

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Victor Cusher

COLLECTION: 4700.1952

IDENTIFICATION: New Orleans native who evacuated from the Lower Ninth Ward as Hurricane Katrina approached

INTERVIEWER: Blanche Jewell

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

INTERVIEW DATE: May 10, 2007

FOCUS DATES: 2005 - 2007

ABSTRACT:

Tape 3812

Introduction; Cusher had a miserable upbringing in the French Quarter of New Orleans, had to hustle because he didn't have parents; helped his aunt with housekeeping duties at the Cornstalk Guest House; difficult upbringing, just trying to survive; married and had a daughter at age sixteen; couldn't go to school; had to work in a segregated world; he was born on January 31, 1940, is sixty-seven years old; worked "any job that paid" to make a living; marriage failed because he and his wife were too young to know what they were doing; when Hurricane Katrina was approaching, he thought about leaving, believed he'd be back in a few days; he left with his son, David, after mayor's mandatory evacuation order; was living on Claiborne Street at that time; had no plan for where to go when evacuating; evacuated with his son, his ex-brother-in-law, Johnny, and his dog, Obie; Obie was his constant companion; Cusher had health problems prior to the hurricane; while evacuating, heard news that a barge hit the levee along the Seventeenth Street Canal; while evacuating, facing traffic, shortage of food and medication, sleeping in the car; travelled beyond Livonia, Louisiana, learned the area was "Klan country" after turning back; arrived at a shelter at Livonia High School; his dog had to stay at the pound; he was there about a week, until the shelter was moved to Morganza, Louisiana; stayed there for several weeks, drove to Houston, Texas, but shelters there wouldn't take his dog; went to Mobile, Alabama, to stay in an apartment with a friend of his son's, but they didn't want his dog there; stayed in an abandoned house in Mobile for about two weeks, then returned to Morganza shelter; back at Morganza, he met Tiffany and Fran who were reaching out to help others; they welcomed him and his dog, gave him food and clothes; he had some distrust of them because they were white and he grew up during segregation, but they were beautiful people; FEMA or the Red Cross was closing the shelter, mayor Landry of Morganza let Cusher use his campsite at Old River, he stayed there about a month; he didn't consider his health much, but was back on medication; kept Obie inside at night in case of wild animals; he enjoyed the peacefulness by the

river; some people at the shelter were ungrateful for the help they received; Tiffany and Fran are Christian and he is not, but they never forced their religion on him, they helped him find and pay for a home in New Roads; his dog died recently; he tried religion once but it didn't work; he needs to be around good people; visiting his former home in New Orleans; asked for FEMA assistance but was told he owed money; his old neighborhood will never be the same; he misses spending time with other retired people he knew there; his difficult upbringing and survival instinct helped him get through the tough times after Hurricane Katrina; he took abuse at many jobs because he had a family to support; met his wife when they both took the last bus home at night; he lost three children before the hurricane, and their mother died at the hospital during the storm; he hasn't seen most of his family except for a nephew and sister; was able to salvage some items from his home in the Ninth Ward; he doesn't have his children or their pictures, only memories; he doesn't have much trust in politicians; some people are still looking for housing two years after the storm; he still pays taxes and insurance on his home in New Orleans; he experienced pockets of discrimination after evacuating; cannot express how much Tiffany and Fran helped him, they were his angels when he wanted to give up; conclusion.

TAPE: 1 (T3812)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 43 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 29 pages

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

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

RESTRICTIONS: None