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HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

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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 then 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 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.