

Interview with Kate Mason

Narrator: Kate Mason

Interviewer: Tanveer Islam

Location: Jacksonville, Alabama

Date: February 27, 2019

Project Name: Jacksonville Alabama Tornado Oral History Collection

Project Description: On March 19, 2018, an EF-3 tornado devastated the City of Jacksonville, Alabama, and had a significant impact on the campus of Jacksonville State University (JSU).

Using an oral history approach, a team of researchers from JSU's Center for Disaster and Community Resilience (CDCR) conducted in-depth interviews with 25 residents of Jacksonville who experienced the EF-3 tornado. Interviews took place in the Houston Cole Library, were conducted in private, and lasted approximately 90 minutes each. An article was published in 2022 based on the tornado oral history project in the *Weather, Climate, and Society* journal by the American Meteorological Society (AMS).

Principal Investigator: Tanveer Islam

Transcript Team: National Capitol Contracting

Abstract:

On February 27, 2019, Dr. Tanveer Islam interviewed Kate Mason for the Jacksonville State University Oral History Project on the 2018 Jacksonville tornado. Mason begins by describing her emotional and psychological experiences following the tornado, including panic attacks and vivid nightmares. She was at home when the tornado struck, with her mother alerting her to the incoming storm moments before it hit. Mason recounts the difficulty of managing her pets during the tornado and the physical destruction of her apartment, which was heavily damaged. Mason details the immediate aftermath of the disaster, during which she lost all her possessions and lived in multiple locations. She struggled financially, lacking comprehensive insurance and renters' insurance, relying on a GoFundMe page set up by friends and financial support from her family. Despite applying for FEMA assistance, Mason did not receive financial help due to delays in processing her application. She also faced challenges with her academic life, as her grades declined, and she received limited support from professors. Mason reflects on the psychological toll of the event, sharing how she experienced flashbacks and anxiety, particularly triggered by sounds reminiscent of the tornado. She discusses her coping mechanisms, such as playing music and working as a park ranger, which helped her regain a sense of normalcy. Despite the difficulties, Mason found resilience in her ability to recover emotionally and financially, crediting both her family and the community for their support. She concludes by emphasizing the importance of preparedness for future disasters.

Tanveer Islam: Well, thank you very much, again. My name is Tanveer Islam from Jacksonville State University, and we are conducting an old history project on the Jacksonville tornado that occurred on March 19th, 2018. Today is February 27th, 2019, and we are hearing from Kate Mason who will share her experience of the tornado and recovery. Our interview is taking place at Houston Cole Library. So, Kate, the first question is how are you affected by the tornado?

Kate Mason: Emotionally or just in general?

TI: Both.

KM: Emotionally, it affected me greatly. I was having panic attacks when I was trying to go back to work in the two weeks after the tornado. I was having very vivid dreams at night that a tornado was hitting me again, only in the setting that I was currently staying at that residence. So, I would wake up with night sweats, almost screaming at night. That occurred for probably about two or three months after the tornado.

TI: So, where were you when the tornado hit?

KM: I was home. I sat down five minutes before it hit me. I did not get the weather alert. My mom called me from across the country.

TI: Wow. So, you lived in Jacksonville?

KM: Yes. I lived at what was known as Winn Place III Apartments on Nisbet Street.

TI: So, you didn't notice the tornado warning or anything?

KM: I had heard a siren earlier on, but I did not realize that – because I hadn't heard it and there was a gap in it, I didn't realize that there was still a tornado coming. That was about 45 minutes prior is what I thought to be a siren. I was not sure. I did not get the weather notification on my phone in a text message that I had signed up for. My mom, who was a semi-truck driver at the time, was in Oregon. She called me and let me know that there was a tornado in northern Jacksonville. It was about ten minutes out from me when she had called me, I'd say approximately. Because I had three pets with me, I was able to get two out of the three into the bathtub with me. But that left me with sitting down only five minutes prior to the tornado actually coming and hitting me where I could hear it.

TI: So, since you are a student here, did you receive any alert from the JSU?

KM: No. That's what I was referring to with the weather alert. I didn't receive it on my phone like I had signed up for.

TI: So, you mentioned about something like night swelling [sic] or dreaming about the event. Other than that, how was your life disrupted with this tornado?

