

Martin Sanchez

Interviewed by Rene Ruiz  
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Corpus Christi, Texas

Transcribed by Rene Ruiz

**Rene Ruiz:** Hello I am Rene Ruiz, today is September 28, 2020. I am conducting this interview here at home in Corpus Christi, Texas. My narrator is Martin Sanchez. My topic that I am going to interview about is Hurricane Celia. Is it okay if I record this interview?

**Martin Sanchez:** Yes.

**RR:** Where were you born and where did you grow up?

**MS:** I was born August 2nd, 1959, in Corpus Christi, Texas.

**RR:** So you lived here in Corpus Christi throughout your whole life?

**MS:** Yes, I did.

**RR:** Okay. How many siblings did you grow up with?

**MS:** Eight.

**RR:** Eight. How many of them were boys?

**MS:** There was, uh, five boys and three girls.

**RR:** And are you the oldest or the youngest?

**MS:** No, I am one of the young ones.

**RR:** Can you tell me a little more about your early life?

**MS:** Uh, we grew up in the the housing authority there in Corpus. We were always playing outside and doing stuff together with my mom and dad.

**RR:** Where did you go to elementary and middle school at?

**MS:** Elementary, I went to a parochial school, Sacred Heart Elementary. Then junior high, I went to Robert Driscoll Junior High, which is close to the neighborhood.

**RR:** Where did you go to high school at?

**MS:** High school, I went to Roy Miller High School. That also was really close to my neighborhood.

**RR:** What sports did you play in high school?

**MS:** Well in high school, I played football and a little bit of track.

**RR:** What position were you in football?

**MS:** In football, I was an offensive guard for two years on the varsity team.

**RR:** What year did you graduate from high school?

**MS:** I graduated in 1978.

**RR:** Did you have any intentions to go to college?

**MS:** Uh yes, I tried here in Corpus at Del Mar College. I went for about a year then after that I stopped going.

**RR:** What were you studying there at Del Mar?

**MS:** I was studying to be an electrician.

**RR:** So once you got out of college, what was your plan? Career wise?

**MS:** I just started working. I just found a job. At the time I started working for H-E-B and that is where I stayed. I liked the job and the opportunities they were giving me there, to grow with the company.

**RR:** How long were you with H-E-B for?

**MS:** With H-E-B, I worked with H-E-B for twenty years.

**RR:** What department?

**MS:** Department, I would work grocery department, produce department, and I would work up front with the checkers. I did all that.

**RR:** Did you have any other job?

**MS:** No, that is the only job that I had.

**RR:** How old were you when Hurricane Celia hit?

**MS:** I was ten years old.

**RR:** Were you scared?

**MS:** Well, at that time I really did not know because we just saw a bunch of rain, but after a while we got scared.

**RR:** Did the city of Corpus Christi take any kind of safety precautions before the hurricane?

**MS:** Yes, they did. They started warning us, saying that 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:** Were they like--Did they have like evacuation buses for--

**MS:** Uh, back then, I can not remember if they did or not, but they were just telling us to stay inside and protect ourselves.

**RR:** What precautions did you and your family take?

**MS:** What we did was boarded up our house, where we use to live at. 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.

**RR:** Did you all maybe consider evacuating out of town?

**MS:** No, there was too many of us and dad did not want to take a chance of taking off. He thought we would be safer at my brother's house.

**RR:** Were you and your family keeping tabs on the hurricane throughout the whole--

**MS:** --Yes, at first, we were watching it on TV, then after that we had to turn on the radio since we lost electricity.

**RR:** At the time, was the news like really accurate, uh, when the hurricane--

**MS:** --As accurate as it could get for the time. That is what we were depending on.

**RR:** Were there any sirens going on, off, right before the hurricane hit landfall?

**MS:** There was some going off, but it was because we lived close to the refineries, that are here in Corpus. Some of those were going off.

**RR:** Okay, so--

**MS:** We kind of knew, a little bit.

**RR:** What can you remember from your personal experiences of being in this hurricane?

**MS:** The way the wind was and the rain, it was real 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. The hurricane really tore up, really make any damage to my brother's house. Apartment, I am sorry, apartment. But it was-um, you would just hear a lot of wind and a lot of stuff being thrown around. A bunch of rain just hitting the windows, real hard.

**RR:** Were there like palm trees maybe--

**MS:** Yes, right by where we live, where my brother lives. It was close to the freeway, so there were palm trees flying all over and there was signs from the expressway flying all over. Couple of cars had been flipped over too, where we were at.

**RR:** So you had said that your brothers was--was there any immediate damage to your home home?

**MS:** Where we were living, yes. The ceiling in my moms and dads room had fell down and almost destroyed everything that mom and dad had in their bedroom, and a couple of windows were broken. But not too much. We did not have any water or electricity when we got back to our regular house.

**RR:** Was there a lot of flooding around?

**MS:** Yes, there was a lot of flooding because of the water, it was raining real hard. Everywhere you turned there was water everywhere, after the storm.

