

Elena Crawford

Interviewed by Justin Bucholtz

Justin Bucholtz: This is Justin Bucholtz, interviewing Elena Crawford about her experience with Hurricane Harvey. The date is Thursday, September 24th, 2020; the time is currently 6:23 PM. Thank you for your time, Elena.

Elena Crawford: No problem.

JB: Okay, so let's start from the beginning. You said you were born and raised in Port Aransas, correct?

EC: Well, technically I was born in Corpus Christi because there is no hospital in Port A, but I lived there my entire life. Same house, my entire life, so yeah.

JB: Okay. So tell me what it was, uh, tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up in Port A.

EC: It's a really small school. I graduated with about 29 people, I want to say? So, a lot of them I'd actually grown up with since Pre-K. A lot of us knew each other, a lot of our parents all went to school together, so naturally we all grew up together and got along like that. You just kinda know everyone in the entire town, you know? I'd say I know a very large amount of people. If I don't know them, I know their siblings, I know a cousin of them. It's, it's, that's just kinda how the town works.

JB: Right. So it's a - it's a very close community, would you say?

EC: I'd say so, yeah.

JB: Okay. So you said that you, uh, went to school there too? Like in a local school?

EC: Yes, so there's only one school there. There's an elementary school, a middle school, and a high school. They're all literally right next to each other, they're all connected. So yeah, I started in Pre-K, which was the very first class they had. They didn't have a daycare at the time, they didn't have a little day school or anything, so Pre-K was the youngest you could start. And I went to school there until hurricane Harvey, and then I graduated there.

JB: Okay. So, uh, when was it that you graduated?

EC: I graduated Class of 2018 -

JB: Oh!

EC: - the year Hurricane Harvey hit.

JB: Oh, okay. So you actually graduated after the hurricane. Okay.

EC: Yes, it was my senior year. It was like the second day of my senior year that Hurricane Harvey came.

JB: Oh wow, hahaha! Okay, uh...so let's talk about that then. Do you remember when you first found out the hurricane was on its way?

EC: Yes. I remember it started out as just a tropical storm. Not a whole lot of us were really worried about it, we were kinda just talking about it in class, it was kinda just something that was kinda just on Facebook. We say it just on social networks. It was kinda just what people were talking about through the classrooms. Um...I don't think we were really that worried about, we just - at first we honestly just thought it was going to be a few days off from school. So we were like, 'this is gonna great, we'll all just go somewhere...' definitely turned out different, but at first, it wasn't something we even thought twice about.

JB: Okay. Had there been storms before that you lived through in that area? Any other like, major tropical storms or hurricanes that blew through?

EC: So, to my knowledge, no hurricanes or storms directly hit Port Aransas, but I do remember as a child, I had to evacuate two or three times for hurricanes that were coming near by. It wasn't anything - but that was why I never freaked out whenever I heard about Hurricane Harvey or the tropical storm buzz at the time. Because we had evacuated and it was just something that came and went, and we came home, and everything was fine.

JB: Alright, so -

EC: So yeah, I'd evacuated before as a child. It was ten or so years since I last did it.

JB: Right, so you expected this to be business as usual, more or less?

EC: Oh yeah, I didn't think anything of it. It was in one ear and out the other before it happened.

JB: Right. So you heard people talking about it in school, uh, when did you realize the storm was worse than you thought it was?

EC: Um, it was about an hour before we were going to leave. We heard about it and as a family, we decided to evacuate just to be safe. I think at that point it was already a category two, but within an hour I'd say everything kinda escalated. They had everyone send us out of school. Everyone was letting out. I want to say it was after lunch, they told us "don't come back to school, don't come back to school," um...and I'm not kidding when I say there were literally police men driving around the town, using a megaphone to tell us to evacuate, which is probably the craziest thing I've ever experience. They were driving around the town just yelling into the street that everyone needs to evacuate because there was a mandatory evacuation suddenly.

JB: And you said that happened like, very suddenly? There wasn't a whole lot of warning there would be a mandatory evacuation?

EC: It kinda escalated within the course of a few hours, I want to say. It might have just seemed that way because I was in highschool and just not thinking about it as much as some adults might have been, but from what I remember and what I'd say a lot of my friends remember, within a few hours, it just got a little bit worse and a little bit worse and a little bit worse until, next thing we knew, there were just cops driving around telling us to get out. Knocking on people's doors, telling people they need to evacuate. Um, I want to say at that point it was a category two.