KM: Aside from losing everything I own, it was disruptive because in the first month, I probably lived in – I lived in four different locations in the first month, and that was very stressful for me, couch surfing. I did not have a vehicle to get to work. I was having to get rides because my vehicle was in the shop. Because it had pretty much been destroyed. It affected me financially a good deal because I did not have comprehensive insurance for my vehicle. I only had liability. Because, as many young college students don't have renter's insurance, I didn't have that either. So, all of my – my new bed, my mattress, everything was going to come out of pocket. All of my car repairs were out of pocket. I did get help from family and friends. Some friends set up a GoFundMe page, but it covered about one-third of the total cost that I had to replace.

TI: So, the house you were living in, it was a rental place?

KM: Yes. It was Winn Place III Apartments.

TI: Okay. So, it seems you didn't have any renter's insurance. You didn't get anything.

KM: I applied for FEMA assistance. But because I'm a National Park Service Ranger, I was working at Crater Lake National Park. It took forever for me to get a third-party authorization. Then by the end of the summer, when I was coming back, when I was supposed to meet him, like I'd worked it out, they said I was no longer eligible. They withdrew my application, and that was after fighting with them for three months about it.

TI: Wow.

KM: So, I didn't receive any financial assistance. Except at the end of the summer, after I had already paid for everything out of pocket, JSU's fund that they raised for the tornado, they did send me \$500.

TI: Did you get any assistance from JSU about housing?

KM: No. Because Winn Place III Apartments is not affiliated with the campus. I did have my mother's place to stay at Cottonwood Apartments across town. So, I stayed there for a little bit. Then I stayed with a friend. Then I moved in with another friend. Then I went back to my mom's place. It was a difficult situation with them only being home four days a month and not having a vehicle to be able to get there and go to and from. So, after moving around about four times, I finally settled back in with my mom before I left for the summer on April 28th for Crater Lake National Park.

TI: How was your academic life disrupted?

KM: I would say my grades did decline a good bit. Right after the tornado, one of my professors sent out an email saying we had a mass amount of chemistry problems due two weeks after the tornado, and I wasn't able to complete all of them. So, my grade did fall because of that. When JSU came out saying we could take our grade as is, I was able to do that for some of my courses. But because I was struggling in that chemistry class, I had to raise my grade to the

passing grade. So, I wasn't able to take my grade as is for some of my courses. That's where my grades fell. Whereas some of them, I were able to take – I was able to take my grade as is.

TI: So, what were your greatest challenges after the tornado?

KM: Honestly, for me, my greatest challenge was just being able to be out in public without having a panic attack. I work at the Walmart deli when I'm in school, and during the summers is when I'm a park ranger. I would be at the Walmart deli and helping a customer, and I would just have this weird flashback and just start crying and have to go into the back. Then that caused some issues. Because my manager at the time was like, "Well, if you don't think you can work right now, maybe you need to take a sick day or something." But I was so in need of money because I had lost everything I owned that it made it difficult for me at work. Additionally, my mom and some friends and I like to go to a Chinese place in Oxford, and it's right next to a train track. A freight train is very similar to the sound of a tornado. Just the tornado being a little bit more higher pitched in my opinion. The first time I went —

TI: Keeps reminding you, okay.

KM: Yes, the first time after, I went to the restaurant after the tornado, the train went by, and I freaked out and went underneath the table. Doing that in a public setting is very embarrassing. So, that kind of destroyed my self-confidence and affected me emotionally that way as well.

TI: Did you take any counseling?

KM: No. After the school semester ended, I needed to be at Crater Lake, Oregon by May 1st. But they were willing to let me get there by May 3rd. Because I was driving across the country. So, while I was trying to do my work for the classes that I couldn't take my grade as is in, and working, I didn't have the time in order to see a counselor like I should have. Then I left for the summer to be a park ranger. I would say I'd never really fully dealt with it emotionally.

TI: Yes. That's really hard. I know it's hard for you to remember the night. But can you tell us a little bit like how it was felt?

KM: Yes, I can. So, my mom called me about ten minutes before the tornado hit, and I officially sat down five minutes before it hit, with my two out of my three pets. My third pet was in the box spring under my mattress. There had been a hole there before, and she'd crawled up. That's just kind of where she would hang out. But I couldn't get her out. My mom told me to leave her and get in the bathtub. I was able to grab some pillows and a helmet just in case anything did fall.

