Mississippi Oral History Project

Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Glynna Dozier

Interviewer: Beth Morgan

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Table of Contents

American Medical Response, Hurricane Katrina .......................................................1
Beginning of Dozier’s storm shift for Katrina ............................................................1
Experiencing Katrina five miles north of the Gulf of Mexico ....................................3
Wind like roaring train for twelve hours.................................................................3
Fear of dying ..............................................................................................................3
After the storm ..........................................................................................................4
Loss of communication .............................................................................................4
Search and rescue ......................................................................................................4
Generator power ........................................................................................................5
Going home to Long Beach .......................................................................................5
Debris ..........................................................................................................................6
Danger from gas leaks ...............................................................................................7
Temporary housing, help from employer ..................................................................7
Relief crews ................................................................................................................8
Ambulance bay becomes dining room .......................................................................8
A little recreation for survivors ................................................................................8
Washer/dryer, twenty-four/seven ..............................................................................9
Air ambulance service ..............................................................................................9
Rebuilding home, insurance and FEMA issues .......................................................9
Pets ..............................................................................................................................9
Obstacles to restoration of home .............................................................................10
Description of neighborhood following Katrina ....................................................10
AN ORAL HISTORY

with

GLYNNA DOZIER

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Glynna Dozier and is taking place on October 27, 2005. The interviewer is Beth Morgan.

Morgan: I’m at the American Medical Response Headquarters in Gulfport, Mississippi, with Glynna Dozier. Glynna, what do you do with American Medical Response?

Dozier: I work in data entry. We submit statistical information to the state regarding the runs that we make and the patients that we transport.

Morgan: And did you work here at AMR through the storm?

Dozier: Yes, I did.

Morgan: Tell me a little about when y’all first began really preparing for Katrina?

Dozier: Actually, we were told the Friday before that, and, of course, even at that point, it was still uncertain as to whether it would come this way or lean more towards the New Orleans area, but traditionally operations personnel come in to support our medical personnel here and see that they have a good hot meal in their tummies and, you know, just do that kind of thing. So we were told Friday that we would be contacted Saturday and at that point we would need to come in sometime Sunday to be in-house(?) before the storm came.

Morgan: OK and you personally, when did your storm shift begin here?

Dozier: I came in about two o’clock on Sunday afternoon.

Morgan: OK and what were your principal duties?

Dozier: We, at that point, were getting dinner ready for Sunday night.

Morgan: So everybody did just whatever job?

Dozier: Right.

Morgan: And it wasn’t data entry, though.
Dozier: No, no, no, no.

Morgan: You can just drink bottled water?

Dozier: You got it.

Morgan: If you need to. (laughter)

Dozier: OK, yeah. It was strictly kitchen duties at that point.

Morgan: And were other people, not normally employees here, here? Were there reinforcements?

Dozier: No, actually it was basically three ladies out of the administrative office and then one lady that came from Human Resources, and we were the kitchen group.

Morgan: So, on Sunday, early Sunday, how long did you think that you would have to be—

Dozier: To be honest with you, probably two to three days. Yeah, we figured we would be back to our normal duties on maybe Tuesday, something like that.

Morgan: And when did you first realize this is not going to be a normal hurricane run?

Dozier: Probably Sunday night. We had put air mattresses in our office to sleep on and I had brought a very small little TV that’s battery operated. And at that point they were saying that it was coming, it was leaning more toward this direction and that being, I think, it was a category four at the time, we kind of knew then that this area not having that kind of hurricane in years and years and years, that it was going to be pretty bad.

Morgan: Did you grow up on the Coast?

Dozier: No. As a matter of fact, I’ve only been down here since October of last year. I’m a Birmingham resident. And so this was really my first. In fact, I transferred from AMR in Birmingham and I came down here like two weeks after Ivan which, thank goodness, did not do a lot of damage to this area. So this was my first.

Morgan: And it’s the quintessential hurricane experience—

Dozier: Yes. (laughs)

Morgan: —isn’t it?
Dozier: Absolutely.

Morgan: Well, tell me about riding the storm out in this building. And let me—this building is located just south of I-10 in Gulfport.