JB: Alright. Uh, you mentioned your family and that you left with your family. Tell me a little about your family so I have some idea of the background here.

EC: Uh, my family has lived in Port Aransas for thirty-three years. Lived in the same house, we'd owned the property for many years. Just a little house I grew up in, and when I was in the third grade, my family rebuilt an even bigger house in the space. So I always lived on the same property but not the same house. I have three siblings, my mom, dad, and we actually have my father's mother lives with us, she's in her eighties, and so we took her with us. And then my sister has kids. We also took her with - she lives in her own house, but we all evacuated as a family because we all stick together.

JB: You're in school you're suddenly told that there's a mandatory evacuation you go back home, there's cops telling people to leave, what was it like packing up, what was that process like?

EC: You know, it...you think I would have thought you know you think of the cops in the streets would have made me more concerned but we were packing we didn't pack a whole lot. We didn't expect it to be that bad. I just packed one bag, that was it. The basic necessities, a few

outfits, I didn't expect to be gone longer than three days. So we all just grabbed a weekend's worth of clothes, contact lenses, toiletries, and we were pretty much ready to go.

JB: So what was the process of actually evacuating like? Did you all cram into one car, did you have multiple vehicles, what was that like?

EC: So we were actually starting to fear there would be flooding, so me and my family each took individual cars. All of us kinda drove in, like a pack. We all made sure we could see each others cars in a view, and we evacuated to Brownsville, all together. I think they had said at the time you had to be out the next day at a certain time, so we were a little early in the process. But there were a lot of people getting out at the time. A lot of people were going to different places. I think a lot of people went to San Antonio, or the Austin area. But you know, we took a backroad to get to Brownsville, and there were just lots of people moving. There were lots of cars everywhere. Lots of traffic.

JB: Right. So you said -

EC: I think -

JB: Sorry, continue.

EC: I think even some classmates told me that while they were driving to different places, they even saw other classmates in the cars. People they didn't even plan to go to the same place as, they even said they saw them looking through the windows. They were like, "Oh, I know that guy. I go to high school with him."

JB: So there wasn't really a whole lot of organized process? People were just going wherever, more or less?

EC: I think people just went to the family members. Just a few hours away, just kinda away from the coastal bend area.

JB: Right. So you went to Brownsville. Why Brownsville? Where did you stay?

EC: Um, my uncle lives in Brownsville, he's got a house there. We figured that would be the safest place, and it ended up being incredibly safe. We didn't get even an ounce of rain. It was perfect weather over there. So it was a good choice. It was a safe area. A little different, and it had everything we'd need. Stores there had all the necessities that we would need, and my uncle has a house that could house all of us for a time. So we chose there.

JB: Alright. And while you were staying there, were you worried about the storm? Were you worried about what was happening back home?

EC: I started to worry, and then the night of the hurricane was when the panic started to really hit. And that's when everyone in Port A started to message each other, started to go on the social networks, and that's when everyone started to panic. But I'd say it was the night of the hurricane that the buzz really picked up. Otherwise, I personally didn't think a whole lot about it. Uh, we have a Facebook page that the entire community uses, and there were a lot of people who actually voluntarily chose to ride out the storm. A lot of those people were posting on facebook up until they lost power, and they were slowly starting to mention, "wow it's starting to get kinda bad," "wow it's worse then I thought it would be," and some people were slowly posting pictures as they could. You know, people were slowly losing power at the time. So that was kinda what we were left with, was just these random images and random messages from people who decided to ride out the storm, and...and then everything just kinda went quiet for Port A.

JB: Wow.

EC: And then of course, a lot of us were evacuated. So people in Port A were posting on the page saying, "hey have you heard form so-and-so? I heard they rode out the storm but I haven't gotten a call from them." I swear, the Facebook was just blowing up with people wondering, "Oh, I know someone who rode out the storm, I haven't heard from them, has anyone heard form them? Has anyone seen them? Anyone get a text message?" It really started to pick up. Everything about Port A, all of the sudden, we had no knowledge of what was going on, and it freaked everyone out.

JB: Right. So how long did you stay with your uncle before you headed home?

EC: I was there a week.

JB: So you stayed with your uncle for a week. Any noteworthy stories you'd like to share about that time?

EC: Well with as many siblings as I have, it's easy to say we kinda drove ourselves crazy. If you have siblings, I'm sure you know that in a room full of that many people, you'll start to bicker and get on each other's nerves. I think that only comes with stress, but I'd say it was a good time. Hanging out, watching movies, spending family time you don't normally get the option to do when you're at home.

