side of [Unclear], which is maybe two or three blocks away from here. They have applied to grant money to protect the pump here, that's located in The Shades.

Track #5

AS: Given the damage here, have you ever considered moving out of The Shades?

SO: Well, I haven't really considered moving, although I've had quite a few people ask me why don't I, and where I could go to higher ground and not do this. I feel, being a property owner here, and a resident here in The Shades -- I used to live in Hoboken for years and then moved here -- I feel that I have a proprietorship here. I feel that I'm in a position where I can ask my government, my

local government, to do something to protect us from intense storms in the future -- a repeat of Hurricane Sandy. The township here in Weehawken, in conjunction with the North Hudson Sewage Authority, has applied for, I think, a $12 million grant to build a deployable wall, or a protection wall, around The Shades. But it's main purpose is to protect a water pump that belongs to the Sewage Authority, which is located just a block away from my house here in The Shades.

We were told by an engineer from the North Hudson Sewage Authority -- at one of the eight public meetings that have to be held in order to get this $12 million, to get these walls -- that had the water gone up six inches higher it would have debilitated that water pump (which is located, as I said, a block from here), and it would have taken six months for us to have the sewage pump repair completed. That would mean we couldn't flush our toilets for six months. So that's really a top priority.

I feel that, by staying here, I have a position of authority to make sure my local representatives focus on putting up deployable fences or permanent walls to protect us back here, so that we will not have to go through what we just did from Hurricane Sandy, again.

HOBOKEN
HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, Allison Outwater, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I agree to participate in an audiotaped interview by the Hoboken Historical Museum ("HHM" or the "Museum") in connection with its oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy* (the "Project"). I understand that during the interview I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on or about October 29, 2012, and that the interview will last approximately one to two hours.

2. I consent to the use of my name in the audiotape and any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview in connection with the Project.

3. I consent to my photograph being taken and used by HHM in connection with the Project. If I withdraw from participation in the Project, I understand that the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I agree that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview as well as the photograph belong to the Museum, and that all ownership rights vest exclusively in the Museum. The Museum may use and store such materials and content in any manner it shall determine including but not limited to, use by any third parties such as researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy may be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript by HHM.

6. I agree that my participation in the interview, use of my name and photograph are being permitted without any compensation to me and without any ownership rights being vested in me. Accordingly, I fully release the Museum, its trustees, employees, volunteers, and representatives from and against all claims now existing or claims which hereafter may arise, relating directly or indirectly from my participation in the Project.

Interviewee Name: Allison Outwater

Interviewee Signature: Allison Outwater

Address: 156 Tennis Ct. Wall, NJ 07719

Telephone Number: 732-685-2091

Date: October 31, 2013

Archives 2013.039.0020

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM

HOBOKEN STORIES:

REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: ALLISON OUTWATER

INTERVIEWER: CHRISTINE ZIEGLER McPHERSON

LOCATION: HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM

DATE: 31 OCTOBER 2013

CZ: I just want to ask you some background questions. If you could state your name.

AO: Allison Outwater.

CZ: And where are you from?

AO: I'm from Wall Township, New Jersey.

CZ: And how long have you lived in Hoboken?

AO: Two years and about three months.

CZ: What do you do for a living?

AO: I'm a student.

CZ: Where?

AO: Stevens Institute of Technology.

CZ: And what do you study?

AO: I study civil engineering.

CZ: And what year are you?

AO: I'm A-3 out of four.

CZ: Thank you very much for your time in answering these questions for us. I'm wondering when, about, did you first year about Hurricane Sandy?

AO: I heard about Hurricane Sandy about a week before it hit. I keep up on the weather a lot, from the beach, so we watch the weather a lot at home. And while I was looking on Facebook and different websites that I use, I saw both the hurricane forming, as we as when the week went on, the front and the full moon and everything -- as I was watching I realized it was going to be a really big storm, even though everyone else said it wasn't.

CZ: And where were you Monday night, when the storm hit?

AO: I was in the house I was living in on campus. I was hanging out with friends, went back to my dorm, knowing I was going to locked in there for a few days. I settled down and decided to catch up on some [unclear].

CZ: Why did you decide to stay, versus evacuate?

AO: I'm from central Jersey. I live at the beach, and it is safer for me to be up here than it is for me to go home. My parents are first-responders. I knew if I was home I would be out with them, in the midst of everything. They were out during Irene, when I stayed up here. We decided it was safer, since I was up on a hill, for me to stay at Stevens, and that way, when classes resumed, I would still be able to be here, in the event that I couldn't get "out of harm."

CZ: What do your parents do? You said they're first-responders.

AO: My parents have full-time jobs, but my dad's part of a volunteer first-aid squad and fire department. My mom may as well be. She volunteers with them enough. Our whole family works with them a lot. It’s a small town, but they're a water-rescue squad in that town. Very few people are trained on it, so during hurricanes and floods they're the town that has to respond to quite a few towns. So they just kind of jump right in.

CZ: So how exactly did you become coordinator of volunteers for the city?

AO: It's still not fully known. I actually don't fully know how it happened. But on Tuesday morning we were allowed out of our dorms -- or Wednesday, when we were allowed out of our dorms -- I lived in an all-girls' house, and I just had to get out of there. I could not be around all the girliness anymore, so I went for a walk

around campus. My phone still had great cell service, so I was looking on Facebook to see what was happening at home. I was seeing all the pictures posted of all the devastation. I saw Hoboken on the Facebook page, and the Twitter post: "If you want to volunteer, come down to City Hall." I didn't give it a second thought; I went right down. I carried buckets of water to Marine View, up and down eight, ten flights of stairs. I went back to City Hall that night, and was going around with a few people, to try and get food to bring to the shelters. They then told me that they needed someone to work the call center, from 2:00 A.M. until 6:00 A.M., and 6:00 A.M. to 9:00 A.M. So I signed up for the shift, because I was available. I figured I didn't have classes. It didn't matter if I didn't sleep. I wasn't going to be doing anything anyway.