Dozier: Correct.

Morgan: Between the ocean and Interstate 10.

Dozier: Right. We’re about, I think we’re approximately five to six miles from the beach area.

Morgan: Tell me about riding the storm out here.

Dozier: We finished dinner and finished cleaning the kitchen up, and we all got to bed about eleven o’clock Sunday evening and laid down our little mattresses. And by that time the wind had picked up and it really wasn’t raining at that point, but the wind was really blowing. So we all, you know, tried to get some sleep. And about 4:30 Monday morning my daughter, who was a nurse in Mobile and was working, called on my cell phone and she says, “Mother, what are you doing?” And I said, “Well, I’m trying to get some rest.” She said, “You know it’s coming right toward you. It’s coming your way.” And, of course, the last time we had heard anything about it was Saturday night and it was still kind of iffy at that point. And she says, “Well, what are you going to do?” And I said, “Well, I’m going to ride out the storm.” I said, “I have no other choice.” So, we laid there until about 6:30, and by that time, that was about the time that the storm hit. So the winds had really picked up and the rain had really started falling, and we got up and went in the kitchen to fix breakfast for, at that time, probably a crew of about, I don’t know, thirty to forty people and we fixed a regular breakfast. And within the next hour or so the winds really picked up and the rain, and I don’t think that I can, that I would ever be able to erase the horrific sound of the wind. You know, you hear that a tornado, and thank goodness I’ve never experienced one, but that it sounds like the roar of a train and that’s what it was constantly. It was just constant. And at one point we could actually see the walls as if they were breathing and the ceiling as if it was going up and down. And I really thought, “Oh my God, I’m going to die. This is it. I am going to die.”

Morgan: How many hours of that, the noise and the—

Dozier: We took that until about four o’clock that afternoon.

Morgan: From six in the morning until—

Dozier: Four o’clock. At eleven o’clock, which was probably the peak, though, of the winds—

Morgan: A.M, eleven A.M.
**Dozier:** Eleven A.M. Chris Cirrillo, who was our director of operations here, had everybody go in this main hall right here like we do for a tornado drill. And we stayed there probably until about one o’clock that afternoon.

**Morgan:** Two hours in the hallway.

**Dozier:** Yeah. And of course during that time, my husband had taken our three dogs and cat and he had gone to Panama City to stay with friends. And of course he’s calling, my daughter’s calling. Communication at this point was just a nightmare, especially with cell phones, you know, sometimes you could hear and sometimes you couldn’t. And I was very, very anxious. You know, I was just scared to death. I really was scared to death. And it was—I guess everybody here, I was probably the only novice, because everybody here had been through some sort of hurricane or a couple of storms, and at this point we really did not know how severe it was. But they were all laid back and I was just a bundle of nerves. But about four o’clock the winds finally died down and at that point we started to venture out, especially to the back of the building just, you know, just to see what kind of damage we could see.

**Morgan:** And what was the first, first things that you saw when you actually—

**Dozier:** Well, the first—and actually some of the crew had gone out earlier, being the brave souls that they are, and stood out on the Bay and had watched the trees, you know, bending over. The building next to us, they lost a complete side of their building and I saw that. We also lost part of the tower in the com [communication] center, which it took out. And then we had a metal roof where they parked some of the vehicles and we lost part of that. So that was my first view of it.

**Morgan:** So, what, after being able to get out, what happened next?

**Dozier:** Well, of course communication at that point was just, I mean, there was nothing.

**Morgan:** No cell or landline at that time.

**Dozier:** Nothing, absolutely nothing. I mean, like I said, you know, the cell phones, occasionally, you could get a signal but, I mean, it was just awful. So what most of our crews were doing at that point was just search and rescue. I mean, they were just going out. And of course, most of your lights, traffic lights, if they were still there they were in pieces. Most of them were completely blown off the lines and there were trees down on them. And so, you know, they just did the best they could. And of course, while they were out, we were trying to maintain as much normalcy as possible and, you know, started on the dinner meal for the day.