JB: Right. So you stayed at your uncle's for a week, you waited out the storm, then you headed back home?

EC: The day after the hurricane, we started to be able to see what was going on with Port A. Someone from Port A was actually able to get to the island using their truck and they posted images of all of our houses, and that's when everyone started to really realize just how bad it was. People were almost too scared to go home. It was so bad that the mayor actually made it to where not everyone could get on the island, only emergency city workers. One of my other uncles, who was also at the house with us - they evacuated separately but met us there - he is a city worker, so he went back early. And that's where we started to get more images. That's where more people started to go back and we started to realize what was at home, but we were not able to get to the island until about a week after, maybe six days, and they had checkpoints set up so they would only let you in if you had an address that was a physical address on the island. Which was actually a really big problem for a lot of people because some people don't have their actual licenses updated. If you didn't have your license updated, you weren't able to get onto the island. So a lot of people were, you know, freaking out because they couldn't see what was going on. The reason for that is because Port A has a lot of vacation rentals, so a lot of people, that was their second home. With the amount of traffic that was coming in now, they needed to keep it to the people who needed to see their first homes. My parents didn't actually want me to go home yet. My dad was the first one to go home. He wanted to assess the situation before he let all of us see our things. There was also still no power on the island, so anyone on the island had to take pictures with their phone and then drive to Corpus and then send them and post them and call everyone. So my dad was there, and then after about a week, he let me and my mom drive home. He said it was safe, the roads were cleared up enough that we could safely get there. Part of the reason I went home as early as I did - I actually might have waited - was because I wanted to get enrolled into a different school. There was still no power, there was still no hot water or anything yet, so we were kinda roughing it for a few days. Bottled water showers, which is never fun, sleeping in rooms that were extremely hot. We actually slept on the balcony some nights just because of how hot it was. And then the power came back on, and that's when I'd say people really started to get back on the island. Everyone got home to see what their home looked like. That's when everyone started setting up the food trucks, the camps, a lot of people came to Port A to feed all the locals. It was crazy. There were people everywhere, cooking and feeding us. I'd say whenever the power came on, maybe...nine days after it hit, was whenever everyone was there. Everyone saw what was going on.

JB: What did your home look like when you first saw it again?

EC: We thankfully didn't get any wind damage because our house is up hill, but we got direct, straight wind damage. My entire siding was ripped off from one house, all you could see was plywood. My balconies were ripped off, many of our doors were ripped off. Some of our

windows we couldn't even reach to board up, so many of our windows were ripped out. It was just wood. It wasn't even a home anymore, it was like it was being built again. The barriers on the balcony were flung all over, the mailbox was gone, my bedroom door was gone, our shed doors I think were pulled open, if I remember correctly. Fences were all down. It was good that we took our cars with us because for all we knew, the barriers from the balcony could have landed on our cars. So that was a good move on our part. But it didn't look like my home anymore, you couldn't even see the color of it anymore.

JB: You got back home, you mentioned that a lot of people came down to help. That was something I remember actually seeing a lot in the news at the time. There was a lot of volunteers who came down to help. Did you interact with them a whole lot?

EC: Did I what? I'm sorry.

JB: Did you interact with any of those volunteers that came down to help? Because they were a big part of the news coverage of the events, and I'm kinda curious if you had any direct interactions with them.

EC: I believe I got a few meals from them, but we kinda kept to ourselves when it came to - a lot of people were coming in and they were doing demo and helping out, but we kinda kept to ourselves during that period because we wanted to heal, and we did the demo ourselves. But we did interact, because people were driving around. When we were all working outside, people drove by and they offered us water bottles. So that's probably how we interacted the most, and then maybe a few meals, but other than that we didn't have a lot of people coming in and out of our house. We were trying to heal on our own.

JB: I understand. You mentioned that there were people who tried to ride out the storm. How did that work out for them.

EC: I don't remember how many - I want to say we had two deaths. Maybe one. But a lot of people who rode out the storm had some crazy stories to tell. Some of them were climbing up on random items to keep the water from getting them. I think I read somewhere that people were writing notes on the walls, just in case they died. I know a lot of people were worried they were going to die. Actually, a man stayed in the house next door to mine. He rode out the storm, and he was very scared. He said it was crazy. Um, a lot of people say they regretted it.

JB: Now you're back home and the process of rebuilding has begun. What was that process like? What was it like to watch the island rebuild?

