

Rene Ruiz-Hurricane Celia

Introduction and Opening Scenes

<<sound of heavy wind and rain>>

[Rene Ruiz, host]: Hello and welcome to South Texas Stories, a podcast that shares community history. I am Rene Ruiz, your host for today. My episode features Martin Sanchez, he is a lifelong Corpus Christi native, who happens to be my girlfriend's father. He personally has experienced many hurricanes during his life here. These hurricanes may range from category ones to fives. The one that he may recall and remember the most, has to be Hurricane Celia. Hurricane Celia was a category five hurricane that had hit Corpus Christi in August of 1970. Martin, who had just turned ten years old at the time, recalls some of the memorable moments that his family and himself encountered throughout this hurricane. Hurricane Celia had left a big impact on Corpus Christi and the surrounding area. Many people who went through this hurricane are really capable of remembering what had happened as this hurricane went on. The aftermath of this hurricane was unlike any other. Many homes were damaged, not only homes but numerous businesses. Most of the people in Corpus Christi had never been through such an intense hurricane considering that this was the last major hurricane that hit Nueces County in over fifty years.

Chapter One: The Preparation

[RR]: Corpus Christi sits on the edge of the Gulf of Mexico, so it is surrounded by water known as the Corpus Christi Bay. This means that no matter what kind of hurricane passes through, whether it is a category one or a five, people who are living here should take any type of precaution to be safe. Mother nature can be very dangerous, especially living right by the water. We witnessed that with Hurricane Hanna, who just happened to hit Nueces County this past summer. Despite being a category one hurricane, we saw some extreme flooding along the beach and high winds. No matter what you should always listen to the news to keep tabs on the hurricane, or simply board up for the safety of your family and house. It is better to be safe than sorry. Martin Sanchez's story shows us why it is better to be safe than sorry. Here he is talking about his family's preparations when Celia was headed for the city.

[Martin Sanchez]: What we did was boarded up our house, where we used to live. But then we went to go and stay with my brother because he had a brick home and he was still living there at the projects. So we went back over there. They [the city] started warning us, saying that you know, if-um, you were not too sure of your surroundings then they would have places that you could go and take cover while the hurricane came.

[RR]: As you can see that Martin and his family had fully boarded up their house due to the high winds and heavy rains that were incoming. He then remembers that the city had started to warn people about the possible intensification that many people were going to experience throughout this hurricane. In 1970, there was no such thing as social media or cell phones, so it was very difficult for many people to hear some news or spread the news. The only way to hear the news was to watch television or listen to the radio.

Chapter 2: Hurricane in effect

[RR]: August third was the day that the hurricane had passed through. The winds had picked up pretty fast and he was capable of hearing things flying around outside.

[MS]: The way the wind was and the rain, it was really strong. You would just hear a bunch of noises outside because. After a while, my mom and dad put us, me and my other younger siblings in the closet because it was in the middle of the house so they put us in there, just in case.

[RR]: Corpus was in the center of the hurricane for a brief moment, they say that everything is calm when you are in the eye of the hurricane. I can see why Martin had insisted that his scariest moment was hearing the wind roar once the hurricane had passed over.

[MS]: Once the eye went over, it felt kind of calm, but you could feel the pressure. Then you could see the rain, you know. I guess it was the eye of the hurricane and you could just feel nothing but pressure and a little bit of water that was coming down. Then all of a sudden when it passed through, it started raining again.

[RR]: This hurricane had passed by so quickly as Martin had recalled, but couldn't fully remember. There were many things that had happened during this quick hurricane.

[MS]: It felt just like, not even an hour. But, I can not remember. It has already been fifty years for me so I can not remember.

[RR]: Not too many people can recall what had happened during the hurricane, as everyone was taking shelter, either inside the tub or underneath a mattress. This quick hour may have seemed like several hours for many other people.

Chapter 3: The Aftermath

[RR]: The aftermath of this hurricane was unlike any other and most people do not experience anything like this throughout their lifespan. When you live in Corpus Christi, you are taking a risk by the possibility of experiencing these dangerous natural disasters. There are chances that you may never forget about a hurricane or any event that was life threatening. Celia slammed into the Coastal Bend, killing 11 people, damaging 66,000 homes in Nueces County and carving indelible impressions upon the psyches of people who lived through the monster storm.¹ The aftermath was unlike any other. Houses were all torn down and there was no electricity for many citizens since the poles were down. There was no way to contact other family members or friends, to just check up on them.

