

Interview with Andrea Porter

Narrator: Andrea Porter

Interviewer: Jane Kushma

Location: Jacksonville, Alabama

Date: July 26, 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 July 26, 2019, Jane Kushma interviewed Andrea Porter for an oral history project about the Jacksonville tornado of March 19, 2018. The interview took place at the Houston Cole Library on the campus of Jacksonville State University. Andrea Porter, originally from Florence, Alabama, shares her personal experiences during the tornado and the year-long recovery that followed. Porter begins by recounting the night of the tornado, when she was at home when the storm hit, causing significant damage to her house while she took shelter in a closet. She describes the surreal experience of holding the closet doors closed to protect her cats as the tornado passed, leaving half of her house destroyed. In the aftermath, she faced the immediate challenge of salvaging her belongings, noting the emotional and physical toll of the event, including living in a hotel for a year while her home was being repaired. Throughout the interview, Porter reflects on the difficulties of dealing with insurance, contractors, and the slow recovery process. She highlights the challenges faced as a single woman navigating the male-dominated construction industry, emphasizing the emotional and practical burdens of the situation. Porter also discusses her personal growth and resilience, learning to let go of material possessions and developing a minimalist approach to life after the disaster. The interview touches on broader themes of disaster recovery, including the emotional aftermath, the slow return to normalcy, and the complexities of rebuilding both physically and emotionally after such a life-altering event.

Jane Kushma: My name is Jane Kushma from Jacksonville State University. We are conducting an oral history project of the Jacksonville tornado that occurred on March 19th, 2018. Today is July 26th, 2019, and we are hearing from Andrea Porter, who will share her experience of the tornado and recovery. Our interview is taking place at the Houston Cole Library on the campus of Jacksonville State University. Andrea, thank you so much for being here. Let's get started by talking about how you were affected by the tornado.

Andrea Porter: Well, physically not affected, so that was really good. I was home the night that it happened and survived it, although half of my house did not. Yes. So, personal belongings, my home – I lived in a hotel for a year, yes, and just got home in March – so, yes, it affected just about everything. Did not affect my workplace, though. My office on campus was probably one of the only buildings and offices that seemed untouched, not a paper ruffled in the whole office.

JK: Well, thank goodness.

AP: Yes.

JK: Because that would have really been a challenge to deal with, both home and workplace, for sure.

AP: Yes.

JK: So, had you ever been through a tornado before?

AP: No. Being from Alabama – I'm from Florence, Alabama – and growing up, I know there were tornadoes that came through. I have a memory of being really small, and there being a tornado. I don't think it actually hit the area where our house was, but I remember the downed trees and stuff the next day. It was right around Easter, and I remember being scared that night. My mom got my Easter basket out early. But it didn't really hit our house. But I remember that. Then I lived in Tuscaloosa, getting my PhD before I came here. It wasn't the 2011 – it wasn't the bad tornado, but there were a couple that were pretty bad with fatalities in the area while I was living there. So, I wasn't personally affected but saw the damage.

JK: But you had a bit of a sense of what to expect.

AP: Yes.

JK: – some of the things that might happen. So, obviously, it did happen to you. What were the things that you didn't expect that showed up with this tornado, and how did you handle the immediate aftermath?

AP: You know, it's really strange, and I've thought about this a lot. Because growing up, there are always tornado watches, tornado warnings. I'll watch it on TV, or I'll have it going on the radio, and rarely in my life have I taken shelter. It is so bizarre that I took shelter that night. Because it's not normally something I would do. Different people, they call it what they will. But there was something almost that was just like I knew it was going to happen, and that I was

just kind of following this, I don't know, set of things. I can't explain it. It's weird. I kind of almost knew that it was going to happen. Yes. So, I guess I was prepared. I've always known what I should do. But there was something different about this time.

JK: Well, it's handy to have that. [laughter]

AP: I don't know if it's a sixth sense about the weather. But yes, this one, I actually took shelter and followed through.

JK: So, the tornado was over. What happened then?

AP: Well, I think I was in shock. Looking back at it now, it's really strange. Even doing this project, I think that I have waited so long to contact you all – because I've seen a lot of different advertisements about it and I know some of the people participating have said, "You need to go do that," – it's strange because I can tell people what happened that night, but in many ways, I don't actually remember what happened that night.

JK: So, you kind of go on autopilot.