EC: Long. Some place picked up way faster than others, other people had to really wait for insurance to kick in. That was a huge issue. There was a lot of people fighting with the insurance companies, a lot of people were getting scammed by construction companies. That process seemed...looking back on it now it seemed like it went by fast, but at the time it felt like it was going so slow. Our school didn't open up, I wanna say it was October...thirteenth that we came back to our school. October thirteenth or eighteenth was when our school officially opened up in the portables. But slowly, certain restaurants were able to kinda get things going. I think the first restaurant to open up was Ire's. A small local restaurant. I wanna say they were one of the first to reopen, probably in October. And it was like every day I'd drive onto the island from going to school in Flower Bluff, and I'd get into town, and every day I felt like I noticed something a little bit more cleaned up, a little bit more cleaned up, but there was debris on people's front yards for month and months, I feel like. Eventually they had people picking them up with their trucks, but there was always more and more debris to move, there was always more and more stuff to move out of their house. So there was months at a time where there was just so much stuff on people's front lawns. And then a lot of restaurants, some didn't open back up, some moved into different spots, some took almost a year to completely rebuild just because of how long those kind of things can take. But I think we recovered extremely well. I think that we moved a lot faster than other places. I think Port A saw the devastation and immediately was like, "well, there's no time to waste. We gotta get this moving." It felt slow, and looking back now it seemed so fast, but it was just a process that everyone just kind of attacked. I was very impressed.

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JB: You mentioned that you went to school after a week back at the island?

EC: I started at Flower Bluff High School the day after labor day. The day after labor day.

JB: What was it like going back to school again after the events of the hurricane?

EC: In Flower Bluff?

JB: Yeah. Was it any different suddenly going to a new school?

EC: Yes, I think all of us - all the people who have grown up in Port A and only have gone to Port A - all agreed that it was a very different change. A lot of us, I don't think we even liked it at first. We felt so out of place, we felt really confused. I mean, that school was huge. The school was like, five times the size of ours. It was a huge change. We didn't even have football, and they did. In schools that have football, everyone loves football, that's like the biggest thing, and we were like, "What, really? There's a football game this weekend?" So that was something that I was like "what?" But the teachers, they were nice to us and helpful, and a lot of students were really helpful about it. They were trying to help us, show us around. And even on the first day of Flower Bluff, our actual teachers from Port A were there, and they stood at the front door as we walked in, and they were making sure we knew where to go. Because I mean, this was the kind of school that actually required a map, it was so big. Port Aransas is just a single square. You can't even get lost in Port A because you just keep taking a left turn and you're right back where you started. At Flower Bluff, it was huge. There were several different buildings. So that was really different. There were so many people in so many different classes. In Port A, you had the same people in each class, but Flower Bluff was nothing like that at all.

JB: You mentioned in our little pre-talk that you would say the hurricane ruined your life. Could you elaborate on what you mean by that?

EC: It might be a bit of an exaggeration. It didn't necessarily ruin my life, but it definitely changed my life. It hit when I was - I would have been 17 at the time. I had so many plans that I was going to do whenever I graduated, and as soon as Hurricane Harvey hit, it was suddenly like, "wow, I have no idea what I'm even doing." I didn't even know where I wanted to go from there. I had these plans - everyone says when they're in high school that they want to move somewhere and live in a new place and explore, but as soon as the hurricane hit, I was like "I think I just want to stay here, I want to rebuild my home," you know? I could never ask my parents to put me up in a dorm while they were not able to live in their own home. So I wanted to stay. When I say it really changed my life, it's one of those things you never believe will ever happen to you, and when it does, you don't even know what to think. I mean, you don't even know what to do with yourself when you're standing there and everything you've ever had is ruined. Like I said, my doors blew off, everything in my house was ruined. From the mold, from the rain, there was a case of black mold pretty much all over the island, so it was like, "what is it safe to keep?" I probably could have some things, but I just got to a point where I was like, "you know what? It's just for the best that I throw all this away because I have to move on." You know, you can sit there and wash clothes over and over and over again until it doesn't smell like mold anymore,

until everything's out, but after a while, I was like, "why am I even doing this? I just have to start fresh." You know, your clothes start to stink when they're covered in rain water. That was kind of the point where I was like, "alright, this has to be done." So that's more what I mean whenever I say it ruined or changed my life, it just put a new perspective on everything. I never realized the impact of a hurricane. Which is why I never thought to bring anything, which is why I never thought to worry before it happened, and then I came home and everything was gone, and I was like, "wow, I had no idea."