I went down, and toward the end of my shift more people were coming toward the volunteer center. All these volunteers were coming in to work for the day. I had planned to stay and volunteer. Someone in the call center asked me to start walking people upstairs. I knew how to get upstairs, so I started walking people upstairs. Then, as the day went on, there would be assigned jobs, and people would ask me to write down everyone's name and cellphone number, and their email address. So I was collecting people's information. Then they were asking me to send people out to do all sorts of different things. As that went on, they just kept giving me more and more jobs. I was just someone who went to volunteer that day, but I knew how to get upstairs from downstairs, and volunteered to bring them upstairs to where they needed to put them. Then they just started assigning me jobs. Later that day I was given a lot more jobs. Then Thursday morning I ended up being the volunteer coordinator. I had the Chief of Staff of the city come in and tell me that was my title, that's what I was doing, and to figure it out. That's basically how it happened.

CZ: So what kind of support, assistance, direction did you get from the mayor, from the city council -- ?

AO: I actually got a lot of direction from them. They would assign me jobs to assign other people. They would come and find me and say, "We need ten volunteers here. We've got these Buffalo trucks to go out. As time went on, I got to know more and more of, "These need to be done repeatedly. These are what supplies we have." So it was less and less of me having to go to them and say, "What do you need?" and more and more we were figuring it out as we went. I had a bunch of students who came down, a few that I knew, a few that other people knew, who were really, really amazing. It was about ten or so of us every day who worked. We would just come in, and we figured it all out. At the beginning, I really didn't know Hoboken. I didn't really know much about the city or what was going on, but I knew that the National Guard had just gotten there. I knew that the city was still flooded, and I knew they were just trying to get people into building, to check on people, and that's what we started with.

CZ: Now where you were living on campus -- did that have power? Or was it out of power?

AO: I actually had power. I lived on Castle Point Terrace, and my house never lost power. I didn't really get to use the power very much because I was always down at City Hall. But we never lost power. So it was good, but I didn't really get to use it. At night I could charge my phone.

CZ: How did you communicate with other people in the city -- the mayor of the city, council people, the chief of staff?

AO: Well, they ended up sending radios, multiple radios, throughout the day, to communicate with the head of CERT, Lou Casciano, and OEM and some people, or I would -- as the students who worked with me got better and better, they were running a lot and doing the repetitive stuff, and I would just run off and find

who I needed to find, to get permission for stuff, or questions answered. My cellphone also had exceptional service, so we used that.

CZ: How was that?

AO: I don't know.

CZ: What kind of cellphone do you have?

AO: I have an iPhone 4. It's really not that good. It's just Verizon, but for some reason I had service. My parents at home had service, too, so I guess our plan ended up being useful. I'm never changing my phone because of that. But my cellphone was mostly used to communicate with volunteers throughout the city. Plenty of them had cell service; they were able to text in or call in to me, and my phone became one of the few emergency hotlines of the city. We only had one phone that was working for a while in the call center, and that was strictly for call-in emergencies. So my phone became, when a volunteer needed something, or to give out to people.

CZ: I'm curious about the call center -- given that so few people had phone service. Exactly how did that work?

AO: A lot of land lines, even if the power goes out, they still work. And if people had cellphones that were working, they were able to call in. Or, if they could find someone with a cellphone that worked, they could call in, and that was really some of the only communication they had throughout the city, because radios were down, communicators were down, everything -- the ward police department, the fire department, the first-aid squad -- everything.

CZ: I was wondering what experience you had before this, in organizing large groups of people.

AO: I was a student leader on campus, and I've always done stuff with my parents. I'm part of a service fraternity. I was in charge of some service events, but it's thirty-forty people. I didn't really have that much experience beforehand. The whole thing was a learning process for me. When you've got 200 people standing in front of you -- it just came naturally to me that I just had to get them jobs, get them out, and make sure that everyone in the city was as okay as possible, and do as much as we could for people. So it just kind of came. I have a large voice, so I was able to project well. I wasn't afraid to tell people to move. I didn't have any experience, I just learned as I went.

CZ: What kind of issues did you face in trying to organize people? And did these get resolved relatively quickly as the week went on, or did they continue throughout the couple of weeks after the storm?

AO: We had a lot of different stuff happen. We'd have crazy people come in and start yelling at us. They'd be angry about stuff because we were who they could get to. We were based in the court room, and when people came into City Hall, they couldn't get to the mayor's office, they couldn't get to OEM (there was security) there, but they could get into where all the volunteers were going, and we had a lot of people come in and yell at us. We were all just like, "We're students. You can yell at us all you want. We can't do anything." That never fully got resolved. Eventually, as the police were outside, they were able to push some of those people away. Saturday and Sunday we had so many volunteers you couldn't fit them in the building. We were running out of jobs to give to some people. At first we had all the donations brought into City Hall. Well, we had so many donations, we didn't know what to do with them. Luckily, that was able to be resolved. We used the high school. We used the entirety of

the high school, because we had so many donations. We were able to set up a whole other system over there. We sent a lot of volunteers there, to constantly just organize stuff, and label stuff, and get stuff out that was needed to get out. It was a big, very large, hectic process, but that was able to be run, and we were able to clear out a lot of space in City Hall, as well.