**RR:** So Corpus, for a brief period it was in the eye of the hurricane, did you go outside and look around?

**MS:** No, because at that time, my parents did not let us. 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:** Oh okay. What was the scariest moment during this whole hurricane?

**MS:** I guess when the electricity started going out and everything was real quiet. We just had the radio, but I guess that we had lost a little bit of radio signal and everything was just quiet. Then all of a sudden it just started raining again and a lot of wind.

**RR:** Were there like sirens, like police and ambulance sirens, going off at the time?

**MS:** No, I can not recall if they were or not. Like I said, we were all inside the closet. (Laughter) That is all I remember and my mom had closed the door on us.

**RR:** How long did it take the hurricane to pass?

**MS:** Uh, man to me, 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. Can not remember, really, on how long it was, the rain and the eye.

**RR:** What did you and your family do, once the hurricane had passed?

**MS:** Well first, my brothers and my dad went out to make sure that the cars and everything around the apartment was okay. Then we waited until it--all of a sudden, it just got real calm and quiet. There was no more wind or anything, but everything was already destroyed. I guess you can say. There was a couple of cars with all their windows broken. There was a sign from the expressway, palm trees were knocked down, and we just waited for a while to go back to our regular house.

**RR:** On the way back to your house, did you all go driving around Corpus to check--

**MS:** No, we just went down the street, but everywhere you went, there was a bunch of houses that were torn up and a bunch of telephone poles were down. Everything was like if a bomb had exploded or something.

**RR:** (Sniff) Did anyone that you know, got hurt?

**MS:** No. None of the immediate family or anybody that we knew, got hurt.

**RR:** I know, there was a hospital that had collapsed or something. They had little tents, um--

**MS:** Oh, the emergency. It was--I think it was--uh 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 bay front.

**RR:** Do you recall what part of Corpus was hit the worst?

**MS:** Downtown, to me, because a bunch of boats that were in the marina were on top of the, on top of the 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. That is what I remember.

**RR:** How long did it take for the city to--

**MS:** Oh it took. I remember it took almost a week, almost two weeks, that I remember. (Someone walking quietly in the house) We did not have electricity and we had to stand in line

to get some groceries. Then after a while, we stood in line to get some dry ice since everything was gone?

**RR:** Was anyone going into a panic, like as we went through this pandemic, when everyone was getting toilet paper?

**MS:** Not really, not that I remember. They were mainly all worried about their houses and stuff. Not so much about going to get water and--I do not think we had much bottled water back then. It was mainly cokes and stuff like that.

**RR:** Did the city maybe offer any water?

**MS:** No, not that I remember. They [the city] were the ones giving us the ice. Other places were giving us groceries. I believe at that time, H-E-B, was trying to give stuff away to the people. But some of the other stores were badly damaged, so they were just trying to get everything going.

**RR:** So you said that it took Corpus about two weeks to recover from this hurricane?

**MS:** Yeah. At least two weeks, just to get the electricity and everything going. At least, that I remember.

**RR:** Did they have like, maybe people from out of town come and--

**MS:** Yes. They had a lot of people coming in, especially from the electric companies and stuff like that. I think they even brought in the National Guard, because of lot of the stores had broken windows and stuff like that. They were some loitering, but not that much.

**RR:** How was your life after the hurricane?

**MS:** Um, it just mainly went back to normal, but we were still getting used to fixing the house and fixing the windows. Just doing little stuff like that. A lot of people--some other people had it worse because some of them lost their whole house. But, you know, thank God that we just lost the room in my mom and dad's room. Ceiling came down.

**RR:** How long did it take to fully fix you all's house?

**MS:** It probably took us about two weeks. Because by the time, we got a hold of the stuff that they needed. At the time, we were renting, so the landlord did it.

**RR:** How was--Did y'all start school right away?

**MS:** No. It took a while. I think a couple of high schools had been damaged and they had to fix them up. Well at that time, it was just elementary, when I was going to elementary. The windows had been broken also, because the elementary that I had went to was in the downtown area. Windows had been broken and stuff like that. We--they still did not have electricity. We started school in September, but since it was August--the first of August, like I said it took us two weeks

that I remember, but it was longer in some areas. So school usually started in September, but it did not start that early.

**RR:** So since school went back to normal, did you all have to make up any days like we do nowadays?

**MS:** No, back then, fifty years ago, they started school a little late than regular time. We did not have to make up days like that because we did not have such thing as spring break like they do now. Back then, like I said fifty years ago (laugh). So, and plus besides our school had gotten damage too so they had to fix the big windows and um, you know the buildings around there too. They had to clear up everything because it had destroyed some buildings around the school and since it was a private school, it taken a little longer. It was not a public school; it was a parochial school so that is why. School started towards the end of September, I believe that is what it was. I can not remember besides. But we did not have to make up any days.