JB: What is it like on Port Aransas today? How has the island recovered?

EC: Oh, I think the island looks great. A lot of restaurants have reopened. There are still a few houses that look like they're still kind of being worked on. I mean, even my house still has a few odds and ends, jobs we might still need to work on. A few paint jobs, a few base boards need to be put back on, because it's a slow process. I don't think you'd even know a hurricane hit at this point. I mean, I think they did a tremendous job. A lot of restaurants and local businesses even have a line painted on the walls where the "Harvey line" rose. When people went back in the restaurants, you could see exactly how high the storm, the surge had rose, because there was just this brown stuff all over the bottom half of the walls, and a lot of restaurants and businesses have like a little Harvey water line drawn so you know just how high it got. For a while, a lot of restaurants even had Hurricane Harvey merch being sold, just to represent how far they had come. A lot of restaurants have pictures up, so it's just something we kinda remember. We're all definitely - we all think about it a lot. But we're all really happy with how far we've come along.

JB: Alright, that's great. That's some good fluffy human interest to throw in there, right there. I'm sorry, give me one moment to look at my notes again.

EC: No problem.

JB: How did your family cope with the damage? Was there a lot of grieving? I think you mentioned you just more-or-less just got down to work and got things fixed.

EC: Yeah, I'd say it probably hit me - I don't want to say it hit me the hardest, but I definitely showed how much it hurt because I was the one who was still in high school, because I'm the youngest. My siblings were all out of high school, they just had jobs at that point. My parents work in the town across the ferry, which also got damaged, but my dad was able to return to work so he was just back to doing what he was always doing. Life went back to normal for him, except the house. My mom, the teacher in Aransas Pass which is across the ferry, and they also got a lot of damage so she was effected by it a lot. She had to work in portables. I want to say that the men in my family definitely grieved a lot less than the girls did. It probably hit us harder. We had to loose the most stuff, we're the ones who clung onto it the most, where as the boys

were like, "well we gotta toughen up and move forward." I definitely say my family thinks about it a lot. Maybe not as much as I do, but I know they think about it a lot. I know that they are upset with themselves in a way for not bringing as much as they did. But my parents always make the best of it, they always have, and I'd say that they did a really good job trying to make everything okay afterwards.

JB: What lessons do you think that you could take away from the hurricane? Or that other people could take away from the hurricane? Is there anything you feel like you learned from this experience?

EC: I think one thing anyone from Port A could tell is that - never underestimate it. I mean, pack everything. Bring everything. Don't hesitate to just bring literally everything because you will miss it when you are gone. You never realize how much you'll actually - sometimes you think "oh, if I lost my clothes I'd just buy new ones," but when you really lose all your clothes, you're like, "wow, this is awful," and then it's like you have to just start over. You have to start over, so always bring as much as you can. Even though things can be replaced, it still kinda stings to see things disappear right in front of your eyes, you know?

JB: Right.

EC: We recovered, and we were pretty strong about it, I think. To this day, we look at other people when they get hit by hurricanes and we all do as much as we can to help.

EC: We recovered, and we were pretty strong about it, I think. To this day, we look at other people when they get hit by hurricanes and we all do as much as we can to help. With Hurricane Lura, we had lots of people bring in trailers over to Louisiana because we know exactly what that's like. We know exactly what it's like to be a small town that no one really thinks about. A lot of people focused on Houston for Hurricane Harvey, but Port A was rough. So you know, we always take that into consideration for other places when hurricanes hit, we think about them a lot. Just don't take anything for granted. That's kind of what I said in the first one, but...literally everything could disappear, just in a night. It's just crazy to think that. It's like a bomb went off, you know? It's just one day, everything you know is gone. We've all experienced going home and everything being gone. So never take anything for granted.

JB: You mentioned that you lost more or less everything in your house. Was there anything really important or vital that was lost in the storm.