AP: Yes. It's strange because something will happen, like on campus I know a few times there have been loud noises where something like dropped with all the construction that's going on, and you felt it too, like a boom. Then you felt it. That has almost sent me into panic mode. Because that night, there were so many trees falling and everything, that even for hours after the tornado, limbs would still fall, or something would settle. You would hear the boom and something else would – so, that takes me back, and I remember – the sensation, I think, takes me back to remembering a little bit more what happened. But the whole thing too, the time of it is really strange. I remember it happened after about 8:00 p.m. because I'd been watching TV. Then it was almost like, okay, well, it's time to get in the closet now. I get in the closet. I wrangle in two of my four cats. The other two, I was just – couldn't get them in there. But they knew that something was going to happen. Because they did not like being in a closet with me but right before it hit, both of them got really quiet and just kind of stopped moving. One was in a corner. They just kind of hunkered down. So, they probably could tell something with the atmosphere, why we were in there. But I remember bits and pieces of the tornado. I have French doors on my closets that just open out and they click into place. So, there's nothing that – no knobs turn. I remember when the tornado was, I guess, going over the house, I heard the roof come off. I heard trees start falling and thudding on the house. Everything was shaking. But I had to hold the doors closed because they were being sucked open. I was afraid the cats would get out and, of course, afraid, there's a tornado coming. But I didn't realize until several hours later, that I had – on the carpet that was on the bedroom floor where I'd been holding the doors closed, I had skinned my elbows and they were bleeding – that I dug in so much to keep the doors, when they were rattling and stuff, to keep them from being sucked open and the closet being sucked open. I remember just holding on really tight. It was almost this sensation, if I held on really tight and kept the doors closed, that it was almost like it would stop. If I keep myself really still, and I hold on to this, that it's going to – it's kind of the sensation I have out of flying. I find myself gripping into it, the chair or the seat in the airplane. It's almost like, if I hold on tight enough, the turbulence won't get me.

JK: Right.

AP: So, after it was over, that was really one of the scary parts. Because I wasn't quite sure what was going to – what I was going to see when I opened the closet doors. But water started coming in the closet, and I could hear it. I could hear water pouring into the bedroom where I was. So, I knew that I had to get out. Because I was afraid more of the house would collapse or the roof fall in on me. I knew it was not safe. Water was just streaming in on the inside of the doors and everything in the closet. So, that was probably one of the hardest things, making myself – because I just wanted to stay in there and hide – making myself open one of the doors. So, I opened one of the closet doors and closed it back really quickly. I got out and left the cats in the closet for a second. The ceiling was falling in in the bedroom, where the drywall, the ceiling, was getting wet. It was little by little, starting to collapse. So, in my bedroom, I had an antique dresser that my grandmother had given me. She would always tell me, "I give you the nice antiques because I know that you're going to take care of them." So, I guess with the adrenaline of the moment – I have never moved that dresser by myself in my life. Usually, when I've moved it with someone, the drawers have all been empty. Oh, no, all alone, I dragged that dresser by myself, full, with stuff sitting on it, out into the hallway, into the back of the house, where there wasn't any damage. Then I kept going back to the bedroom doorway, and I would look. I'd be like, "Okay. Well, the ceiling hasn't fallen yet, just some of it. But water was still pouring in." I would grab more armloads. So, I started grabbing the stuff that I knew was not replaceable, like all my jewelry and stuff. I'm grabbing that out. I went and got my two pet carriers, grabbed the two cats out of the closet and put them in the pet carriers. The other two cats were in the back of the house that wasn't touched. I was like, "Ya'll were smart." So, anyway, I made sure that they were safe. But I started dragging stuff out of the bedroom. I mean, I left stuff like TVs. I didn't care anything about that. But anything that was of value, and I got most of it out. Every time I would stop at the threshold going in the room, and I would look up at the ceiling. I go, "Okay, grab one more armload and run." The last time I did it, I went in and got the last armload of stuff that was important to me, and as I walked out, the whole ceiling collapsed. So, I know I'm crazy for going back in there. But anyway, so I got most of the stuff out of the bedroom. But then my whole living room, dining room area, while all this was happening, everything was falling in in there too. The ceilings were falling in because the roof was off, trees were on the house. But there really was less in there. It was just furniture. It was just stuff really. There were some antiques in there. Luckily, I still have them. They did not – from my other grandmother. So, the stuff that got destroyed was stuff that, meh, it's okay.

JK: That's some real presence of mind to be able to –

AP: Yes. I did not stop, I mean, for, I think, the hour after it. But then I started, as the adrenaline, I think, started wearing off a little bit, and I had moved all of this stuff and been grabbing everything, I had a broom. There was insulation all in the house from where the ceilings – from the attic, where the insulation had all fallen in with the ceiling. I was standing in the back part of the house trying to sweep the insulation back into the part of the house that was messed up, just trying to keep the space that wasn't messed up clean. I'm like, okay, you've lost it. It's like I have a Dustbuster out in the desert, trying to get – I was like, "You've got to give this up." So, I ended up sitting in the back of the house and – for the rest of the night because you couldn't go anywhere. Right about the time that I'd finished grabbing everything out of the

rooms that were affected, I heard a knock on one of my back windows. I came around. The only door that I could get out of was a side garage door. It was my neighbor who had come to check on me. His parents lived down the street. He had gone to check on them too. It's funny. He cuts my grass when he cuts his. He said, "Well, you know how we were never able to get grass to grow in your yard because of all the trees?" I said, "Yes." He said, "You're going to have all the grass you want from now on."