TI: So, you had a helmet in the house from bike riding?

KM: Yes, just bike riding. But my Aunt Cindy was a nurse, and she said in the majority of tornado cases or natural weather events, it's head trauma that really hurts someone. So, last second, I thought to grab that and put it on. I was on my phone with my mom the whole time.

She was on the phone when it hit. I'd say about two minutes before it hit, it was very strange. The –

TI: You can take your time.

KM: The power went out. But when it went out, because everything was just completely off, and my eyes weren't able to adjust, I couldn't even see my hand in front of my face when it hit me. I didn't have enough battery on my phone, with talking to my mom, to put a flashlight on. I didn't want to hang up with her in case it was going to be the last time I spoke with her. It went out. It's very strange when all the power goes out like that. Because it makes the hairs on all of your body rise up because there's not even that slight electrical whirring in the background just from power being available that some people don't realize they hear all the time. We block it out. But when it's gone, you notice it. Then in about a span, I'd say, of 10 to 15 seconds, I heard a very kind of – it sounded like a train but more high pitched. It sounded like it was maybe a mile away. Then it was just roaring in my ears, and it was on top of me. I thought the walls in my apartment – I'm in my bathroom with the door closed – I thought the walls in my apartment had been ripped away because I could hear the wind and bricks blowing around and everything. I thought my cat was dead. My upstairs neighbor, I had spoken with him earlier on in the day, just joking, during the afternoon, before it was even nighttime. It was probably about maybe 5:00 p.m. We were joking that a tornado wasn't going to hit. My walls in my apartment were very thin. So, I could hear every footstep he made, and I could hear him when he got into the bathtub. After the tornado hit, I couldn't hear him moving around anymore. I was worried he didn't make it. Because at this point, water was dripping down my walls and flooding my apartment. My ceiling, so, essentially his floor, wasn't ripped away, but it was just the complete second story almost of the middle building of Winn Place III Apartments was ripped off. I thought he wasn't alive. But because the tornado had just passed – I mean, it was there and gone. It had just passed, and my mom told me to hang up with her at that point and call 911. I called them. They informed me another tornado may be on the way and to stay in my apartment. But as soon as that one passes, if I hear it pass, if it does come by me, to get out of the apartment as soon as possible because my ceiling could collapse in on me. It was likely, based on the damage of the building, from what I described, that my building could fall in on me. I went to the door, and it was really windy outside so, I wasn't sure if the other tornado was coming by. But I opened the door stupidly, and the wind was whipping in my face. My upstairs neighbor [Brian?], his curtains were coming underneath – into my door frame because they had been ripped out. I shut the door again, scared, and I sat in my apartment, called 911 again. They said they couldn't even get to Winn Place III because down the road at the Reserve, there were some students who were on the phone with dispatchers, and it hung up when the tornado came by. So, they were the priority. At this point, I don't know how to describe the lamp. It's the basic lamp that they have on the ceiling that's a dome, and it has a pointed tip. There was so much water coming into my apartment that that was bubbling like a fishbowl. I'm trying to get myself together and wading through the water. I'd say at this point, maybe 2 or 3 inches of water had built up, not a whole lot. But I'm wading through the water. I get my dog and my cat that I had gotten to the bathtub with me. I set them outside after the wind had died down, and everything had passed. This is about maybe – I was scared to leave my apartment for about maybe twenty minutes after, but I was waiting for what may have been the second tornado coming by as well. I got my dog and my cat out. I kept going back and forth to my bed to try to get my mom's cat –