EC: Well, I lost my retainer, so my teeth are shifting. But other than that...looking back on it now, I don't want to say clothes is super important, it sucks to lose all your clothes, but that's obviously something you have to slowly rebuy. I think we lost a few pictures. Those kind of got

wet. I think a lot of people in Port A on the other side of town really suffered from the surge. They lost a lot of pictures, childhood memories, stuff like that. But mainly, what I lost the most is I lost my entire house. That was my everything, that was where I grew up, all of my siblings all lived there. That's where I had the most memories. When I say I lost everything, I mean I lost everything I had ever known inside that house. Valuables are replaced, but our dad built us that house when I was eight years old, and it was our dream house and it was just gone - it wasn't gone, but it wasn't a house anymore. I think that's the craziest thing to lose. And losing my high school. It was the weirdest thing, just being like "wow, I didn't realize how much I really want to go to school." I didn't realize how much I wish I could just go, and go to school, and play sports, and be with my friends, and be at a normal basketball game. I don't think I lost any certain valuables that I will never see again that was super crazy to me.

JB: You mentioned that there were two deaths on the island. Did you know anyone personally who got killed in the hurricane.

EC: No I did not. And like I said, I don't know how accurate that death part is. I feel like I saw it. One casualty, maybe two, but I really don't know. You see stuff on Facebook but you never know how accurate it is, so I don't want to tell you for sure that that's the number. I feel like there was a casualty or two.

JB: I understand. Let's circle back a ways for a bit. You mentioned something about going to school and playing sports. Did you play sports?

EC: I did, I ran cross country.

JB: I know that might seem off topic, but information like this is useful for when I'm presenting your story.

EC: Oh, uh, in Port Aransas, I didn't play basketball but we have something called the Marlin Classic, which is our home tournament, and it's one of the greatest things I ever - it's the only thing I really remember from high school. It's great because they actually take you out of class because the tournament goes on while we're in school, and a lot of teachers all love basketball, that's our main sport because we don't have football, and we'd all watch the games while in class. And because everyone gets let out of class to go to the games, that's when even the people who hate sports decide to love sports all of the sudden. And that's when I'd say the entire school really came together, and that's why everyone loved the Marlin Classic. I'd been going to the Marlin Classic since I was in kindergarten, that's when the teachers started bringing you. So that entire gym is filled with all ages. The kindergarteners make crafts, the cheerleaders, we have our black out, our white out, our blue out. That's usually where we have our toughest games. You see the entire week, you see Marlin Classic schedules, and it's right whenever November break

lets out for Thanks Giving. It's just a good feeling, and that actually got taken away, and a lot of us were really upset that we didn't get to have our senior year Marlin Classic. Even though I wasn't in basketball, it was still one of my favorite things to go see. It was one of my favorite things to miss school for. What's when the games were always the best.

JB: How would you say the community as a whole responded to the hurricane? How would you say the general population responded?

EC: A lot of people in the community really came together. I think that's whenever I communicated with people - I knew a lot of people in Port A, but there are a lot of people you know that you never talk to, but that's when I really started to talk to people. We all were helping each other, loaning each other stuff. I mean, I can't tell you how many girls had to loan me clothes in high school. We were all helping each other out, giving each other stuff. Some of us had to carpool to Flower Bluff. That's when everyone kinda came together and helped each other out. There were lots of people helping. So the community really toughened up and knew we had to get to work, and everyone was willing to help in whatever way they could.

JB: It's been...how long has it been? About three years now since the hurricane came through. What's happened in those last three years? Tell me about you today.

EC: I graduated high school, and I did graduate in my actual gym, so I was able to finish high school the right way. I started college at TAMUCC as a bio-medical sciences major, and I'm hoping to graduate with my Bachelor's in August. I'm hoping to go to pharmacy school straight after that, which was my plan before Harvey. My initial dream career has stayed the same. A lot has changed over the course of time, but I feel a lot better now.

JB: That's good. Are there any particular little stories, little snip-its, little vignettes that you want to share? Just little events within this that you think are important?

EC: I remember in high school, whenever we got our gym back - we were the Marlins, so we call our gym "the Tank." It's a joke we started making, I want to say when I was younger. When we finally got our gym back, we had a Harvey themed pep rally. I remember thinking that was fun. That was something we made jokes about a lot in high school. A lot of local businesses, whenever they did reopen - I actually didn't mention this. I had a job when I was in high school. A summer job, and it got ruined, obviously in the hurricane, and they reopened the summer after I graduated high school in a completely new building. They recovered so strongly. And all the places on the island even do ribbon cuttings, just because they were so excited to reopen. And I think it's cool that a lot of local businesses were so excited to start fresh and to start new. I'd say that's about it. There were a lot of random things that happened in high school that I don't really remember, but I know that was a very large portion of what we talked about my senior year.

JB: Right. You mentioned that you made jokes about it, and I find that kind of surprising. Do you think humor was a sort of coping mechanism for everything that happened?