**Morgan:** Did you still have electricity?
Dozier: Yes, we had full generator power here and actually stayed on generator for at least a week, I think, possibly longer. So we had lights, we had air conditioning and we had, you know, electricity for the stove, we had everything.

Morgan: So you went back to basic needs.

Dozier: Right.

Morgan: Getting meals ready.

Dozier: Right.

Morgan: And did you stay here also Monday night?

Dozier: Yes, actually I was here until Friday evening. I left here about 5:30 and [drove to Birmingham to meet up with my husband.]

Morgan: Sunday till Friday—

Dozier: Right. —you stayed here at the offices.

Morgan: Right, we stayed here and slept on our little air mattresses, and took showers here and, you know, just did what we could do.

Morgan: And were you able to—so, you could run your computer, you could do basic things like data storage?

Dozier: No, actually we had, of course, no internet service or anything, so actually that data entry was put on hold and we did not return to doing that, Beth, until about three weeks later, not only because of the internet being down but because we were really needed more in, you know, in the food service area and that kind of stuff.

Morgan: Basic needs.

Dozier: Yeah.

Morgan: Were you able, during that week Sunday to Friday, to find out about your personal home. Where do you live?

Dozier: I live in Long Beach. We live about two blocks from the beach. We had bought a house back in March and were in the process of renovating it. The Tuesday after the storm one of the female paramedics took myself and a couple of other employees and went out to check on various houses. Unfortunately, where I lived was so devastated that they already had police set up. We had to—if you didn’t access it
from the beach road, which was totally gone, you had to access it across a railroad track. And at that point they weren’t letting anybody over the track. So, this same paramedic, bless her heart, and I call her my angel of the time, next, that was Tuesday, Wednesday night when she got off work, and she lives in Long Beach, also, but she lives further inland.

Morgan: So, the police, even you as a resident, would not—you were not allowed in?

Dozier: At that point we were not. They were not allowing anyone in there. But Wednesday night she did go by and what she had to do was to park on this side of the railroad tracks and actually walk over, and I think because she was AMR they allowed her to do that, and the next day she came in and she very sweetly and gently took me by the shoulders and she said, “I have seen your house, do you want to know what I found?”

Morgan: OK, so you got news about your house.

Dozier: I did and she said, “You do have a structure. You have two structures.” Because we have a garage that’s separate from the house, and she said, “There is a magnitude of debris.” She said, “So much so that I could not actually walk up to your front door.” She said, “It looks like the windows had been blown out,” and we have a brick home. But she said, “It looks like it’s pretty much intact.” And I said, “Did you happen to see the garage?” We’d left two cars in the garage. And she said, “I only saw one.” She said, “And of course, I didn’t go around to the back but I did see that one car.” So I thanked her. And the next day, that Thursday, I took a lunch hour and decided I was going to go down and see it for myself, and that was treacherous. I was scared to death because at that point there were still so many lights out and, you know, in some places there were National Guard directing traffic and in some places it was just, you know, fend for yourself. And it took me about thirty-five minutes to get down there. It normally takes me about twenty minutes. I was able to—I had to park, of course, on this side of the railroad track and I was able to walk over, but the debris was so bad and all of the street signs had been taken down that I was not sure where I was. And fortunately at the same time my next-door neighbor pulled up and of course this was like his second or third visit, and he said, “Would you like me to walk with you?” And I said, “Yes, please.” So, we walked up to the corner of our street and Ocean View which goes directly to Highway 90, and I recognized the little yellow house that had been on the corner, but it had been totally taken off the foundation and was sitting in the middle of the road. And as we turned the corner I saw my house. And I’m so glad that the paramedic had, you know, kind of filled me in on what to expect, but even at that it was just like a war zone. We had two couches in our den and they were in the front yard along with two boats.

Morgan: Not your boats?