well, also my cat that I was taking care of at the time – out. I couldn't lift my mattress up because I'm very petite. So, I had to lay on my back in the water, and I had a knife, trying to cut just the fabric off the box spring to see where she is. She kept crawling further and further away from me. It looked like my ceiling was getting pretty saturated. So, I would run outside to check on my pets, and I'd run back inside to check on her. Finally, this truck drove by and on the side of the truck it said, Exile Armory. So, I was thinking it was that local business in Anniston. But this guy got out, and he said, "Does anyone need help?" Most of the people said, no, they had gotten themselves situated. But then because no one else needed help, I asked him for help with my cat. He lifted up my mattress, and we got her out. At this point, my phone battery is on about 10 percent because I didn't have it charged. I'm trying to call my mom and let her know that everything's going to be okay. I'm going to be okay. I'm just sitting outside waiting. I finally get through to two of my friends in Anniston. They drove all the way from Anniston. It took them about 45 minutes to get to me because they had to stop and move trees and be careful of power lines. But they came and got me and helped me get some of my stuff out of my apartment. I stayed with them that first night before going to my mom's. But it was unbelievable during the tornado itself. It was during those few seconds that it was passing, it was terrifying to not know if I'm going to die, if that phone call – me saying, "I love you," to my mom was going to be the last thing I said to her and just not knowing at any point if you're going to die and then just afterwards, thinking that you shouldn't even probably be here. I mean, when FEMA inspectors – when I was across the country, and they did go to my apartment complex. They were just discussing getting a third-party authorization for me to verify that I lived there. When they were going by my apartment complex, they too said that my building should have collapsed in on me, and they don't know why it didn't, based on the damage. So, it's just very scary, thinking I almost didn't even make it to 21 years old. I can still feel very vividly those seconds when I just didn't even know what was going to happen.

TI: Do you need a break?

KM: No. I'm okay.

TI: Were you able to get your laptop and other personal belongings with you, or they were damaged as well?

KM: Well, that night, I grabbed a pair of clothes. I had the pair of clothes I was wearing. Then I grabbed an extra pair of dry clothes. I'm a very musical person, so I grabbed my instruments. I grabbed my three – well, my two ukuleles and my guitalele – guitar-ukulele hybrid – and loaded them into my friend's truck that came to get me. I got the essentials that I needed, like my phone charger, stuff like that. Because I still had my phone. It was still working even though it had died by that point. But the issue for me is the next day, my apartment manager let people come for 30 minutes to get things out of their apartment. My car was still there as well. When I showed up, my apartment manager refused to let me go into my apartment. Because the ceiling could be possibly caving in on me and that's a liability for him, even though I was willing to accept it. However, he let my upstairs neighbor go to his apartment to get some of his personal effects, even though pretty much everything had been just ripped away by the wind. That essentially, my mentality was his floor, which is my ceiling. So, if he fell through the floor, that'd be a liability as well. I tried to argue with my apartment manager about that. He wouldn't

let me in. I tried to get legal advice for the following two weeks, just from family friends who were lawyers or anything like that, to see if there's anything I could do. During that two weeks, it rained a lot in Jacksonville, which meant my apartment was constantly getting re-flooded. I had no idea what was even going to be available. It ended with my – I called my apartment manager. He's located in Anniston. He said that because it's now considered a condemned property, it would technically be illegal for me to go in. But should I call him – when I called him, he worded it in a way, where it was like, "Well, should you go, it'd take me about five minutes to notify the authorities and then take them about another five minutes to go out there and 15 minutes for me to get there. So, if you can get in and get out in that time, I won't know you're there. Our cameras aren't working there anymore because they were destroyed." So, I rounded up two of my friends, and I dumped everything I could out into the parking lot. Because then it's not a liability standing in the parking lot outside the building. My apartment manager showed up, not the authorities. But he did say that I needed to leave shortly after, but what I was able to recover are –

TI: So, they came right after the tornado and told you to leave the property?

KM: The next day, yes. It was a condemned property. That was when they let everyone in for 30 minutes. Two weeks later is when my apartment manager told me, I had about 10 minutes to get in and get out.

TI: So, you stayed the night there after the tornado?

KM: No. My friends picked me up. Then that's when I said I stayed the night with my friends in Anniston before going to my mom's.

TI: Okay. Did you receive any warning from the management that there might be a tornado, and you need to take precautions?

KM: No. I received no warning from management whatsoever. But that is not surprising to me because our apartment manager was not very reliable. On days that she was supposed to be working in the office, she would be two streets over at home and would only come in if we called her needing help. So, it was a very unreliable apartment complex. I mean, it took me forever to just get my deposit back, after the tornado. It took me about five months.

TI: Since it was the spring break, were there other students there?