Then I had some issues of -- we would have some of the volunteers out but collecting the information back from them was kind of difficult. Having them call in or text to my cellphone became very frantic when there were a couple hundred volunteers out. We had a lot of issues. I was pretty well resolved with having at least one person from each group come back with where they were, and what needed to be done where. We had issues of a lot of people needing medication. I'm still not sure why some of the people didn't fill up on basic medications when they knew there was a storm coming, even if it isn't something big. It was very hectic. So we were able to get a system set up -- one of the students was able to really help figure out what needed to be done there, to get the pharmacists and the mayor to write prescriptions; get CVS and Walgreen's open; get the prescriptions filled and have volunteers deliver them. That became a great system that worked extremely well. We helped a lot of people with that.

But for the most part, most of the issues were resolved where we just found a way to work around them -- the crazy people coming in and screaming at us: You just let them scream, and you do something else while they're screaming their heads off. It made them feel better; it made them feel like something was getting done. If it was something we could help with, we would help with it. Otherwise, we can't bring everybody Diet Coke when they want Diet Coke. It's just not something in an emergency that's possible.

CZ: So how did you manage with the fact that, on the one hand, you had City Hall, which was the center of a lot of operations. But so much was also happening at the high school, in terms of coordinating between those two sites?

AO: We had one person who was in charge of the high school. We had a few people who were there every day, and knew what was going on. We would be in communication with them. Every morning I would go into City Hall extra early, and have meetings with the different people we needed to have meetings with. They would come, as well, and sit down with us. They ran their own processes. Once everything was organized, it was very simple getting stuff organized; getting stuff out; and when we had extra volunteers, especially children -- children cannot climb up ten flights of stairs with water, but they can easily run a few boxes of pasta around. So we were able to send families down there because, as the power was out longer and longer, the kids got antsier and antsier, parents brought them in to volunteer. So it was great to get that going. I saw some amazing kids over there, doing so much to help. Even if there wasn't anything to do, they would be in the kitchen cleaning up. Because people would drop off food, and they would go in and clean up and sweep the floors, and wash the tables. It was nice to see such young individuals helping out and trying to do as much as they could. But once we had that system set up, we just needed some volunteers. If they needed anything from us, they were able to call us, or radio us, and we could see what we could do as soon as possible.

CZ: How did you figure out what people needed, in terms of -- and remember all the supplies at the high school. I'm wondering how did that then get distributed, and how as it that you figured out what people needed and where they were?

AO: If anyone one was anyone was unable to leave their apartment and needed something -- especially the elderly -- the volunteers we sent out to each building multiple times a day would write it down, bring it back to City Hall, and report it to us. We would send a volunteer to the high school to get those items, and bring it to them. We also had [unclear] distribution centers around the city, pods. I think

there were six of them. We would every morning send meals ready to eat, [unclear], water and other -- dog food, baby supplies, canned foods -- to each of these centers, and people in that area of the city could go to these pods and pick up food that they needed, whatever they needed. People could also go to the high school and pick up food, or clothes, or toys. Everything was being donated. The hallways were filled in the high school with everything. So we knew if we needed something they likely had it, because there was so much of it. People were able to -- this was after the flooding receded but no power went in and out of the city. We couldn't get deliveries. Most of the food stores were closed and flooded. So we were able to get the food to these points of distribution, and people were able to go there and pick them up; or, if necessary, we could bring it to them.

CZ: I'm curious. What happened to all that clothing? I remember the hallway just stacked with coats and scarves.

AO: A lot of it went to people who needed it, in the city. A lot of it went to the homeless shelter. A lot of the food went to the homeless shelter, as well, and Our Lady of Grace, where their food pantry is. A lot of the stuff we had, actually, once we knew Hoboken was safe -- there was still so much, down on the shore, that needed help, so many places seaside -- Toms River, even my home area, Balmoral -- everything needed so much. While we were getting back on our feet and pretty stable up here, they still weren't, so we were able to get people with pickup trucks to bring stuff down to them, for people who needed it down there. Especially people whose homes were completely destroyed and were living in hotels. They didn't have clothes and stuff like that. So we were able to bring stuff to them, and get it to as many people in the city as needed it. There was just so much stuff, so it was great to see.

CZ: I'm wondering -- what do you know now that you wish you had known on October 28th?

AO: Well, there's a lot that changed in me; a lot that I saw in my friends who volunteered; a lot in the city itself. I really wish I knew that -- I got very stressed out. I was always running and doing stuff. We had a lot of people coming in, claiming to be experts, who would start yelling at me and telling me I was doing stuff wrong. I actually took it to heart. I kind of wish I'd known then -- a lot of people like to talk, and pretend that they're big hot-shots. They're really not. A year later now, watching the city go, and all these different things that happened -- I actually did as much as I could, and I thought I didn't screw up. I'm a student in college, whose home town was underwater; whose family was underwater; whose home had damage, and we couldn't get in contact with anyone. So all these people were telling me I was doing stuff wrong. For what I was able to do, I did it right. With what resources I had, I did right. I also wish I knew that you can't make everyone happy. There were going to be so many angry people, who just like to be angry. Nothing could have happened to them; they just want someone to yell at because they can. We were there. I wish I knew to just ignore them; let them get it out, and focus on what was really important. I did listen to a lot of people yelling at me about the stupidest of things. They were just people who wanted to be angry. They didn't have damage. Half of them still had power who were yelling at me. I definitely wish I knew that.

CZ: Are you still working with the city in various ways? Volunteering, or -- ?