EC: Actually at first, whenever the hurricane first started, we were extremely defensive with people making jokes and making memes, I mean we hopped on that. We went through a definite anger phase in the healing process. So we were super defensive about anyone who tried to make a joke for a while, but that's just kinda how you heal. After a while I think we started to laugh at just the little things that happened, we started to slowly laugh at things we lost. Because in a way, you lose things you kind of wanted to lose. You kind of get things off your shoulders that you always wanted off your shoulders when a hurricane wipes it out. So we were able to laugh at memories that we no longer had, in a way. I can't remember specifics, but I do know there were small things we were able to kind of joke about. Yeah, I'd say that probably was a way of healing, a way of accepting.

JB: How did the hurricane affect your friendships? Were there any friendships that were started, or lost?

EC: I'd say we all became more friends after the hurricane. That was when a lot of the petty stuff really came to an end and we kind of came together as friends. Like I said, there were some people I graduated with who I'd known since Pre K and I still even love to speak to some of them nowadays. We looked at each other's houses, and we just, you know, it was like everything we'd all known for each other was just gone. I'd say a lot of us actually became better friends after the hurricane because we knew what we were losing.

JB: A lot of community unity. That's great! I should have prepared more questions. My teacher's going to listen to this and hear me trying to fill for time, and I'm gonna get in trouble. Anyway. Is there anything else you want to share? I keep going back to you because I feel like I'm running out of material.

EC: I don't think so. It's been a while since I was in high school, so I can't always remember exactly, but I know a lot of things went on in high school about Harvey. I think I remember we wanted to make our senior song "Rock you Like a Hurricane," but they wouldn't let us. For good reasons, but we all really wanted to do that. Some people were like, "no it's too soon, it's too soon," but it was a joke I think we had. I know...I remember when the hurricane first started, a lot of college kids, much like yourself, were doing exactly what you're doing now. They kept asking to interview us and give us questions, but it was always too soon. It was almost offensively too soon. They wanted to interview us, they wanted the information, so it's been a while since anyone asked me - you're actually the first person to ask me questions about it in a while. Now I'm finally able to kinda think about it. Now that I'm officially moved on from it

and okay with it. But yeah, a lot of people were kind of attacking - we had a lot of people come from the news, we had - like I said, I had a lot of former students at the high school email me and ask me questions, and I was like, "I don't want to answer these right now." So it did take a bit of a process for people to kind of be okay again.

JB: Right, but you think that you are at least okay again?

EC: I've accepted it for a while now. I wanna say it really bothered me, I wanna say it really, like...I wasn't completely moved on to it until I started college, and I kinda started moving my life - because I still live in Port Aransas, but when you go to college in Corpus but your life kinda exists in Corpus. And I think that's whenever I started to really be okay. And I think to this day, I think a lot of people are, for the most part, okay with it. I still definitely freak out about hurricanes, they definitely scare all of us - just a tropical storm will send the entire storm kind of panicking. But I think we're a lot better now.

JB: That's actually an interesting point you bring up. We've had a very active hurricane season this year. How does that make you feel personally?

EC: It really scares me. I was actually in Florida for the Hurricane Sally that hit. I was in Pensacola, and I kinda just sat through it. It wasn't nearly as hard core, but it was...kinda sends you in a really weird state of mind whenever it's happening again. But every single time the weather channel shows us just even a storm, I feel like everyone's instantly thinking about what their next move needs to be just because they don't want it to happen again, they don't want to lose everything again, they don't want to have to start all over again. Because it definitely was not an easy process. And that's why like I said, when Hurricane Lora, people were definitely all about sending stuff, taking trailers to Louisiana, doing what they could.

JB: Right.

EC: We don't want it to be us, but we don't want it to be anyone else either. We don't want them to feel what we felt.

JB: Yeah. Okay. We're actually almost done here, so let me see if I can think of one last good question. Is there anything you'd like to say to people about hurricanes, about your experience? Anything you want to just tack, some...grand final statement?

EC: You never know how serious it really is until it happens to you. You never think it will be that bad until it happens to you. You never realize what a hurricane can actually, truly do until it happens to you. You'll never really notice it until you see your own house completely turned around. Some people - we even had local restaurants in the water. That's how insane it was. So

that's when it really hits you, like "wow, this happened." I know whenever we got back to the hurricane there were a lot of images - when we got back to the island there were a lot of images shared and there was, like...some people left abandoned cars on the beach, and some of the cars were buried under the sand and you could just barely see a little bit of it sticking up.