JK: Okay, so cracked a joke.

AP: Yes. He said, "You will have no problem." He said, "I've kind of walked around your house coming back from my parents." He said, "All of your trees are down. They are all on your house." He said, "It looks like –" of course, there were no lights. So, electricity was gone. But he said, "It looks like if you stay in the back part, you'll be okay. Because it's all just on the front." So, I stayed back there for the rest of the night. My mom still lives up in Florence, where I'm from. I had been on the phone with her when the tornado hit. Of course, we lost cell service. So, as soon as I had service back, I called her. She and my stepdad were already in the car driving down here. I call them the first responders. Because really, they were some of the first ones in the neighborhood. They got here about midnight, I guess. I mean, in the car, and it took them probably about thirty minutes, once they got over into the neighborhood, to make it to my house. Because they were still clearing trees and stuff like that, trying to make pathways. But yes, they got there, and they stayed the rest of the night. They had brought some tarps and things with them. So, that was a little comforting.

JK: Absolutely.

AP: Yes, to have them there. But yes. Then I had the presence of mind about 4:00 or 5:00 a.m., to call the Hampton Inn, when I realized I can't stay here. But you're not thinking about that at the time. So, I got a room. They agreed to let me have my cats with me. So, I had a place to stay after that, and I never left for a year. But yes. So, right after it, I think – going back to your original question on this – I think it was shock, honestly, and adrenaline. The next day and for days after it, I found bruises all over my body. I was so sore I could barely walk. A lot of it, I think, was because I'd been moving heavy stuff and, of course, then, just, of course, tensing up and – just of the stress of the event. But yes. I had mystery cuts and stuff. But the oddest thing was looking down about 3:00 in the morning, and mom said, "What's wrong with your – what do you have on your elbows?" I even have a sweatshirt, and I pulled it back. It's where I dug in to hold the closet doors closed while it went over.

JK: Wow, such an experience.

AP: Yes.

JK: So, that's certainly a big experience to deal with.

AP: Yes.

JK: But then you have to start making decisions about –

AP: Yes.

JK: What does this mean? What am I going to have to do?

AP: Yes. I think the immediate was just I wanted a place to stay. I think this was the hardest on me because I like my creature comforts. I like to stay home. That's my little place, and I didn't have it anymore. So, living in the hotel was really stressful. Even though, I mean, it did feel like an efficiency apartment after a while, living in that room, but just not having my things and being settled. I don't know. I'm something of an introvert. I just like my own space. It was really hard having to compromise that, I guess, is a good way to put it, and having to, I don't know, learn not to have that comfort.

JK: Right. Understandable. I think those comforts that you're talking about are ways that help us manage just our day-to-day stress that we experience. But then layer a disaster on top and losing all of that comfort because of a disaster, yes, is a lot to deal with. So, you were able to homebase at the Hampton Inn. I'm sure you were plugged into what the university was trying to do –

AP: Yes.

JK: – to figure out, how are we going to recover?

AP: Right.

JK: When are we going to reopen?

AP: Yes.

JK: All those things. Were you having to divide your attention to work as well as your home recovery?

AP: Yes. Because in graduate studies, we're a little bit like a one-stop shop for graduate students. We handle all the admissions. We handle certification when they're about to graduate. Because of that, we had to come back. We were some of the first ones back. I just started that job in January, and so a lot of life changes in 2018. I guess, knowing now a little more, I think that I would have understood that there was more flexibility in my job, that it would have been okay not to come in. But having just been in that position and moving from faculty to administration, I was – I didn't feel comfortable not coming in. So, I was here pretty much full-time, working the one-stop shop. But on the other hand, I like to control things. I realized at some point, there is nothing about my house and stuff right now that I can control. So, it's better just to focus on what you can, which was the students, and to do the job and just –

JK: That sounds like a good strategy. Adapting to –

AP: Yes. I just kind of go through the motions with the house as best I could, negotiating all of that. Because it's a lot of hurry up and wait too, like you're waiting on insurance to call you

back, or you're waiting – I realized quickly over those first few days that this was not going to be fixed in a week or two, that this was – it was a long-term process that I was about to go through.

JK: Right. I understand. So, you certainly have given some examples of how your life was disrupted and also some of the greatest challenges that you had. Are there any challenges that you want to mention that we haven't talked about so far?

