

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Dorothy Mackey Prevost **COLLECTION:** 4700.1686

IDENTIFICATION: Lower Ninth Ward resident, Hurricane Betsy survivor.

INTERVIEWER: Nilima Mwendo

PROJECT: Hurricane Betsy

INTERVIEW DATE: December 2, 2003

FOCUS DATES: 1930s - 2000s, 1960s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 3339, Side A.

Introduction; Prevost has lived in the Ninth Ward her whole life; attended McCarty Elementary School and Booker T. Washington High School; other schools for African Americans in New Orleans in the 1930s and 40s; she loved attending McCarty school; visiting John McDonogh statue with flowers; students from white schools would go first, African American Students later after the flowers were dead; free gift giveaway at Christmas, called the Toy and Doll Fund, was similarly segregated, held uptown in Pelican Stadium; she didn't know about segregation until she was older; she was one of six children; both her parents and all her siblings are deceased now; her childhood was the best time of her life; mother would cook, children would play and make up games; everyone in the neighborhood raised gardens and many kept animals; her family had a cow, neighbors would bring a glass bottle to get milk; everyone traded and exchanged food with each other; exchanging ration stamps during World War II; people looked out for one another; her father and uncle built their home in the Ninth Ward around 1938; she met her husband at a baseball game, they were married in 1953 and had two children; husband worked at the post office for 35 or 40 years, retired, died from Alzheimer's and Parkinson's; no warning when Betsy was coming; heard on radio that Mayor Schiro had the levee intentionally busted; water came from direction of the industrial canal; husband was at work, she was home sleeping, when he got back he woke her up and told her to get ready to leave; left their house and went to McDonogh 19 School; husband carried daughter because water was so high; someone died overnight at the school; army trucks came and took them to the Port of Embarkation; people were panicking, some people drowned when they were trying to get on boats or trucks; spent next three nights at Port of Embarkation; it had been closed for years and there was dirt everywhere, bathrooms were stopped up; eventually left to go stay with her husband's uncle; Port of Embarkation was overcrowded; a baby died of malnutrition or lack of water; people reuniting with family members there; the army was providing food; her daughter, Tessie, integrated McDonogh 19 in the 1960s; it was all African Americans at the Port of Embarkation;

whites may have been evacuated to other areas; most whites had moved out of the Ninth Ward prior to Betsy; her friend on the other side of the river said there was no flooding there; her husband's uncle's house was near San Jacinto Hall on Dumaine Street; in the Seventh Ward people sat out on their stoops; she and her husband got an SBA loan but not much else because his job paid well and they were young; Red Cross gave them vouchers or a check to buy furniture but it wasn't enough; SBA loan helped them make other needed repairs; SBA loan was around \$3,800; she didn't want a loan to pay back later; water in her house was almost to the ceiling; scrubbed down all the sheetrock but on it all began to crumbled; didn't get back to their house for two weeks, then cleaned it out and threw away almost everything in it;

Tape 3339, Side B.

Prevost has lived in the Ninth Ward her whole life; suffered from stress and anxiety over the condition of her home after the storm and lost weight; Mahalia Jackson sent clothing into the Ninth Ward after Betsy; today things are different because she doesn't know many of the people in the neighborhood; her mother-in-law was visiting when Betsy came; the family met up at her husband's uncle's house; ripped up all the carpeting in the house and put down tile floors; relatives and people she knew helped to repair the house; they rented their house on Flood Street; her husband warned the neighbors across the street to leave during Betsy, now the neighbor calls to warn her whenever a storm comes; speaking with the neighbor during another storm where wires were down and power was out; same neighbor now brings her food when they have cookouts; she doesn't think about Betsy much, "I turned it over to God and he took care of the situation"; deaths of her brother, sisters, husband were hard but she is happy; she can wake up when she wants to, cook when she feels like it; believes levee was intentionally broken to save the business district; Mayor Schiro ordered it and that's why he wasn't reelected; radio broadcast said it was Schiro but he never admitted to it; if a hurricane comes, "get out . . . we're surrounded by water"; when hurricanes come, her daughter and husband don't like to leave; Prevost leaves and stays at a hotel because she doesn't know anyone who lives out of town; best thing to do is get out; they probably gave warnings to get out during Betsy but she wasn't paying attention or was sleeping; husband yelled at her that you don't sleep during a bad storm; she didn't gain from Betsy but many people did in the form of food, clothes, grants; her sisters got, "houses full of furniture" from the Red Cross; she got \$30 and some sheets; Hurricane Betsy brought people together; schools would have gatherings to talk and people would visit each other's houses; sitting on boxes or on the floor until people were able to buy furniture; her neighbors used to watch her daughter; whenever a storm comes she prays it will miss New Orleans but feels bad that somewhere else has to get it; God can't answer every person's prayers, he gives people what they need; no streetlights and dirt roads in the Ninth Ward until Mayor Morial; Ninth Ward suffered because money was being spent in New Orleans East; no stores in the Ninth Ward anymore; Schwegmann's and Puglia's used to be there but are closed now for various reasons; city council members make promises to get elected but don't follow through; overgrown lot next to her house only gets cut around election time; Sherman Copeland was the last person that helped out the Ninth Ward, he kept the senior center open; other council members; country bus route; discussing drug use among teens with a man at the bus stop; her vision problems and glasses; she was away from her house for about a month after Betsy; her husband swam back to the house after the storm when the water was still high; some people had to leave disabled family members in their homes and her husband got them out; family members were scattered and she didn't know where her mother was; she thinks the neighborhood would be the same if Betsy

never happened, “because God has a reason for everything”; people wonder how she copes with the death of her husband and siblings and how she can still believe in God after so much hardship; closing comments.

TAPES: 1 (T3339)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 30 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 72 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Correspondence, Interviewee data form

RESTRICTIONS: None