KM: My apartment complex did have a lot of students in it. Because it was spring break, most of them were gone. But because it's not campus-affiliated housing, we had tenants of all ages there that weren't students. Some of them were home. One gentleman I spoke with that night, he was asleep during the tornado when it hit. His roof was just ripped off above him, and that's what he woke up to. Two of my friends that were students that lived there, who had their ceilings ripped off above them as well, they were here during spring break. But they were at work, working in Oxford, at Logan's Roadhouse. So, they weren't there when it hit. But they had to come home and rescue their pets and everything after the fact.

TI: Well, it seems like you suffered a lot. So, the next we're going to talk about the resilience, how you cope or adapt with the recovery and all that. So, can you talk about how you were able to cope with this? What happened in the tornado? Also, what helped you to cope with the challenges from the tornado?

KM: One thing that helped me a lot, and I would say that it also, in a way, it made me not fully deal with it emotionally, but at the time, one thing that helped me a lot was having to be in Oregon for my job. It got me away from the trauma. I wasn't driving by my old apartment complex towards the end of the semester by the time my car was fixed. I wasn't having to face Jacksonville, so to say. I would say that led me to not deal with it completely, emotionally. But being able to go across the country, doing what I love did help. Additionally, even when I was having anxiety attacks over in Oregon and everything, just picking up my instrument, just playing music, trying to get back to the basic things that I used to love doing, that I hadn't done because of all the stress from the tornado, I was just trying to get back to some form of normalcy. Singing a song a day, dancing a little bit like I used to, even wearing mismatched socks just for the heck of it, just minor things helped me adjust to get back to normalcy. Also, initially, right after the tornado, what helped me is having to go to work. That gave me some sort of schedule. Despite suffering emotionally while I was at work, it did give me that schedule that I needed to follow. So, it gave me some sort of control in my life when I had lost all control.

TI: You said that your mom and your family lives here. They live here. So, does that help you to cope with that?

KM: They did. They recently moved to Kentucky. But at the time, it did and it didn't help me. Because they were truck – my mom and my stepdad that lived here were truck drivers, and they were only home four days a month. So, they did come back immediately after the tornado occurred, and we dealt with that. She was able to let me stay with her for a while. But when – towards the very end, when I went back to live with my mom, before I left for Oregon, as my last residence before I left for the summer, I was there alone. Because she was off truck driving throughout the country. So, I was even alone in that setting. I do have stepfamily that helped me after the tornado, but they're in Birmingham. At that point, my vehicle would not make it down. Because they were so busy with their lives working forty hours a week, they weren't really able to see me. So, I was kind of alone before I left.

TI: Are you a member of any student organizations or any other organizations in the community?

KM: No, I'm not.

TI: So, basically, you were by yourself after the disaster?

KM: Yes. I did have friends that helped me, but in regards to family and that very, very strong emotional support that you get from close family that you can confide in at points like that, I was lacking in that. Some of my friends, after the tornado, I had their support for about a week or a week and a half. Then it all became electronic. It wasn't – there was kind of that electronic barrier there. Because they didn't want to talk on the phone. They only wanted to message.

They had to move away because their residence was destroyed as well. I haven't seen some of those people or talked to them since about a month after the tornado.

TI: So, where do you live? Have you recovered right now, or are you still struggling?

KM: Well, I'm still struggling financially, trying to build my bank account back up. But I have found a new residence. I actually live right up the street from my property that was destroyed by the tornado. Because there was such trouble finding housing after the tornado because all of these students were without it, and they were trying to find the remaining properties that were available, and I had some pets, I had to reserve an apartment before I left for the summer. In all honesty, I had only ever seen the outside of the apartment complex. I just left my deposit and was going to move in when I got back from being a park ranger out west. I didn't even get to see my apartment. It was basically, "I need housing. Let's make this deposit and go."

TI: Do you still work at the Walmart?

KM: Yes, I do. I do that during the school year when I'm not away for the summers.

TI: Okay. Can you point to something that helped you that time or if anything helped you that you can remember?

KM: Anything very significant you mean?

TI: Yes.

KM: It kind of goes back to the music. But I began writing my own songs, which I had never done before. One of my favorite songs I've written actually talks about how I didn't think I'd see the light of day after the tornado.

TI: So, you started doing creative things after the trauma you got.

KM: Yes. Honestly, all I did was really try to get my creative abilities back. Because I had fallen into a stressed-depressed state where when I wasn't doing schooling and I wasn't at work, I was at home sleeping. I was sleeping the majority of my days. So, I just forced myself to get up and do small creative things that I enjoyed.