JB: Wow.

EC: That was, that was like...kinda like wow, I didn't even think that would happen.

JB: Okay, thank you very much for your time. If there's nothing else you can think of, I think I should have enough material now.

EC: I mean, I mentioned earlier that there are places open in Port Aransas that have the Harvey Water Line. Ire's has it, the candy store has it. Even to this day, I think some place even sell Harvey merch. We did sell flags for a while, the high school sold PA flags and "Port A Strong" flags. Those were a really big hit for a while. Some restaurants still have them up to this day. In Port Aransas, every now and then you might see someone walking around with a tee-shirt for Hurricane Harvey because there were just so many made. There were a lot of - I was much older when it happened obviously, but there were a lot of people who took pictures of their kids playing in the destruction, and you know, the kids helping. There were a lot of kids doing - I mean there were kids outside doing legitimate work, picking up everything. That's just how crazy it was. Everyone wanted to help. Everyone realized how serious it was, even little kids. And even my niece acknowledged what was going on, and she was...it was her second birthday when we evacuated.

JB: Oh, wow.

EC: Yeah, we evacuated - her birthday was the 24th, so we drove down that day and we had her birthday party like, a little hurricane party. So to this day, we always - we have - when we were there, we made little arts and crafts that said "Anna's hurricane party." So she definitely knows what it was, and she was two. And...yeah, I'd say that was about it. There were a lot of people who weren't able to get their RVs out in time, so there were many RVs flipped upside down. Or shaped - bent like an L, so that was something a lot of people struggled with. Oh, but a really major thing that happened after the devastation was - there was a resident in Port Aransas who did "a Home for Misplace Marlins," which was a program where people donated money and RVs. I don't know how many RVs were given, but that was a huge program in Port Aransas that allowed a lot of people to stay home and be with their friends. A lot of families were given RVs, and they lived in them until their home rebuilt. I'm not quite sure, I think once you moved out you gave them to another person. But that was, that was a really big thing that was a huge buzz in Port Aransas, was "a Home for Displaced Marlins." You can probably look that up to this

day.

JB: I will take a note of that, that might be valuable research. "Homes for Displaced Marlins." I'm really glad you thought of some those things last minute, because those are some great things to throw in.

EC: Yeah, I mean, I might...it's hard to think of everything just right now, but a lot happened. I even think that at the Port Aransas Museum, there might even be a Harvey section. I don't know for sure, but I think there might be a little Hurricane Harvey...letters or something like that. I know there was a time capsule done about two years ago, that some people did.

JB: Alright. If that's all you got, then I think we can wrap it up her.

EC: Yeah. I wanna say...I do remember, in high school...I don't remember when we were able to actually move into the actual building, we were in portables for quite a while, I remember the portables literally started growing grass in the bottom because they were - we had so many. But they actually weren't that bad, they were actually a lot nicer then I'd expect them to be. Yeah, I...I think we went back to high school after the semester - when we started the spring semester, I think we were able to go back in the high school. We have a small band in the high school that was performing at the church across the street, because that's what we were doing. I do remember - one last thing that I remember with my school, is that a college, professional basketball team lent our basketball team a basketball court that they set up in our civic community center, and that was what we were practicing on. They loaned it to us and we sent it back, and that's how we were able to practice for basketball again. It was actually very cool, I didn't realize you could just set them up like that.

JB: Yeah.

EC: The civics center had a basket ball court in it.

JB: Yeah, that's really cool.

EC: And I think the police station is one of the things that's not completely rebuilt yet. I think they're still in portable. So you could look at that. I believe they're not...I think the fire department just got their new building.

JB: Police station and fire department. I will make note of that too, thank you very much.

EC: Of course. I do remember when we were leaving, the ferries had to shut down at a specific point. It got to a point where you would leave and they wouldn't let you back in. A lot of people

were posting on the page because they said they forgot something, and they weren't able to come back in.

JB: Right.

EC: I think that's all I can pull out of my brain.

JB: Okay. Alright. Thank you so much. I think it's great. I was just about ready to call it quits and then you came up with like, seven more minutes of stories. And there were some really good ones in there.

EC: Oh, cool. Glad I could help.

JB: Oh yeah, this has been a big help. Thank you again, last time, so much for your help. This is Justin Bucholtz, finishing his interview with Elena Crawford. Date is 9/24/2020. Time is 7:15 PM. Thank you very much.

EC: Thank you.