Dozier: Not our boats. And someone else’s hot tub that was in about five different pieces, and lumber, and photo albums, and shoes and clothes, and dog houses. And it
was so bad that my next-door neighbor said, “Let me clear a path so that you can get in the house,” he said, “because it’s very dangerous,” and there were nails sticking up everywhere. And he did that, and I walked in and all the windows had been blown out, our den was full of other people’s furniture, all of ours was gone, my beautiful antique dining room table was outside in pieces. The west end wall of our house, which is where our bedrooms were, was totally gone. The water had apparently come in and that’s how it had gone out, and it had taken sheetrock, the studs were still standing but the bricks were gone. Everything was gone. We had just installed kitchen cabinets and most of them were out in the backyard. Our beds were still—we had beds in two bedrooms—they were still in there for some reason, I don’t know why the water didn’t pick them up and, you know, but they were still there. But the rest of our furniture was gone. All of our closets were washed out; we lost all of our clothes. Everything was gone. And at this point my next-door neighbor walked in and he said, “We need to leave; I’m smelling gas and it’s not safe, and we’ve got to go now.” So he kind of led me by the hand down the little path that he had cleared and I came on back to work. And it was my—now my husband was still in Panama City, he met me in Birmingham that weekend and we came down the following Tuesday. And of course I had, you know, I had told him what I had found so he knew what to expect. So his first, his first trip over there was like Tuesday.

Morgan: And you have two daughters? You have children?

Dozier: I have a daughter and a son. I have a son that lives in Birmingham and my daughter’s in Mobile.

Morgan: OK, so they were grown.

Dozier: Yeah.

Morgan: And had they had an opportunity to come back and see the house?

Dozier: No, I had emailed them pictures, but they have not been down here.

Morgan: Have you had any time—well, let me just ask you about your job here now. Everything is so new and different. What’s your primary focus now, job-wise?

Dozier: Job-wise, you know, just really to continue doing what I’m doing and AMR is a wonderful company to work for. They have just been so understanding and, you know, the outpour of help and people wanting to do things for you has been overwhelming. I have never seen anything like it before in my life. They asked for employee donations from their PTO fund, which is their paid time off, and were very successful with that. And I was given, not loaned, but we were given a large sum of money to help with our house and they’ve just been so wonderful.

Morgan: And where are you living now?
Dozier: We are living with a colleague of my husband’s, not too far from here, it’s in Gulfport. And they—it’s a young couple with a young child and they basically cleared out their guest room and said, “This is yours for as long as you need it.” So we’ve been very fortunate because there are others that have lived in shelters and are having to commute from Mobile, for that matter, and that’s probably what we would’ve done had we not found somebody to stay with, we would’ve probably gone and stayed with my daughter.

Morgan: Well, this headquarter has grown, from what you described on Sunday, which is making little meals in the kitchenette—

Dozier: Oh, absolutely.

Morgan: —to a pretty much self-contained compound. Could you describe—

Dozier: Absolutely.

Morgan: —the facilities for me now?

Dozier: As early as Monday afternoon, the day that the storm hit, we had crews in here from—and these are AMR crews—from Miami, Florida, from Macon, Georgia, and probably by Wednesday of that week. Not only did we have our people, but we had FEMA in one section of the building. We had Red Cross in one section of the building. So, by Wednesday, we probably had at least 200 people in this building.

Morgan: And you started with about thirty.

Dozier: With about thirty and probably went to 200 people in that quick a time. So we—it was interesting, we started off serving the employees in our employee break room, which had about five or six tables in it, but very quickly we realized that, you know, that’s no longer going to work. So, we moved the tables out into the hall and then very quickly realized that that wasn’t going to work either and moved it outside. Have you been out back to see what we’ve got back there?

Morgan: Yeah, would you describe that?

Dozier: The bay area actually became our food service—well, our food service production was still in the kitchen at that time, but actually became our dining room.

Morgan: And by bay area, that’s where the ambulances used to park, correct?

Dozier: That’s right, and it’s also a loading dock area for supplies, just a large concrete area with, you know, a little bit of a roof over it. So that became our food service, a dining room area that became our activity area, if you will, in that by Wednesday night they had a big screen TV set up out there and were showing movies so that, you know, you kind of relax and try to take your mind off things, and that kind
of thing. They also brought in tents and hand washing stations for the crews that were going out and coming back in. We, at that point, started a twenty-four hour a day laundry with a washer and dryer that was set up in the little room off the loading dock. So, we were, we were self contained at that point and we were doing everything that needed to be done to, you know, to carry out what we had to do.

