

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Lisa Faye Jarreau

COLLECTION: 4700.1953

IDENTIFICATION: Former elementary school teacher, New Orleans resident who evacuated before Hurricane Katrina

INTERVIEWER: Myrna Matherne

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

INTERVIEW DATE: March 10, 2007

FOCUS DATES: 2005

ABSTRACT:

Tape 3813

Introduction; Jarreau clarifies pronunciation of her name; parents originally from New Roads, Louisiana, but moved to New Orleans; family visited New Roads regularly; her employment before Hurricane Katrina was mainly in elementary education, also worked at a law firm; she lived with her daughter on Paris Avenue, they lived a quiet life; before Katrina, she toured New Orleans with a friend from Virginia; her parents are divorced, she discusses where each of them lived in New Orleans; Jarreau's great-great-grandmother is Delphine Tounoir; Tounoir and Jarreau family history in Pointe Coupee Parish, they were merchants and seamen settled along the Mississippi; the Tounoir family has died out; book on the Tounoir family had the same photo that she had in her home of her great-great grandmother; her maternal grandfather spoke Creole *patois* when he was angry, a broken French mixed with various dialects; Creole *patois* is spoken in Haiti; her maternal grandmother made and sold praline candy to ferries stopping at St. Francisville, Louisiana; a white woman named Miss Ruby would sell homemade dolls; her paternal grandfather was a veteran, grandmother was a quiet and beautiful person, but most of her experiences were with her maternal grandparents; many of her relatives are in a cemetery at St. Francis Church on Point Coupee Road; the church still holds mass; interviewer Matherne hopes they can visit the church; church may be 300 years old; Jarreau begins story of her experience with Katrina; that Friday, she worked at the law firm and the school; the following day, she had a guest visiting and they toured the French Quarter, glad she had that experience before the city was damaged; Jarreau names some of the spots they visited; her mother kept calling asking her to evacuate, she was hesitant to leave; she was the last one to arrive in New Roads because she had to get her niece from St. Bernard Parish; contraflow out of New Orleans had changed since the last time she evacuated and she ended up heading north instead of west; she drove north for hours, exits in Mississippi were blocked by law enforcement; she contacted a friend who had retired to Mississippi, but the friend's home was full of other evacuees; she finally exited the highway and police officers directed her to Clinton, Louisiana; passing places with confederate flags and not stopping to ask for directions; stopped at a service station not far

from St. Francisville where the ferry could take them to New Roads; she drove for miles then turned around and went back to the service station; she hadn't driven far enough because she and the man who directed her had different ideas of what "just up the road" meant; she got more gas and left again; arriving at the ferry, there was a long line, people were selling food and many had pets with them; landscape around the ferry had changed from when she was a girl; her guest was stuck at the airport and it was madness there; Jarreau stayed with her aunt in New Roads where it was ten women under one roof; her relatives went through her things, everyone was on different schedules, babies crying and people being loud; first images on TV of the city after the storm looked like total destruction; seeing that places near her home and business she frequented were completely flooded; the whole first floor of her home flooded and her roof caved in, she didn't make it back until November because the National Guard was keeping people out; her daughter's guinea pig had died; Jarreau's father stayed through the storm but had to evacuate when the water came; he returned to New Orleans shortly after the storm; water was the most damaging aspect of the storm; people who stayed told her they heard explosions; she thanks her mother for encouraging her to evacuate, she's not sure she would have had the wherewithal to survive; she's settled in New Roads now, unsuccessfully looked for work in the school system; is now a student studying film production; many films are shot in New Orleans and celebrities live there; movie industry there brings employment opportunity and boosts local economy; evacuation experience brought out the good and the bad in people, some people embraced her but she has also had negative experiences; people trying to use her to collect FEMA money or get tax credits; people using food pantries when they are not in need; she waited forever for financial help from FEMA and the Red Cross; heard of people with little damage to their homes getting large amounts of money by lying; hurt her to see people taking advantage of the help offered; bad experience when an opportunity to get free uniforms for New Orleans students arose and she saw people from out of town there lying "just to get something to get it" for free; people telling her she couldn't go to the food stamp office dressed a certain way; dishonest people waiting for food stamps was baffling to her and turned her stomach; she was raised in a diverse environment, it was different in New Roads where she didn't feel she was embraced; some people judge others by their skin color; she had no idea racism was as bad as it was in the new millennium; a church member of hers who always complained about his back, she used to giggle at his slow country accent; she once asked him about his bad back and he said he had been shot by five white boys and left for dead; that story messed her up and she cried for days; the incident had only happened twenty-two years prior and she was struck by her reality versus his; the man cooks squirrels and she loves squirrels so that was a conflict for her; she's not sure what God's purpose was in allowing Katrina to happen; poor and elderly were most affected because they could not evacuate; everyone is responsible for what happened, not just FEMA; she hopes the tragic events of Katrina can be a learning experience; natural disasters can't be stopped but our response to them can change; she's started to embrace new things since living in New Roads; thinks she will attend the next time there's a *boucherie*; she found her roots in New Roads, now has a positive association with being Creole; conclusion.

TAPE: 1 (T3813)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 1 minute

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 29 pages

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

OTHER MATERIALS: Voices in the Storm reception program (2 pgs); Interview log; Interviewee biographical info form

RESTRICTIONS: Jarreau wants to be made aware of any major duplications and has stipulations on the use of her photograph. See Control folder for specifics