

Biography

Mary Etta Moody was born on August 26, 1945 in Bogalusa, Louisiana. Her parents were Dewey Scarborough and Ruby Pope. Although she is currently retired, Ms. Moody worked for several years as an announcer for a small-town radio station. In August 2005, Moody witnessed the devastation of Hurricane Katrina firsthand. Instead of evacuating, Moody chose to remain at home in Poplarville, Mississippi, where she currently resides. Moody enjoys storytelling, raising calves, and gardening.

Table of Contents

Introduction/background information.....	1
Hurricane Katrina impact on Bogalusa, Louisiana.....	1
Hurricane Katrina impact on Poplarville, Mississippi.....	1
Poetry reading: “Katrina”	2
Hurricane Katrina impact on New Orleans, Louisiana.....	3
Efforts to revitalize Poplarville community.....	4
Reflections on Katrina-related damage in Poplarville	4
Final thoughts.....	4

AN ORAL HISTORY

with

MARY ETTA MOODY

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Mary Etta Moody and is taking place on October 28, 2005. The interviewer is Beth Morgan.

Morgan: I'm here in Poplarville, Mississippi, with Mary Etta Moody, who is a storyteller. And we're at the Raines Street Community Center, and Mary Etta also went through [Hurricane] Katrina here in the Poplarville area. She has a story about events in Bogalusa. So Mary Etta, would you tell us that?

Moody: Sure. Well, Bogalusa is my home. I moved over here about thirty-nine years ago when I married, and I still keep in touch with my friends, but I changed the names to protect my life because this person might shoot me if they found out I used their name. Miss Avery is well known to a lot of people in Bogalusa and she's a very eccentric individual, and she's always waiting for the end of time and for her death; she's about ninety. She had bought herself a beautiful wedding dress to be buried in and she had it in the closet. Well, when Katrina started, Miss Avery got the idea that it was the end of time and Gabriel was going to blow his horn after Katrina got her presence known. So the wind started blowing and howling, trees started falling all around this old lady's house. And so she got her wedding dress on, laid down on the couch, put candles all around the couch, had some flowers in her hand and was waiting for Gabriel to blow his horn. Well, as you probably figured out, Gabriel didn't blow that horn and she was just laying there. Well, some of the neighbors, after the storm was over, got to missing her about a day later and they started looking for her. Well, they realized she didn't come out of that house so they thought she was dead. They went blocking in there trying to get in and knocked the door down, and there she was laid out on the couch, kind of dehydrated, and with candles all around. I guess she'd got up a couple of times to redo the candles because she'd started it during the storm. Well, one of the men said, "Miss Avery, are you all right?" And she said, "No, I'm dying. Gabriel's going to blow his horn any minute." And he said, "Gabriel ain't going to blow no horn, Miss Avery, not right now, probably later, but it was just a hurricane." She says, "Well, I'm not getting up from here until he blows his horn." He said, "You going to be laying there a long time." So finally they convinced her to get up. Well, she couldn't get up by then. So they had to call in somebody to come and haul her to the hospital, which was down I might add, because it had been damaged. But they got the old lady convinced it wasn't the end of time. But some people around here thought that this was the beginning of the end of time. I've even heard people that were real intelligent say, "You know this is the beginning of the end of time." But it's not.

Morgan: Did you ride out the storm here in Poplarville?

Moody: You bet I did, right in my house.

Morgan: Did you have moments where you thought *maybe* this is not the end of time but the last storm you'd ride through?

Moody: No. I rode out [Hurricane] Camille in the same house and the house went. The top went, the back went. And I had some beautiful red velvet curtains; that's when I was nineteen years old and wanted to look like Scarlett O'Hara's mansion in Atlanta. And the beautiful red velvet curtains went with Camille, and the house went and beams fell everywhere, and I survived that. And this time the house didn't go. We had five trees on the house and a big old hole in it but it didn't go. And I wasn't—this is what's wild—I wasn't afraid. I wasn't afraid at all. And you bet, the next one comes, it's a hundred and fifty, two hundred miles [per hour], I'll be waiting for them.

Morgan: And you'll stay here.

Moody: I'll stay here. I'm not leaving.

Morgan: Tell me some of the other effects in Poplarville in general, the city, after Katrina.

Moody: There were so many trees down it looked like tree city instead of Poplarville. There were trees everywhere. I remember when we got out the next morning—I live outside in the country—and the road, the little road, Springhill Road that I live on was completely covered with trees and we started hearing the chainsaws. And so we got our chainsaws out. Oh, I learned to use a chainsaw during this time. I'm sixty years old but I have *mastered* the chainsaw. And people got their chainsaws out and we got ours. Mine was kind of rusty, but anyway, we cut ourselves out of the house with the help of Mr. Brewer, Mr. Wayne Brewer. He was coming one way and we were going out. He was coming in and we got the area open so we could get out. And then we started on trees on Springhill Road, cutting out the trees so the people could get in. There were so many people who had left and were coming back. And it took two days, just about, in my little area to get it open where the people could get through, and these were local people, these were our neighbors. It wasn't the city, the state, the town, the nobody, it was the neighbors that got out and cleaned out the roads so people could go up and down them. One of them was Mr. Wayne Brewer; another one was [Baue Pardue?]. They were out trying to get these roads open. They got out and worked cleaning these roads. It was just ordinary everyday people. If you do stuff for yourself you get it done quicker than to wait around for the government to *think* about doing it.