Morgan: And now, two months later, there’s still dormitory-like conditions here, correct?

Dozier: Absolutely. What we have done was we had taken part of the PBS, which is Patient Billing Services Office, and of course at that point with the computers down they weren’t able to function and weren’t able to work, and had put cots in there for some of the crew. Now we’ve gone to bunk beds that they have set up for the crew. And I don’t think that they’re still housing them outside but at one point there were also people outside sleeping in tents. I think they brought them all inside because of the weather changing.

Morgan: Do you have any vision about how long it’s going to be in the future that AMR is going to be a dormitory compound?

Dozier: We really don’t know at this point or I have not been told. We are also using an air ambulance, and I won’t say service, I’ll say services because we have different companies that are coming in because two major bridges were totally devastated that linked this area with Pass Christian and Waveland, which was the hardest hit, and then on the other side, Ocean Springs, and so therefore they’re not really accessible by vehicle or they couldn’t get there in a timely manner, so we’re now using an air ambulance service for, you know, those calls that we get that we can’t go to quickly.

Morgan: Well, how about the recovery at your home in Long Beach, how’s that going?

Dozier: Well, it’s very frustrating. You know, you’re dealing with an insurance company and you’re dealing with FEMA. And unfortunately we took in seven feel of water in our house. We also had extensive roof damage and it had knocked the fence down, and we did not have flood insurance because we were told, where we were, it was not a flood plain. And of course we’re in the same boat with thousands of other people down here and that’s a real issue, I don’t know if you’re familiar with it or not, but it’s a real issue down here right now. So we still have not heard anything from our insurance company and we’ve had some contact with FEMA. We have applied for one of their trailers which we hope to get next week, and what we want to do is to put it in our driveway so that we can be there and kind of work on the house, and mainly get our animals back together. We had three dogs and a cat in Birmingham; one of our dogs passed away last Sunday and the lady that’s taking care of them called me and said that he passed away. So we want to get our animals back. I mean, that’s part of being back to normal. We’re hoping once we get the trailer in the driveway, then we can bring them back down here.
Morgan: Does your husband work also?

Dozier: My husband works for the Biloxi VA [Veteran’s Administration] Hospital. He’s a prosthetist; he makes artificial limbs. And he was very fortunate; they did not have much damage where he was. So, he was actually back to work the week after the storm and, you know, they were very fortunate that they didn’t have much damage.

Morgan: How do you balance a forty-hour work week and trying to rebuild your home basically from the ground up even though you still had structure?

Dozier: Really, it’s extremely hard and we’re still, at this point, we have to have a pass to get across the railroad tracks. We have a pass because we are a homeowner down there and they still have a curfew of eleven o’clock, which makes it hard. And we try to go down sometime after work, but you really can’t get anything done so it’s all done on the weekends.

Morgan: Is there power back up in Long Beach in your neighborhood?

Dozier: Yes, not at our house right now but most of our neighbors on the street behind us have their power up. And we’ve got water and sewer, so, and those, of course, are the requirements to get the FEMA trailer, so.

Morgan: And just in your neighborhood, your surrounding neighbors, were other people’s structures left or, you know, you hear stories about entire neighborhoods gone but there’s that one house—

Dozier: That one house.

Morgan: —what did your neighborhood look like?

Dozier: We live on a dead-end street; it’s a very short street. And there are, from the corner house, there are three houses on our side and they’re all—well, two of them are brick houses and then the other one is a wooden structure. The two brick houses fared pretty well. The other house was a total loss. I mean, it was still there but it’s going to have to be demolitioned, I mean, there’s nothing of it left to build on. Across the street we had two houses; we had a brick house and a wooden structure. The wooden structure is totally gone; these people only have a slab. They lost everything. And the brick home is still there. It was kind of in the same shape as ours; the windows were blown out and it had a lot of debris, so we think they will probably demolition it. For the most part our street is still there except for that little house. My husband, he kids me and he says, “You know, if they demolish that brick house across the street, we’ll have an ocean view. We are now the new beachfront.”

(end of interview)