AO: I volunteer for the city all the time. I did before the storm. I worked at the music festival, the harvest festival. I just finished with the Ragamuffin Parade. I love doing those things. I'm very involved in my community-service fraternity, and I love volunteering. I help at as many things as I possibly can, a lot of which are in Hoboken, or involve Hoboken, because Hoboken is extremely important to me since the storm, especially anything with the recovery effort. Also, I'm in classes for the

Community Emergency Response Team right now. I wasn't able to take it last semester because of class conflict, but I'm doing that now. I'm working with the head of CERT and a few other people to plan for another storm, or another emergency, to get things set into place. In the event that anything that happens, we're a little bit more ready. We're a little bit more prepared, know who's in charge of what, and what's going on with that. [Unclear] I still see a lot of people from the city all the time, a service events, at random things around the city. I try to help out as much as possible. I still enjoy it, and it's nice now, because now I see people -- where I saw them a lot before, I didn't know who they were. Now I know who they are.

CZ: So when you go to volunteer for the city, are there particular offices that you volunteer with? Or do you just go to City Hall and say, "I'm here for this event?"

AO: I work with Cultural Affairs. They plan a bunch of events in the city. My fraternity works with them for all sorts of events, and through our fraternity I'm in charge of those events for the brothers. So I work with them on all their different stuff that they have -- their craft shows and all different events. If I know of an event that's going on in the city, even if it's not through City Hall, I go down and try to get our fraternity involved. We have about 200 brothers, so we're able to do a lot. Every once in a while I know something is going on at City Hall that they need volunteers for, and I do pop down and see what I can do.

CZ: I'm wondering, how has this experience changed your aspirations for the future?

AO: When the storm started, I was a double major. I was part of so many clubs on campus, and did so much. The storm made me realize what was important in my life. It helped me to realize that I only wanted one major; I didn't need

two majors. I didn't need to kill myself, and take so many classes. I could take just what was right, and be a lot more relaxed, and be able to still get the jobs that I wanted, and do what I wanted to do. I didn't have to kill myself, to try and do so much. I dropped out of a lot of clubs that I was doing because other people wanted me to do them. I was holding positions in those groups because other people wanted me to. I figured out what was most important to me, and I really focus on those groups now. I focus on myself a lot more, my friends. I spend a lot of time with friends now that I wasn't able to before. I'm able to not go home as often -- because there is always stuff going on at home -- but I'm able to talk to my parents more, and my family, and it really made me realize -- I already had a love of community service before, but it made me really love it, because during the storm, after the storm, I was able to see people's reactions and talk to people, and realize that, through community service, I really am actually helping someone, and that is the greatest thing ever, to me. So I realized that I kind of got my life a little more in line, a little bit earlier, [unclear] people, so I guess that ended up well.

CZ: That's good. Now you have to figure out if there's a job that involves community service and volunteering.

AO: I would love that. I actually had a discussion with my friend about that the other night. It would be the greatest thing ever for me. But I love engineering, too. I realized that I had wanted to work for Disney most of my life, as an engineer. But I realize now that I want to stay near home. I want to stay near my family and my friends, and just kind of help [unclear] and help where I'm from. Up here, this is not far away from home. So being able to help in Hoboken also -- I wish there was a job that involved engineering and community service that I could make a living off of. But when I retire, I figure I'll probably end up doing a lot of work for different service organizations, and that will be so much fun to me. So, in the long run, I'll be able to. But right now, I'm doing engineering. I love engineering, so I can help people through building stuff.

CZ: Do you think you might stay in Hoboken after you graduate?

AO: I've looked into it. It's kind of expensive. It's a little bit difficult. It depends on, really, where I get a job. The type of job I want to get -- unfortunately, a lot of students, when they graduate, try to stay up here, so there aren't as many jobs up here. But home is only an hour, max, away. It's great, because I can still come up here all the time. If I know there's another hurricane coming, I'll probably end up coming back up to Hoboken, to stay here for a while. I've definitely looked into it. I would love to stay in Hoboken. Hoboken really has become a home to me. But it all depends. I don't know where I'm going to be a year from now. So I'll see what happens.

CZ: All right. Well, thank you very, very much for your time. I appreciate it.

HOBOKEN
HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Hoboken Historical Museum – *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*

Informed Consent and Release

I, Jean-Paul Picard, of adult age, hereby agree as follows:

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the oral history project known as *Hoboken Stories: Remembering Storm Sandy*. I understand that I will be asked about my experiences during the storm known as Hurricane Sandy, which occurred on October 29, 2012.

2. The interview will be audiotaped. In the interview I may be identified by name, subject to my consent. I may also be identified by name in any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview, subject to my consent.

3. I understand that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that a photograph of me may be taken or borrowed for duplication, and that if I withdraw from the project, the photograph will be given to me.

4. Subject to the provisions of paragraph five below, I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to Hoboken Historical Museum, and that the information in the interview can be used by Hoboken Historical Museum in any manner it will determine, including, but not limited to, use by researchers in presentations and publications. In addition, a copy will be filed with the New Jersey Historical Commission.

5. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript.

6. I understand that at the conclusion of this particular study, the tape(s), photograph, and one copy of the transcript will be ~~kept~~ in the collections department of the Hoboken Historical Museum.

Interviewee Name: Jean-Paul Picard

Interviewee Signature: Jean-Paul Picard

Address: 1028 Hudson ST #3 Hoboken

Telephone number: 201-264-1037 cell

Date: 10 / 4 /2013

Archives 2013.039.0021

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIWEE: JEAN PAUL PICARD

INTERVIEWER: ROBERT FOSTER

LOCATION: 300 OBSERVER HIGHWAY,
HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY

DATE: 4 OCTOBER, 2013

Track #1

RF: What is your connection to Hoboken? How long have you lived in the city? Approximately where in the city do you live? Who, if anyone do you live with? And what is your profession?