TI: So, the next question is what will you carry forward from this experience? What advice would you give others, especially the young people like you, how they can deal with the event like this in the future?

KM: What I've gained from it, I would say, in moving forward is that, in a strange way, even though it's bittersweet, it was self-liberating. It showed me exactly what I'm capable of getting through, even in a situation where I was feeling somewhat alone when I was having to stay on my own and stuff and not having that family around. They were around for some part of it, but not all of it. I would say that even in times after such a large disaster like that occurring, even if you are feeling alone, you're still able to get through it. There's always going to be more doors,

more avenues you can take in order to adapt and make it through. It's when I started building walls up and saying, "Oh, this will never work, or I don't think this is going to be possible," new opportunities per se, for me to get my car fixed, so I could drive across the country, opened up that I did not even realize would be available. There were people helping me that just came out of the blue. There was one woman and her husband, including her daughter, that actually contacted me and offered to buy my new pair of park ranger boots that I needed for the summer. Because brown polishable boots can be expensive for such a strict uniform standard. Her daughter bought me my boots. Then they gave me money to help repair my car. So, it was just – there's always going to be kind people out there that even if you're feeling alone, they're willing to step in and help you, if that makes sense in a way, just –

TI: You mentioned something like your friends opened up a GoFundMe page. Was it helpful?

KM: It was helpful. Yes. All in all, if I were to add up the cost of everything I've lost and the repairs for my car the – combined with the GoFundMe and the financial assistance I did receive from my family, it covered maybe just over a third of the total cost. But they were able to help me significantly. The third, when I say that, I mean the third of the total cost of what I lost. I was not covering the remaining two-thirds on my own. So, I was able to get a third of the total things I lost, paid for. But because I was so financially affected by it, my family paid for the majority of that third. But then once I got back, I had to get the items and things that I did not have because I went away over the summer. That's where it really financially affected me, like my new mattress, new electronic items, things that I had lost like that, a new laptop.

TI: Did you get any assistance from your work?

KM: No. I got no assistance from my work. I got assistance from a co-worker that gave me money for groceries one time.

TI: But did they know that you were affected?

KM: They did.

TI: Okay. Do you have any advice for like in terms of preparedness?

KM: Preparedness for a natural disaster?

TI: Yes, or any disaster. It could be fire.

KM: Yes, I do. Any disaster, I have a tackle box now, full of items that could potentially help me in a disaster. Now, if it's a fire, those – that tackle box has things like a first-aid kit, stuff – smaller items that can assist me. I have it easily available to where I can just grab it and go if need be. This is just from being trained as a park ranger, but I also have a bag packed of any emergency items or extra clothes and things I would need in case a natural disaster or any disaster occurred, to where I would just have that readily available. Should I lose everything else, at least I already have it packed, what I need. So, I'm not scrambling to do it at the event of. Because when the tornado hit, I was exceedingly unprepared. I didn't have candles for the

power outage. My flashlight didn't have batteries in it, which is why I couldn't use the one on my phone. Because I was stuck calling 911 responders, my phone wasn't fully charged. I didn't have a portable charger to be able to supplement for my phone battery dying, and the power was out, so I could plug it into my phone. Cell phones are the main means of communication now, after something like that occurs. So, I have a go-bag ready. I have a tackle box of items. Just what I would recommend to anyone that's needing to get through something like that or be prepared for it, have what matters most to you easily accessible in a bag. That way you can grab it and go if need be. Just have whatever you need that you deem necessary to be essential to survive and achieve success in a situation like that. Just have it ready to be able to go if the time ends up being that you only have five minutes.

TI: Would you recommend having a renter's insurance?

KM: Most definitely. At this point in time, I still don't have renter's insurance because I can't afford it. I don't make enough at work. I'm not able to work enough because I'm a full-time student in my senior year with very challenging classes. That scares me, especially with tornado season coming up again around here or high storm season coming up this time of year. I still can't afford renter's insurance or comprehensive insurance on my car. So, if something like that would happen, still recovering financially, trying to build my bank account back up after I had to purchase everything when I got back in August, if something like that were to occur again, it would set me back monumentally, to put it that way. I would definitely recommend having comprehensive insurance and collision insurance on your vehicle if you own a vehicle or renter's insurance on any property that you may be renting. It'll save you a lot of money. It may not save you time because it's going to be a tedious process to go through filing that claim, but it'll save you a lot of money and stress in the end.

