

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: George Miller Jr.

COLLECTION: 4700.1954

IDENTIFICATION: St. Bernard Parish councilman, former resident of Chalmette, Louisiana who evacuated ahead of Hurricane Katrina

INTERVIEWER: Blanche Jewell

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

INTERVIEW DATE: May 11, 2007

FOCUS DATES: 2005

ABSTRACT:

Tape 3814

Introduction; Miller's parents, George Miller Sr., and Estelle Miller; he grew up in the Lower Ninth Ward; married in 1967; worked for New Orleans Public Service and Murphy Oil Refinery; experienced Hurricane Betsy in 1965 and the flooding of the Lower Ninth Ward; promised himself he would never get caught in a storm again; he's probably evacuated thirty-five times in forty years; decided to evacuate his family to Houston, Texas, when he saw the size of Katrina; using the term "hurricane vacation" with his grandchildren; didn't pack many items from his home because he was caring for his aunt who had recently broken her hip; media coverage after the storm was unbelievable; they couldn't contact his son-in-law who stayed behind; son-in-law contacted them at the hotel several days later and said their house was gone; people shouldn't blame the mayor for asking people to shelter at the Superdome; Miller's whole community was gone; friends in New Roads, Louisiana, were able to get Miller's grandchildren enrolled in school and had a place for them to live; neighbors asked him to leave his doors unlocked so they could deliver meals; Pam and Kelly from the Baptist church helped his family get clothes; New Roads Sheriff Paul Raymond Smith was able to help Miller get a police escort back into St. Bernard Parish; he took video of his destroyed home, the police escorts sat and cried with him; his home has been gutted but twenty-two months later they are still waiting on Road Home money; feels his family has been blessed compared to some of his friends; his daughter bought a home in Livonia, Louisiana; he and his wife bought a home on Gretchen Street in New Roads and his wife retired; New Roads is a great community with no crime and good schools; he enjoys being involved in the community, recently joined Kiwanis; the community has been great; difficult situation with his gutted home in St. Bernard Parish, waiting on Road Home funds, extreme decline in value, still needing to carry insurance; he's in St. Bernard once a week because he's an elected official, serves on the St. Bernard Council on Aging; over 100 seniors in the parish are living in trailers, hopes to receive close to a million dollars from FEMA and insurance to rebuild the senior center; the trailers are depressing; dealing with red tape through

FEMA means the new senior center will take years to complete; the parish will rebuild but not with the same people; he tells young people that the parish is now in their hands, to get involved in politics, because most older residents are gone; it upsets him that only a third of people vote; his wife hasn't been back to their home since the storm, wants to remember it the way it was; they salvaged glasses from their wedding and his aunt's communion Bible; comparisons between World Trade Center attack and Hurricane Katrina; more people would have left Louisiana if it wasn't such a great state; the community in New Roads has sucked them in; negative aspects after the storm include delayed funding to rebuild, people looting; witnessing looting when he returned to St. Bernard; "I think that's the hardest part is that people would take advantage of you when you were on your worst hour"; when people remember Katrina and its aftermath, he believes the negative will outweigh the positive, even though there are many success stories; media portrays more bad stories than good ones; example that the media didn't cover the positive work being done for seniors in St. Bernard; people will remember that money didn't get to people who needed it; different responses to Hurricane Betsy and Hurricane Katrina; a four-star general recommended bulldozing everything but you can't do that when people own parcels of land; recovery efforts hindered because people don't learn from past mistakes; seems that legislature has already forgotten about St. Bernard Parish; over 400 homes slated for demolition have not been torn down yet; lack of cooperation between local government, state government, and FEMA have stalled recovery in the parish; his home address in Chalmette, Louisiana; missing friends and their children after seeing them grow up for so many years; similarities between New Roads and St. Bernard; urging young people to vote and get involved in local politics; conclusion.

TAPE: 1 (T3814)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 45 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 20 pages

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

OTHER MATERIALS: Voices in the Storm reception program (2 pgs)

RESTRICTIONS: None