JPP: I've lived at 1028 Hudson Street, for the last twelve years, with my wife, Mary. I used to live at 609 Grand Street in Hoboken, since 1981. So I've been in Hoboken since 1981. My connection is, I live here, I work here, and my best friends are here.

RF: And what is your profession?

JPP: I'm a photographer, graphic designer, and web designer. I also teach at the Hudson County School of Technology.

RF: Do you work in Hoboken?

JPP: Yes, I do have some clients in Hoboken. My business is here in Hoboken, though I free-lance quite a lot in New York City.

RF: And where is your studio located?

JPP: My studio is here at 300 Observer Highway, in the [Unclear] building.

RF: When did you first hear the words "Hurricane Sandy."

JPP: About a week before the storm, there was talk about it. People were getting ready. We saw in front of City Hall like a map, discussing what the flood areas could be, depending upon the severity of the storm. So it was about a week before the storm.

RF: What did you expect the storm to be like?

JPP: A lot of wind, a lot of rain, flooding -- not to the extent that it did happen, but that a number of areas would be flooded, at least a few inches in, like, Grand Street, for example, Monroe -- that sort of thing. When I first came to Hoboken in 1981, a good part of Hoboken was known as Venice-on-the-Hudson, because of the flooding issue that had existed.

RF: How did you prepare for the storm?

JPP: Here at the studio what I did was I moved my equipment against the farthest wall. I moved a temporary wall, which has box springs at the top, and moved it so that I basically created a sandwich room or a closet, a makeshift closet, and put all my electronic equipment there. Then I had seamless paper that I had suspended in front of the windows, and rolled it down with a curtain in front of that, expecting that if the glass shattered, it would be caught in the paper, and the trajectory would hit the floor before it hit that false wall, where that makeshift closet was. That's what I did here. At 1028

Hudson Street, what we did was -- I had put some sealant and foam core at the doors, to allow three feet of water to rise, because we had drains at the bottom of the basement of the building, where our boiler is, and hot water heaters and stuff. I figured if the water didn't go out fast enough it would rise, so to prevent the water from coming into the basement I put that there. I later learned that had the water risen to three feet, it would have just busted through; that what I had done was insignificant. I did also sandbag, as well, which wasn't as high as the foam core wall, if you will. I also used a caulking sealant in the wall, to prevent the water from leaking from around that foam core wall. But I'm sure it wouldn't have helped.

RF: What did you do on the Monday, during the day, before the storm hit?

JPP: Pretty much what I just mentioned, especially where the condo building that I'm in, in Hoboken, at 1020 Hudson Street -- it’s an old, 110-year-old building, so it's railroad flats, condos. The work I was doing was mainly that -- and telling people, also, that they should move stuff out of their bins that they have in the basement, or raise it up at least, because I did expect

maybe a half-foot of water to a foot of water in the basement.

RF: Do you feel that you were prepared enough, heading into the storm?

JPP: I don't think one ever feels prepared enough, after the fact. I thought we were, because we had food. I had my homemade frozen soup in the freezer, and if we didn't have power, there was ice, so we could keep the freezer going for a few days, and make soup, as we say, [unclear]. So we had dry food and stuff like that, and we had enough emergency food for the cats. I did go get medication, so I had my medication prescription available to me. So that was a good thing; I felt I had enough medication.

RF: Where were you when the storm hit?

JPP: At my home, at 1028 Hudson Street. We're on the second floor. The ground level is actually half of the basement, so we're two stories and a half from the actual ground.

RF: Did you lose power?

JPP: No. What happened was, there was a click. You could see the power go off and on -- and not very much of it. It was very, very quick. So we had power. No, we didn't lose power.

RF: When did you first leave your home, to explore? Where did you go? What did you see? And what did you think?

JPP: Okay. After the curfew was lifted -- I don't know exactly what time it was -- it was actually in the afternoon -- we started walking around. First, I did a quick walk around the block, to see what the damage was, if any. I didn't notice any damage. I later learned from one of the owners that their front window busted in, there on the top floor. So I helped her friend -- because she was out of town -- seal the apartment (seal the window. Sorry), and we had to make a makeshift -- because I had some extra materials of the foam core and all that, and plastic bags. I was able to makeshift it so we reduced the amount of leakage. Also, I was able to help pick up the broken glass and the frame, and I photographed that so that if she

needed that for insurance purposes, she had it. She lost one piece of furniture, because the glass actually penetrated into the piece of furniture, a sofa -- not a sofa, a lounge chair.

RF: Was there any water in the vicinity of your block?

JPP: No. We were watching all night long. As a matter of fact, in the middle of the storm -- the street light was on, so we could see what was going on. At the highest of the wind, we saw the rain literally going horizontal. We looked at the street, and it was completely dry. The wind dried the water from the street before it hit the ground, it seemed to me. It was amazing. We kept looking at the distance of -- because our building faces the "S" -- Frank Sinatra Drive -- so the hill that comes up [unclear] -- we were watching to see if the water came up, and it did not. We didn't see any water, particularly, on the street at that time.

RF: So there was no water on your street, and you also continued to have power.

JPP: Right.

RF: Did you feel relieved?

JPP: I felt relieved that we didn't have water in the basement. We did not have heat because our boiler had some problems at the beginning, before the storm even became an issue -- or thought. So I called the plumber to restart the boiler, and the plumber could never get there. So I was concerned that we weren't going to have heat. What I later learned was that the sheriff's office would not allow -- the sheriff would not allow the plumbers to come into town. They would say, "We have a heating emergency," and the police said, "There's no electricity; get out of here." We had electricity. So a lot of misinformation was happening right away. I was finally able to call the plumber, he walked me through how to restart the boiler, and we had heat. So we had heat, hot water, and electric all through this period of time.