¹ Parker, Dan. "Twenty-Five Years Later, Celia Still on Mind of Corpus Christi." *Austin American Statesman*, Aug 09, 1995.

[MS]: We just went down the street, but everywhere you went, there were a bunch of houses that were torn up and a bunch of telephone poles were down.

[RR]: Since there was a lot of damage, there has to have been a lot of injuries. Injuries may have included lacerations, head trauma, electrocution, and broken bones. Most of these injuries may have resulted from collapsing roofs and flying debris. It must have been quite difficult for these people to seek medical attention right after a major hurricane had passed by, since there was a hospital that had collapsed due to the high winds right by the shoreline. This had meant that there must have been medical tents around to assist and aid people. Who were the people that were running the tents? I am sure that came into your mind. The people who had run the tents were actually nurses who came from surrounding areas. About two hundred registered and licensed vocational nurses volunteered at the forty-eight Red Cross shelters, various aid stations, and relief centers in Corpus, Port Aransas, Aransas Pass, Alice, Refugio, Taft, Gregory, Portland, Robstown, Odem, Sinton, and other smaller communities that were hit by this hurricane.²

[MS]: I think that one was Spohn Hospital, because it was close to the shoreline. To Shoreline Avenue, that one was close to the water. They were just doing tents and having emergency people go in there. That is the one off of the bay front. Downtown, to me, because a bunch of boats that were in the marina were on top of the, on top of Shoreline Boulevard. Our big coliseum that we had in front of the bay front was torn apart, bad, and a bunch of houses were out of electricity and some had their roofs taken off and windows broken.

[RR]: Most people who went through this hurricane, can easily remember what had happened afterwards. They were all shocked from any injuries that they may have encountered or were just in total shock after seeing the destruction that this storm may have left. The people all came together and helped their city recover from this horrible natural disaster.

Conclusion: The Recovery

[RR]: This hurricane happened so fast, but it had left a long lasting impact on Nueces County and its surroundings. It was the worst hurricane to hit Corpus Christi in 50 years. Winds gusted to an estimated 184 mph. Damages in today's dollars would be nearly \$2 billion.³ Martin, who has been a Corpus Christi native throughout his whole life, had some great advice for those who reside in Nueces County or the surrounding counties. Here is what he had to say about taking precautions.

² "Nurses Ride Out Hurricane Celia, Then Aid Other Storm Victims." *The American journal of nursing*. 70, no. 10 (October 1, 1970): 2053.

³ Parker, Dan. "Twenty-Five Years Later, Celia Still on Mind of Corpus Christi." *Austin American Statesman*, Aug 09, 1995.

[MS]: No it is just every time that the weather department tells you now that the hurricane is coming towards you, you know, you have to take it serious. Do not start thinking that you could ride it out. If you can go somewhere, go, but if you can't, you know that you have to prepare yourself good and take care of everything that you have around you and your family and so forth. Because if you don't, then you will really be hurting after the hurricane. I guess you just got to pray that it does not hit your house that bad and that is one thing that my mom was always doing. We were there and she was praying all the time. I guess with God's help we survived it, you know, we might have lost a room in the house but that is about it. We did not lose a car. Just take care of whatever they tell you to do and pay attention. Listen. You can't take a hurricane that lightly at all. If it is a one or five category, you still got to keep up with it.

Credits

[RR]: This has been Rene Ruiz for South Texas Stories, if you would like to hear the full oral history with Martin Sanchez or to read the episode script, please go to the South Texas Stories website connected to the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi library. I would like to personally thank Martin Sanchez for conducting this oral history interview with me, and last but not least, I would like to thank you all for listening to this episode.

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Bibliography

Parker, Dan. "Twenty-Five Years Later, Celia Still on Mind of Corpus Christi." *Austin American Statesman*, Aug 09, 1995.

"Nurses Ride Out Hurricane Celia, Then Aid Other Storm Victims." *The American Journal of Nursing*. 70, no. 10 (October 1, 1970): 2053.