**RR:** So nothing really changed, did the city maybe make any changes such as a curfew?

**MS:** Yeah, they had a curfew because after a while they called in the National Guard because, like I said, downtown was destroyed, pretty much and a lot of big department stores we had here were also damaged. A bunch of people were trying to pick up stuff and take away from the department stores that were around town and in downtown. Everything mainly was in downtown, fifty years ago. That is why they brought in the National Guard and they put a curfew. I believe the curfew was from six at night to six in the morning. You could not be out in the streets.

**RR:** How long did this curfew last for?

**MS:** Um, I want to say, I think it lasted for two weeks or more. They had to get everything under order since everything was really bad--destroyed. Everything. A bunch of stores, lost a whole--some stores were just completely down to the ground. They had to rebuild them, and that took a while.

**RR:** While they were building, what did the stores do, like the company?

**MS:** Um, some of the stores, they could not do nothing because most of the merchandised was damaged, because the stores were totally destroyed. So they just tried to keep it calm, that way nobody would go in and ransack whatever they could steal from their store. They had security and--tied it--you know, kept an eye on it.

**RR:** I know Hurricane Harvey happened in what? 2016? How could you compare this hurricane to Hurricane Harvey?

**MS:** It was--they were neck to neck, that I could see it. Harvey was just a little stronger, but it still, the--the--that I remember, and I went through it. It was real--it was real like you know when you hear a bomb go off and stuff just splatters everywhere. And with Harvey, I did not really feel Harvey that much since we are here in Corpus and then Celia was a direct hit. So, that is why I

felt that more than Harvey.

**RR:** Um, during Harvey, you know how hard Rockport had gotten hit? Was it similar to how downtown Corpus had gotten hit?

**MS:** Yes, that is the way it was. It gotten hit really bad. Even some houses in Portland, because I had a bunch of relatives in Portland, their houses got damaged and um, like I said there was quite a bit of flooding on the streets, but only for about a couple of days after the storm was over.

**RR:** During Hurricane Harvey-- well after Hurricane Harvey, everyone went together to send like a relief fund. Did people do that--

**MS:** Well back then, we did not have so much social media and stuff like that. We did not even have cell phones. A bunch of it just came because it made the national news, that we got hit real hard. They started sending help from all over the country, but mainly it would arrive to the city and the city would give it away or the churches would help us a lot too. They would give us food and stuff like that. And uh, like I said we did not have much social media and stuff like that, so it was mainly donations from around the country that were coming in to the city.

**RR:** Did the local news maybe say that there was a good amount of death's and casualties?

**MS:** Well after a while they kept showing--well we did not have electricity, for a good while. By the time we found out about it, it was a couple of weeks and that is when the city started showing everything and um--I can not remember how many died but they were mentioning it all on the TV after we got our electricity back, and like I said it was a while when we did. It took them, man I say weeks, because like I said, nobody had electricity, we did not have nothing. We did not even have electricity, our phones were down. We had to--we had to--man, stay in the house but it was hot because we could not run no fans or anything. Back then we did not have air condition, so it was mainly a box fan that you put on the window and it was hot. Every night for a while. During the day time also, we could not go no where because they were just telling us to stay home because all the stores were just bad. Even the H-E-B's, they were still down and they were trying to get it going too.

**RR:** After going through this hurricane, what would you have maybe done differently?

**MS:** Well, since I was smaller, I really would not know. My parents are the ones that really did everything and they just-- they were just trying to keep everything from getting damaged, but unfortunately there at our house, where we were staying at, the ceiling fell off. But like my dad said, there is nothing that we could have done. But otherwise, I think my parents, you know, they kept us safe and they had provided food and some drinks, we had enough there for about at least a week. Then after that it got a little tight, but that is when we had to go to our churches, they were giving us some donations out. So that is how we got some food.

**RR:** Would you say that this hurricane was a real eye opener and--

**MS:** Oh yeah and you don't think how bad mother nature can do it. Then all of a sudden, you see this, from one week to the next it was real nice, it was a hot typical summer then all of a sudden, they are telling you to take cover, stay in your house, don't do this, don't do that, don't go anywhere because it is really bad, it is going to hit us real hard. And, sure enough, as soon as it hit, it was something that you wish nothing like that would happen to your kids or to your family. But man, thank God that our family stayed together and we were all taking care of each other.

**RR:** When Hurricane Harvey hit, did you all maybe take--did you maybe take the same precautions that your parents may have done?

**MS:** I think I took a little more precautions because now, you know, with technology and everything we have now, it is better, you know. You will find out way ahead of time. I know with Celia, they were telling us--they were telling us but they could not tell us precisely on where it was going to be. But now with the technology, I would take a better way of taking care of my family and my house.

**RR:** Before we end, is there anything that I may have missed that you would like to share?

**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. You know, yeah, if you can go somewhere, go, but if 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. You know what, I take it back, one of my brother's car window got broken, but that is about it. And um, 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.

**RR:** All right, this interview is now ended. Thank you for conducting this interview with me. I really appreciate it.

**MS:** You are welcome.