When we started to walk through town, on the afternoon after the storm, yes. Now we saw even more relief, because of the amount of damage we saw; the amount of flooding we saw.

RF: What did you think about, as you started to explore, and started to see the rest of Hoboken, and the state that it was in? Particularly consider your eye as an artist.

JPP: Well, it was very dark at the time we got in front of the -- I still call it St. Mary's Hospital. There we saw water, and I go, "That's an emergency center, and it's flooded." That means everybody had to be taken out, on the top floors. That was a problem. Then we saw the ambulance lost a few blocks further south, and that was like, "The water must have come really fast, it must have damaged things. It really must have been a really difficult time." So I started photographing the damage -- which is not necessarily my forte -- because it was pretty much overwhelming. How do you, in a small frame, photograph this mass event? You're really only photographing parts of the events, not the mass event. So it was difficult.

It was interesting to see a lot of people and how they were all photographing, with their phones, or videotaping, or whatever. That was happening. People were coming and looking, to see what it was like. Also, you could see people shopping, trying to get food -- because suddenly they realized they didn't have enough food; or

they thought, "Oh, this is worse. It's going to take a while before things get back to normal."

RF: How many photographs did you take?

JPP: About 150, maybe 200. A number of them were repetitive, or different angles of the same shot. This was over the four-day period. One of the things I remember is I photographed the Y, in front of -- in the south end of Hoboken, near the train station, a gasoline truck was there. It was provided, I understand, by a donor. There was a man pumping gas one container at a time, and I saw a friend of mine there, so I photographed him on line, then I photographed the line, and the truck and everything. I'm going, "This doesn't make any sense," because this gasoline truck -- but there were no cans. You would think they would have refilled the cans, and they would have traded can for can. The firemen had to shut it down because people were bringing water bottles to fill with gasoline. That's a very dangerous thing: the plastic is not designed to -- the gasoline could actually damage the tank and come out -- and the fire. So had there been a fire during the time, we would have lost a portion of the town. So unfortunately -- because they were trying to empty their basements from the

water, using sump pumps, the gasoline was definitely a danger, unless you had the proper tank and everything. Because you couldn't get gasoline from the gas station; they didn't have electricity to pump the gasoline up. In Florida, that's not an issue because all the gasoline stations have generators, to at least empty the tanks, so people can get gasoline. But here in New Jersey, we have never suffered this before, to this extent. So you had gas stations full of gasoline, and they couldn't get it out.

RF: And how did you pass the time in the days after the storm?

JPP: I did several different things. The first thing was, our neighbor in the neighboring building ran an extension cord out their window, and put out a table. People were charging their phones or computers. It was very cold, so if you sat on the steps, a little hypothermia is happening; you're losing body heat. And these people had cold apartments. So I went to our back yard, and we had chairs. I cleaned them off quickly, and brought them out so they would have chairs, and they wouldn't have to sit on the ground. My wife and I went around to look, and get food for someone because they were

stuck at the sixth floor, in a modern condominium, in my old neighborhood at Sixth and Grand. The husband couldn't walk out of the unit because he needed an elevator unit. And even if you could, there was chicken, restaurant grease fat, all over the lobby, because a restaurant that had a drum, a fifty-gallon drum of recycling grease, to be recycled, and dumped over and spilled, and polluted the entire area. So it was slippery, and no one could get kitty litter to put gravel or traction on there. So it was slippery to get there. This is what we found out, as we actually delivered the food.

So I went to the bodegas. The grocery stores were all closed. All the grocery stores shut down, the supermarkets, so the bodegas were open, that were in my neighborhood, so they sold everything, and they were selling out. There were some bodegas that still had canned goods available, so they were selling that. Their refrigerators were pretty much closed, and they had already dumped that stuff. So we would get canned food, and bring it to my friend, Rosilyn, and her husband, Frank, so they had that. The fire escapes, or the internal fire stairwells -- the emergency exits -- dark; pitch black, so we always had flashlights with us.

Another thing I did was I started to go on Facebook, giving people news and information of what was open. We also had a "mole-up" group, under the Google, so we were able to send information via that. I also created a flier, in very small type, with a color paper we didn't use, and I would run fifty or 100 sheets, and I called it the Hudson Street News. I handed out fliers to all the places where people were charging. So that was along Hudson Street, along 11th, and some places between 11th and 10th. Some buildings were on and off, because we're on a grid that's different from the rest of Hoboken. I handed out leaflets, and I did that about four or five times. The type was very small, and I only left two or three on the board. People had to share. Because I didn't know how long this was going to last. I didn't know how much paper I had left. I really didn't know how much ink I had left, and would I be able to get ink for the piece? My way of doing it was never to say what was closed; I only said what was open -- because by the time I handed out the sheet, maybe the store or business that was closed, was open.

So by doing that I was able to get out information. A lot of people learned that the marathon in New York was canceled, on my first run. I announced that I had just gotten that news. So I just mentioned that.

RF: When did you first visit your studio?

JPP: I think the third day, because it was so flooded. On the first day, when I photographed at Garden and 1st, it was all full of water. I was able to go up to City Hall at Bloomfield and look down on Newark Street, and I just saw water. So I knew my whole building [unclear] was flooded, and later learned, when I walked through the hallways on the first floor, there was water up to my knees. So the first floor received a lot of water. It was on the third day I came -- there was no heat and there was no electricity.