TI: As a student, do you think the university could help you more? We're still trying to figure out how we can be more prepared for the next event. So, do you have any advice or any expectations, as a student, for the university?

KM: As a student, I would say that I honestly did expect more support from the professors after such an event. I did get support from two professors that I've had throughout the years but – to not slander anyone, but one of my professors gave no support whatsoever. It was basically, you do what you have to do, even though you're scrambling to find a new place to live, or you're probably going to fail the class. I understand that my grade was low during the majority of the semester because I was struggling, despite trying to get help. But I was hoping not to still have assignments due the week or two weeks after the tornado. Because that's a recovery period for everyone. I believe that the professors that I did have that exhibited that type of behavior towards their students, they were scrambling because it was towards the end of the semester. That's a stress on faculty as well. I don't deny that. But I had faculty members telling me that they were struggling quite a bit because of their fence being blown down during the storm, but their house wasn't affected. That's why they didn't see it – such a natural disaster being an excuse for not being able to get certain assignments completed on time, even though they didn't go through the same scenario. There was – in a way, there was a wall of understanding that just was – there was a wall built up, where they just – it was blocking the understanding. They weren't able to put themselves in our shoes. I know a lot of my other friends faced that as well

with their professors. It was a stressful situation for everyone. I would hope that despite JSU having a plan in the event that something like this occurred before, I would hope that their plan is a little bit more secure and that they've worked on it progressively. They're going to continue to progressively work on it with new advancements and recheck that plan every year, as it should be, just to make sure that they do have something in place and they're not scrambling as well – as much after the tornado, just to alleviate the stress on the students, as well as the faculty, and the university as a whole. I felt that their contingency plan for an event like this was not the strongest. I've seen stronger plans at universities in different states where I've visited, or my family may go. For example, the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, their plan is – after speaking with my cousin, he wasn't down there when the really bad tornado hit then. But their plan, as he's overlooked it with the university, is very secure, and it's very strong to help students more so, in an event like that. But they had to be hit by a tornado for that to happen. So, I'm hoping that JSU – and I'm expecting that JSU will further improve on that, even though I'm hopefully graduating this fall, for further students that come here. I do hope that they improve upon that. Because a lot of the freshmen that were supposed to come in that year – I'm from – well, not originally from, but I lived in Prattville, Alabama for seven years. When I graduated high school, a lot of my friends who were sophomores or freshmen decided that they may be going to JSU for the scholarship opportunities. The way some of JSU faculty members reacted afterwards and some of the press releases, that deterred them from going to JSU, and they actually decided to go to another university. So, I would hope that with a stronger plan, they would be able to have this – more students come in and feel comfortable going to university like this.

TI: Thank you very much for all the recommendations and for your time. Is there anything that you think we should know? Or do you have any concerns or comments that you'd like to share with us?

KM: No. The only comment I would share is that I did have help from my family, but it was my stepfamily and my direct parents. Some of my other family members, they – and I don't want to say I feel entitled to the help. That's not what I'm saying by any means whatsoever. But they didn't even lend me support or call me after the event. So, I would say, it was overwhelming the amount of concern that strangers in this community portrayed towards students at JSU that were affected by it. In my case, my family did not provide a lot of support after it, aside from my direct family members and my stepfamily in Birmingham. My family living in Kentucky did not. So, I would say that this is a fantastic community for rallying together and conveying that we are resilient against something like this. All of the strangers I've never even met that just would lend me a smile or just words of encouragement after hearing that I was a student affected, was just overwhelming. The amount of support the community gave as a whole and the amount of fundraisers they tried to set up was just fantastic. So, I would say that this is a great community in recovering after a disaster like that. They're willing – it fits the Southern hospitality that one would expect when coming here. Because everyone came together and kind of formed one big family. So, that's the comment that I would leave is that this community, even though I didn't see it as a really great community to live in before, it definitely changed my mind after the impact of the tornado. People were really amazing.

TI: Okay. Well, that concludes our interview. Thank you for sharing your experience of the tornado and your story of resilience.

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Reviewed by Nicole Zador, 3/12/2025