

**T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection**

**ABSTRACT**

**INTERVIEWEE NAME:** Ida Belle Joshua

**COLLECTION:** 4700.1684

**IDENTIFICATION:** Ida Belle Joshua is a native of New Orleans, Louisiana and survivor of Hurricane Betsy. She worked as a hairstylist, teacher's aide, social worker, and was active in her community as President of the Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood Council and Area Beautification Committee.

**INTERVIEWER:** Nilima Mwendu

**PROJECT:** Hurricane Betsy

**INTERVIEW DATES:** November 20, 2003

**FOCUS DATES:** 1949 - 2003

**ABSTRACT:**

**T3336, Side A.**

Purchased a lot in the Ninth Ward and her husband built their first house; moved in 1949; her coworker at a beauty parlor suggested they buy the lot; lots were \$200 each; bought the lot and paid for all building materials up front so they wouldn't have debt; first years in Ninth Ward the area was open land, not many properties; homes on Tennessee Street were mostly owned by whites; Ninth Ward was mostly African American; community involvement of Pete Sanchez, Teddy Marchand, Sherman Copeland, and Ike Reynolds; Ida Belle worked with them under the Total Community Action Program; neighborhood before Betsy was "doing good"; after Betsy residents sought urban renewal; nominated Sherman Copeland to represent them; Ida Belle and her husband moved into Ninth Ward to avoid deteriorating area where Magnolia Projects were being built; she was a hairdresser, her husband worked on the riverfront; she has always helped people in her community; discusses elementary schools, high schools, and colleges attended by her three children; meeting with Moon Landrieu; no recognition from City Hall because they were an African American community; no playgrounds or bus routes in the area; before Betsy neighborhood was mostly poor but people were hard workers and kept their houses up; she was scheduled for surgery the day before Betsy, her youngest child was sick, her oldest child kept an eye on the news; heard a loud sound under the house, water was rising, husband tells her it's time to go; water was coming from the direction of the levee; family piles into her husband's boat, along with several neighbors; water was rushing so strongly it took all night to get to the next block by boat; people from other houses yelling for rescue; got to second story of friend's house but water kept rising; husband left her and children at Port of Embarkation; walked to Canal Street and got a ride to her mother's house; husband was gone for a week still rescuing people; stayed with her mother for three months in a one bedroom apartment; she "felt like dirt"

accepting clothes from a friend; left mother's house and moved in with friends, the Gordons, stayed there for a year; Red Cross and SBA loans had three percent interest, Ida Belle was adamantly opposed to borrowing money; injustice of other parishes getting grants while Ninth Ward only got loans; she fought for a grant, attended many meetings, finally got enough to pay medical bills and finish their house; poor people got loans and squandered money on drinking and shopping.

**T3336, Side B.**

White community moving away from Tennessee Street, homes bought by African Americans but they could not afford to keep the houses up; community started to deteriorate; she stayed through all other hurricanes up until 2002 when she evacuated to Mississippi; belief that levee was blown up to save other parts of the city; nobody ever admitted to blowing the levee; increased community activism after Betsy into the '70s; breakfast program for poor children at Lawless Elementary; eventually left the school after filing a lawsuit for unfair treatment of teacher's aides; discussion of federal grants, urban renewal; trying for many years to get grants for urban renewal; difficulty of being a community activist, contact meetings, travel, time consuming; urban renewal grant was spent on building homes and other investments in the community; community leaders got rich, she got nothing; after grant money ran out, community organizers left; she lived in another community but then moved back to the Ninth Ward; neighbors there were more caring; grants were given out differently in St. Bernard parish; her children don't talk about Hurricane Betsy; younger people haven't picked up the torch of community activism; she discusses her disappointment with elected officials and corruption; difficult to find people who have the time or are willing to make the effort to work to better the community; role of churches and community centers; drug problems in the community; "we don't have to worry about 'the man' killing us anymore, we're killing ourselves"; advice for young people to be successful.

**TAPES:** 1 (T3336)

**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 1 hour, 34 minutes

**# PAGES TRANSCRIPT:** 57 pages

**OTHER MATERIALS:** Correspondence, Interviewee questionnaire, article from Real Estate Journal (2 pgs), partial article from Loyola Law Review (4 pgs)

**RESTRICTIONS:** None