Morgan: And how's the community doing now?

Moody: It seems to be doing good. Some people are still out of their houses but most people are trying to get going again, trying to get back going. You know, things can knock you down, but the main thing is to get back up and try to knock back.

Morgan: You've written a poem, too.

Moody: Well I didn't write it. Randy Newman wrote a poem [song] called "The 1928 Flood ["Louisiana, 1927"]." It was about a flood on the Mississippi [River], but I had kind of borrowed it. And I apologize to Mr. Newman; I'm sure he's going to be put out by my rendition, but—

Morgan: He'll be happy you're giving him credit.

Moody: —but he's a great, great writer. It's this—it's called "Katrina."

"What has happened down here? It's the winds [have] change.
 Clouds roll in from the south and they bring hurricanes.
 Katrina blew real hard and she rained a real long time.
 There was six feet of water in the streets of Evangeline.
 Katrina blew all day and then she rained all night.

The levees broke.
 Some people got lost in that flood; some people got away all right.
 Levees broke clean down to Plaquemine.
 And there was sixteen feet of water in the streets of Waveland.

Louisiana, Mississippi—
 Katrina tried to wash you away
 And then she tried to blow you away.

Louisiana and Mississippi—
 Katrina tried to blow you away
 And then wash you away.

President Bush came down.
 But he didn't come on no railroad train; came in a helicopter;
 Brought a little fat FEMA man with a notepad in his hand.
 President said, "Little fat FEMA man,
 Isn't it a shame what Hurricane Katrina done to this poor redneck's land?"

Louisiana, Mississippi—Katrina tried to blow you away,
 She tried to wash you away.
 Katrina tried to blow and wash you away—Louisiana and Mississippi.
 But she didn't. *You won.*

Morgan: And outside of Poplarville, you had some concerns about what had been going on then in New Orleans, too, correct?

Moody: I had some graves down in New Orleans of, family-member graves, and I still don't know—I ought to go to New Orleans. I could get in now—how the graveyards were. I knew the ones in Pearlington and down on the Coast had been hit hard and some of the coffins had left the graves and moved elsewhere with the wind's help, and I was just worried about the New Orleans graveyards. I just can't fathom because, see, some of the graves went back to 1810s, 1820s, and they've been there for years and never been flooded out, and I don't know if they were flooded or not. I still don't know. I haven't ever found out. I've been trying to, but I just never have got the information.

Morgan: Your poem is really victorious and it has a great spirit to it. Talk to me a little bit about the spirit of the people here, in the Poplarville community.

Moody: A lot of people were real—I was real down that morning. I went out and all those trees were everywhere that I had. I planted my going-to-Europe trees about twenty years ago and I was fixing to harvest, and all them are gone.

Morgan: What is a going-to-Europe tree?

Moody: My mother and I were travelers at one time; we loved to travel around. And I planted trees through the tree program of the state, and those trees were going to be my way to get back to Europe or to China or Tibet, which I had been to, in the future. But now I'm not going. I've decided to go to [Walt] Disney World instead. But the people, the thing about the people is, you went out and you were so depressed and then the smell of the pine, this marvelous, wonderful smell and aroma hit your face and you realize that you're alive and there are other things alive, and tomorrow is going to be better than today. And the first thing I saw after I went outside was an old mockingbird that lives at our house; she'd been there for several years. And I thought the wind had got her because we had no birds at all after Camille, except some seagulls that were blown up here. All the birds were gone. But there was my old mockingbird with her one little baby. She had a little nest full before Katrina, but she saved one and I saw them both this morning, the baby's gotten big now, and they're alive and they survived. And a lot of people survived. We had some people to die here, but most of the people here made it and they're going to make it on. They're going to keep going and they're going to keep getting better. And this is going to be a great place to live one day. It is now, but it's going to be better in the future.

Morgan: So you're not hearing people say, "I'm going to move away from the Coast, as far away from the Coast as I can get," and just sell out and go?

Moody: Well, some people are, I guess, but I hadn't really talked to anybody that was leaving. Most people come in here—some man was telling me, said he sold a house, sight unseen, to somebody from New Orleans; had minor hurricane damage. I mean, when somebody buys a house, sight unseen, in a place where there's been a hurricane, that's pretty good. But we didn't get any floodwater. This is the highest place, next to Meridian, in Mississippi. We're way up in the air.

Morgan: So most of the damage up here is wind damage.

Moody: It's all wind damage. There's very little, if any—I hadn't heard of anybody having water damage. Now, there might be somebody, but I just hadn't heard about it. Most of it is wind damage, and that's why the insurance companies were, you know, compliant, I guess, up here. They want to make a fuss out there on the Coast. [The insurance companies owe the people money.] The Coast is pitiful. I've been to Waveland and down on the, walked down to the beach, and I think the first time I went to Waveland I just cried and cried; I couldn't stand it. And this lady, she was a Mennonite lady, was working and she says, "Honey, if you ain't going to help us, go away. We don't need your tears." And you don't need tears no more. Tears is already gone. It's time to get to work.

(end of interview)