So we came in, Mary and I, had no damage. I had cracked windows from years and years ago, and the cracks didn't get bigger, and everything was fine. So what I did was I grabbed my computer equipment -- because I thought there was no security here now -- so I grabbed the stuff that I thought -- and brought it back home. I later learned that one of the people in charge of the building -- the real estate agent in charge of the building -- saw looters trying to get into the building. So he ran over to the National Guardsmen, and they parked the National Guard trucks around the entrances of Neumann Leather and that

ended the possibility of looting -- because they were going to break in all the doors, because now there were no alarms, and they figured they could break in and steal whatever they could find. So I was glad that I had removed at least what I thought -- I moved my equipment out of here, to do that.

That was like on the third day. Meanwhile, I was busy with the Hudson News and stuff like that. I later learned that some people weren't following Facebook, and I asked that person why. She said to me, "To conserve power." It was amazing. I'm a web designer, and in some ways the web could not handle it, because if people don't have power, they don't have a connection to the phone; they have no way to get emails or Twitter if the power's gone. So instead of setting up a website giving information, I said, "Well, how are people going to find the website? They're not going to search -- they're going to search what they know, they're not going to search what they don't know." So that's why I created the newsletter.

City Hall also handed out newsletters and taped them on light poles throughout the city. They would actually call out for teams, and whoever got there to do that. It's not that the internet didn't work, but the

internet, by itself, couldn't replace the old-fashioned flier, to get information out.

RF: And when were you able to resume working in your studio?

JPP: When the power returned. I'm going to guess that that was seven days later. I'm not 100% sure. But about seven days later to ten days, because even though power came back on, I had to get our equipment back in, and I had to walk the route to be sure that the roads weren't closed; that it was easy to get in; there were no lingering, large ponds of water, or stuff like that, where there was. Because there would be mud everywhere -- to do that. So that’s what I did.

RF: And what have you done with the collection of photos that you took?

JPP: I gave the museum the right to exhibit them in their upcoming exhibit about Sandy. I've also shown my photographs -- the Fund for a Better Waterfront -- Ron Hines is the president, and he asked me to show some of the photographs for an exhibit about the flooding, and what

ideas we should start thinking about, to mitigate or prevent another flooding that happened.

RF: When you look at the photographs a year later, what do they make you think or feel?

JPP: Well, first, I don't think it's a year later. That's the first thing. It feels like just a few months ago. That it was an incredible amount of water; that Venice-on-the-Hudson actually became absolutely true. I never thought it would flood that far up, that much. That was quite amazing. I also thought that this -- the coming together of people -- reminded me of what happened after 9/11 in Hoboken. You did see a coming together, especially when they set up triage at the train station. There was a call for blood; there was a call to set up shelters. I was involved in that, on 9/11. And you would suddenly see people -- strangers -- coming in and volunteering, not knowing what they would do, but being there, available, to do whatever they could -- which is something that I've always liked about the town -- it did come together, to try to help people, and provide either shelter, food, camaraderie, in an urban environment -- which is not always easy.

RF: In what ways can artists commemorate the storm?

JPP: Hmmm. That's a very good question. Photographers document. The artist part would maybe be expressions of what they went through. Writers could write their emotions and feelings of this -- how they felt, and all that; what they had to go through. One of the things we have to realize is that many of us come from another part of the region. And since the entire region was affected, people were concerned about their parents -- or, vice versa, their kids -- who were other places, or their summer residence, or whatever. So this became a concern. I think people can also maybe create the imagery that talks about the experience. Some things that we take for granted now become prized possessions, because the grocery store's not open; the supermarket's not open.

RF: What did the people of Hoboken learn about themselves, after going through this storm?

JPP: I think the people did learn that the variety of people, people who have lived in Hoboken all

their life to people who've just arrived -- all share this square mile, and they can come to work together. I saw Stevens students help a full-time garbage man, who works for the city, actually pick up the piles of trash into the trucks -- because he couldn't do it on his own, and if he's working all twelve, fourteen, eighteen hours, the physical labor eventually gets to you. So the fact that he had help with these Stevens students was quite good.

I helped a friend of mine who watches over a building. He lives in Union City. So I was able to call him, and tell him what the situation was -- how much water was in the building and stuff like that. I would go to see him from time to time -- that was also something I did, to answer your question -- which was I went to visit friends, to see how they were doing. I couldn't reach everybody I knew. So that, and also -- our building was fine, but just because the power was on doesn't mean that the power would necessarily stay on, if there was such a great draw. Everything calmed down, and it seemed like, okay, everything was fine.

It was funny to see our building, full of power and light, and across the street, these modern condominiums, four times the value, had no power except for the garage door, and the hallway lights. They had no heat,

so most of the people had to evacuate. There was absolutely no light. Night after night we could see no light, not even flickering. And I'm going, "These are modern buildings, the most expensive buildings here, and they didn't think to put in a generation system to run the basic utilities necessary, so people could live in those units." Something is wrong with that.

RF: Do you feel that Hoboken has recovered? And if so, is there a moment that made you think, "Hoboken is back?"

JPP: Most of Hoboken is back. You can see. Because the routines have come back -- like we have a gallery that's new, after the storm, that's here at Neumann Leather, Pronto Gallery, and they've had several shows since the storm. So they were able to clear up the space. They opened after the storm, but they were to come in, clean up the space, prepare for shows, and go on. I've seen a number of new stores open right on 1st Street, where there were older businesses, which are gone. I've seen some restaurants that handed out food be able to come back, so there is a normalcy. However, there are people going through construction. I have a friend who owns a sign

business, and he's still trying to get his insurance paid. It's taking a long, long time, and the amount of paperwork -- well, if you're trying to run a business (and we established a business but there's all this paperwork), to do all the paperwork, you can't run the business; and to run the business, you can't do the paperwork. It seems like there has to be a better way. I tried to apply for unemployment, as a free-lancer (which I was told I could do), but I couldn't get online, and as soon as I answered the question, "Will I get some of my work from New York?" they said, "Oh, we're sorry. You have to call someone else." This was all pre-recorded; I never got to speak to anybody about it.

