

**T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection**

**ABSTRACT**

**INTERVIEWEE NAME:** Daryl and Cathy Chauvin

**COLLECTION:** 4700.1950

**IDENTIFICATION:** Teacher (Daryl) and nursing home worker (Cathy) who evacuated from Plaquemines Parish as Hurricane Katrina approached.

**INTERVIEWERS:** Blanche Jewell, Gayle Roy

**SERIES:** Voices in the Storm: Hurricane Katrina Survivors in Pointe Coupee Parish

**INTERVIEW DATES:** March 23, 2007

**FOCUS DATES:** 2005-2007

**ABSTRACT:**

**Tape 3810**

Introduction from interviewer Jewell; Cathy born in New Orleans in 1957, grew up in Metairie; met her husband, Daryl, at Nicholls State University; Daryl born in 1955 in New Orleans, grew up in Port Sulphur; Daryl and Cathy's two children, Jason and Megan; Daryl a teacher for twenty years; Cathy's parents Clare and Robert Joseph Schroder; Daryl's parents Caroline Chappetta and Renee Paul Chauvin; Cathy currently speech pathologist in long-term care facility, worked at Riverbend Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Belle Chasse at time of Hurricane Katrina; evacuating Riverbend with over eighty geriatrics to Kentwood; monitoring news about the storm's path on Friday night; decision to evacuate nursing home on Saturday morning, supplies packed and residents loaded onto busses throughout the day; Cathy and Daryl spent Saturday night packing, planning to evacuate; they met the busses at a Baptist church near Kentwood where the nursing home residents would be housed in a gymnasium; nursing staff did whatever was needed for the residents; traffic and contraflow when evacuating from a previous storm was a mess; Daryl and Cathy stayed at a hotel further north of Kentwood with Daryl's mother and their pet; Daryl's mother helped to cook for residents; Cathy stayed with the residents until mid-October; nursing staff had learned from previous evacuations; knew that the storm was bad because of high winds; expected damage to their home, but not destruction; Cathy comforted when her children arrived to stay with them; no food on hand except junk food; discussing leaving the hotel and going to another town to get the family settled; Cathy and Megan tried to buy food and gas but couldn't get anything; Daryl and Cathy agreed they had to go somewhere else, decided on New Roads where good friends lived; stopping along the way to get gas for Jason's car, a kind stranger gave them a full gas can; Daryl visited his classroom before evacuating, had an eerie feeling that he may not see the school again; friends they stayed with in New Roads were Gerry and Brenda, had evacuated to their home in previous storms; stayed at Brenda's mother's home for two months with other people who had evacuated; began hearing stories about conditions in Port Sulphur; planned to go home to assess damage but Hurricane

Rita hit; Cathy commuted to Kentwood, her patients were wonderful and thankful; Red Cross made them move out of the gym because of potential respiratory issues; move to smaller location led to multiple patients getting sick within a week, so Red Cross let them move back to the gym; some nurses slept in their cars; fortunate to have a maintenance man with them; Red Cross offered food but they were already providing three hot meals a day; panic began when contracted vendors couldn't reach them, but three trucks showed up with ice and propane; Cathy says that's an example of how one person can make a difference in the world; Riverbend flooded with a few inches of water, would be several months before residents could return; at a meeting for Plaquemines Parish teachers, Daryl and other teachers told they would still have a job, were asked to help with clean-up efforts, undertone that some should take leave or retire; Daryl took a years' leave, then started teaching in Pointe Coupee Parish; Chauvins had jobs but no place to live; Brenda and her sister were real estate agents, helped Chauvins rent a home from a man living in New York; unusual situation of moving in and boxing up the man's belongings; lucky to use his furniture because they had none; stayed there November through April when the man returned and they had to leave; they plan to remain in New Roads; Daryl is working in Plaquemines Parish again, Cathy working for Pointe Coupee Nursing Home; they are one of several families they know that are living apart out of necessity; fortunate that their children were out of high school and didn't need to make school placement decisions; greatest loss was their community, their home, Daryl's classroom; friends are scattered and they miss neighbors dropping by; it was odd for Cathy not knowing people in her nursing home or at church; comfort of attending Catholic services; slowly getting used to their current church and meeting people there; finally visiting their home with their children two months after Katrina; not knowing where they were because familiar landmarks were gone; Daryl got emotional seeing the destruction of his mother's home, memories of growing up there; the house was gone but the bathtub, toilet, and headboard were still in place; flooding levels in Port Sulphur, Buras and Nairn in previous hurricanes; daughter, Megan, is a city girl but took the loss of their home hard; describing the damage to their home, they had part of a roof and walls, but the back of the house was gone; many FEMA trailers but few home being built, more progress in Port Sulphur than Buras; FEMA and school board negotiations to rebuild schools; Boothville school was raised and survived the flooding; Port Sulphur was heavily damaged by flooding; after the storm, birds were gone, lots of rats and mice around; a grocery store near their old home just reopened, as well as a gas station, dollar store, and St. Patrick's Church; priest at St. Patrick's was discouraged from rebuilding but was determined to do so; Daryl and Cathy married and their children were baptized and confirmed there; pews and two organs were donated to the church; fleeting horrible feelings that sneak up unexpectedly; they don't want to rebuild only to lose their home again, they are tired of evacuating; Cathy thankful that she was there for her nursing home residents, but never wants to go through that stress and worry again; Daryl's mother is starting over, currently lives with Daryl; they moved Daryl's father's burial up to Belle Chasse from Port Sulphur; bodies missing and tombs disturbed after the hurricane, no one wants that for their loved ones; advice to get flood insurance; hard for people to comprehend the complete loss of community; pictures don't do justice to the magnitude of damage; recognition that what they lost is replaceable, they are lucky to have their lives, children, and jobs; the grief is very real; leaving their home and community was not a choice, so the transition was tough; discussion about where to move and work after the storm; after the storm, they had no control, had to rely, "on the grace of God and the generosity of other people"; Boothville is slowly coming back, but orange industry was destroyed; looking back, they realize how blessed they were in Port Sulphur, and

feel lucky to have had their friends in New Roads who took them in; getting used to life in New Roads, Cathy was excited the first time she ran into someone she knew in Wal-Mart; whatever they went through, someone else always has it worse; worst part of recovery has been dealing with government bureaucracy and insurance companies; Daryl got fed up with an insurance agent who couldn't understand that they evacuated and weren't able to answer specific questions about flooding in their home; FEMA worker once told him, "maybe you're not needy enough"; feeling that Louisiana got a dirty deal when it came to emergency response; Cathy feels blessed to have had a time when she had nothing but God to depend on; Daryl still feels mad, but has no one to be mad at, knows they will never recapture what they once had; Cathy felt frightened; Daryl doesn't deal well with change; in a way, the hurricane happened at a good time for them, children's lives weren't drastically impacted; Megan felt sympathy for high school seniors who didn't get to have typical senior year traditions; Daryl hears from his students how difficult it is to live in a FEMA trailer; Cathy knew they would be miserable in a FEMA trailer so they didn't get one; started feeling settled when they had their rental house; Jewell thanks them for sharing their story; Cathy wants to get more involved with church after their new house is built; comments on current organist at the church and Daryl's desire to play again; end of interview.

**TAPES:** 1 (T3810)

**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 1 hour, 22 minutes

**# PAGES TRANSCRIPT:** 69 pages

**PHOTOGRAPHS / PHOTOGRAPHER:** 1 photo taken during interview. Photographer David Breidenbach

**OTHER MATERIALS:** Voices in the Storm reception program (2 pgs); Biographical Data Form

**RESTRICTIONS:** None