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THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

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INTERVIEWER: EILEEN LYNCH
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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 -
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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.