So that normalcy hasn't come back. People have lost money. People have lost possessions. Some of those possessions are family-type stuff. I saw the garbage. I saw art. I saw a lot of art being thrown out because there were residents that were flooded, because some of the residences are in the basements, and they were just being thrown out because you could see the water stains on them.

But for the most part, it has come back. People are renting spaces. I notice more new people coming in. Yes. I see it come back, but I think there's always that little nervousness. You kind of know if people -- in

the next storm, if people leave or not. Leaving is an important aspect -- evacuate. I cannot emphasize that amount. When Irene happened, there appeared to be more water in certain areas, and one of the things that people don't understand is, if you're in the buildings and you flush the toilet like you normally do, you add to the problem. If you get out, there's less normal usage, so now the storm can use that as a way out. There's talk about having "back checks," so the water will -- if you have a "back check," that means that anyone living in the building -- at the highest point of the storm, at the highest level of water, you flush the toilet, and it goes right into the basement, or even to the first floor, because it has to go somewhere, so it will come out through the toilets. So the best thing to do when a storm is "stated" is that people should evacuate, because they put less stress on the entire system. Because if you're stuck and surrounded by water, you have to be evacuated. You have to leave.

So I think we'll wonder if that [unclear] will really coming back, that people say, "Oh. I'd better get out of here. This is a flood zone."

RF: Is there anything you would like to add, that I didn't already ask about?

JPP: Well, I saw a lot of the damage, like the floating docks at 13th, 14th Streets, where they were -- they rose up high, and they got hung up on their support columns, that kind of guide them up and down, from the tide, so they just hung there. I saw the famous sailboat that got up on 14th Street. Not 14th Street, I'm sorry -- that would be 18th -- even past 18th Street -- and the water had to be high enough that the boat was able to get above the rock shore, and land right on the sidewalk, the walking walkway, with its keel, which was at least three feet deep. I don't know how high the water above this walking promenade, if you will, was able to get, there, but it had to be high. I saw rocks moved -- a garden rock around the Lipton Tea building, known as the Tea Building, where the rocks came up; The Monroe Art Center, known as the "Levellor" [phonetic] Building, was shut down, and they had damage on the first floor. I saw just piles of garbage. The piles of garbage were higher than the water, at the end -- just piles where people had actually thrown out everything.

One thing I saw several days later was a supermarket -- King's. They would bring out what they call a "U-boat," which is their form of a dolly, loaded with food. It was all full of food. They would take a box

(frozen food); rip it open; the guy would count -- there was twelve -- he would pitch it into the garbage truck. He did that with every case, and someone was taking down the information. This was for the insurance. And I'm going, "You're doing it this way? This is going to take a long time. This is going to prevent the speed of opening up the place, the store." The A&P, which is near 6th and Grand, said they wouldn't open in a week, and in three days they got open. What they did was they put -- I forget whether it was plastic or paper -- but they basically sealed the freezer/refrigeration units, so no one could touch that, because they were waiting for the insurance adjustor, I presume. What they would do is -- everything else was on shelves, mostly canned goods, obviously, and sometimes they had fresh vegetables, and they were bringing in stuff. So they actually opened pretty fast, given the enormity of the storm. They were able to do that. I was able to do that. That's one of the things I did -- I walked around, found out what stores were open, and would write down the addresses, to indicate what was open, on the flier, so people could at least get some food and stuff like that.

One thing I saw wonderful was --

Track #2

JPP: There was "Amanda's," [phonetic] who was just handing out food, because it was going to spoil anyway, but they were handing out food. But they started to run out of plastic forks, so I collected plastic forks, had them washed in the dishwasher, and saved them for any event. So I grabbed all the plastic forks I had, and gave them to "Amanda's" so they could hand out more food easily, and stuff like that. I think that's where people helped.

I saw the bodegas -- they're open. It's hard to even get there, but they opened, sold what they had, and that was good. I saw the National Guard and the Verizon centers, where they would let people -- they had created a heated tent near City Hall, next to that gasoline tank truck that I talked about. He had a heated tank, and people could charge their phones, get information, and stuff like that. The Elks Club opened up, and they opened up their whole hall. They didn't have heat, but they had gas stoves and they have a full kitchen. So they were providing food, and their membership came out and provided food, in order to get the word out that they were providing meals for people, so they could have soup, or sandwiches, or whatever.

So that was something I saw, and that was a great thing to see -- people trying to help one another in a storm -- which is very chaotic, because it's not only that you want to help, but some people are not sure what to do. At first I wasn't sure what to do, because I wasn't as affected by, "Oh, I've got to get the heat coming on and the plumbers are not here yet," or, "Okay, I've got that done. Do we have enough food?" Then a friend of mine called, "Oh, I need food." "Oh, okay." So I went to get food for her. That type of thing. So it starts to become like you live -- now one of the things that happened was, my work didn't stop. My school closed. Actually, it closed for two weeks. My wife's school in New York City, they closed for a week. So we would just basically stay online, and help people out. We had friends come over to take a shower, get warmed up, and stuff like that. And people seemed very appreciative of that. They thought it was great.

RF: Thank you.

JPP: You're very welcome.