AP: Well, it is strange. I'm like, there's the academic in me coming out in this. I really noticed what a disadvantage women are [have?] when they have to negotiate a disaster on their own. I'm not married. I have no children. I've never been married. My parents live three hours away. Really, my close friends that I've made in Jacksonville are my family that I have right here. They are the ones who came and helped me cleaning out the house, pulling up carpet, all of that kind of stuff. But I realized, as far as – especially in certain industries, and construction is one of them, the men that are involved, it's pretty much exclusively male. I did not meet a woman at any time. I realized how hard it was to work with them to some extent. The insurance agent, the day after the tornado, he came just to assess the damage and start the process so that I could hopefully get money as quickly as possible to start fixing. He sat down with me and explained how the insurance process, how all of this works. This was one of the first instances I had with this. He told me, he said, "Now, we're not going to issue the money directly to you. Your insurance check will go to you and your mortgage company. Let me tell you why we do that. Because see, you could be a bad girl. You could take that money. You could go to Mississippi, and you could gamble it away and not make – and not fix your house." Yes. So, I have to sit here, and I have to listen.

JK: How does one respond to something like that?

AP: Yes. So, I just sat there and nodded, I think. A day after someone's house – I mean, I'm sitting near my garage with this person. The house is in shambles. This is what he's telling me. But yes, so that kind of stuff pretty much the whole time. So, I think that it's difficult to be a woman, especially a single woman, and to navigate this. Yes. So, there you go. So, that's another difficulty.

JK: I understand. That's a big one.

AP: Yes. There's so much red tape involved in everything. The reason that I'm still working, my house is still not totally done, there are so many issues with mortgage companies, insurance companies. I have problems with the original contractors that I hired. They walked off the job after doing the work poorly and taking a lot of insurance money. Many people have had this. But my mortgage company now is still holding the rest of my insurance money. Unless I give my mortgage company signed statements from the original contractor, saying that our contract is null and void, they will not release the money to me. I have an attorney. He has written my mortgage company letters. But they will not accept those letters as a termination of that original contract. So, the position that I'm finally in right now – and I've been talking it over with my mom – I hate to be 45 years old and having to take this route, but she's going to loan me the money to pay off my mortgage so that I can get them out of the equation. Yes. Then they will give me the insurance money. Then I'll have a paid-off house and can finish. But yes, the irony

is that the damage that was done to my house is way more than I owed on the house the whole time. So, it's just stuff like that, the absurdity of some of this, that here I'm going to have to pay off my house to get you out of control of how I'm fixing the house and so that I have options, so that I can still take legal action, if I want to, against the contractors. So, yes, those are the other difficulties.

JK: All right. Of course, no one stops to understand that you've been through a disaster.

AP: Yes.

JK: This is the last thing that someone who has experienced a disaster needs.

AP: That's true. The other thing, and I don't think that this is a difficulty, but I have noticed something. Because most of the people who were affected by the tornado, I think that a lot of their situations were resolved more quickly than mine. I mean, not quickly at all, but I seem to be one of the last ones that's still going through – I've moved home, but I just got running water in the kitchen a month ago. So, I moved in with only running water in one bathroom. I've been continually trying to finish things and paying out-of-pocket because of the mortgage company situation, holding the insurance money. But I've noticed that to a lot of our students and stuff, they – it's like it never happened. We've moved on now. Everybody has moved on. Tornado is over. I don't know. It's just weird that the campus seems to have moved on. Everyone has seemed to move on. When I go home, I walk in, and I have sheets hung up over windows and things – a siding falling off my house that needs to be redone from the bad work that was done originally. I just keep thinking, "When is this going to be over?" I don't even have a sofa and stuff like that anymore. I mean, I can get them, but I've still stuff packed up in tubs. It's just not over. But to everybody else, it is.

JK: That's very painful. [laughter]

AP: Nobody wants to hear it anymore either. That's the other thing. There are very few people that still ask me, "Are you home? Have you finished?" Most people are like, "Oh, I know you're glad to have everything done." I'm just like, "Yes –" and just don't even say anything. Because they don't want to hear it. But not that they're bad people. But it's just interesting that everybody is done with it now.

JK: Unfortunately, it's not uncommon.

AP: I'm sure. Yes.

JK: But I don't know. Maybe it's people's way of dealing with that experience. But it doesn't make it any easier.

AP: No.

JK: It doesn't make it any easier. Well, clearly, you have demonstrated some resilience to this disaster. Because you're here talking about it right now, and you still have some recovery to

continue. But you've been able to cope up until now. If we could, it would be great to hear some of the ways that you were able to be resilient in the face of all of these challenges.

AP: Well, I think I'm lucky first of all, because I do have a support system and family, friends, and I had good insurance. I had some money saved. So, I think that I was in a position that, unfortunately, I don't think some other people were in, have a good job. But I had thoughts. Right after the tornado, I did have thoughts. I thought, "This is how people go homeless. This is how it happens." That – especially if I've been hurt in the tornado and then had a disability where I couldn't continue working. This is what happens, where good people who have done everything right, this is how they find themselves sleeping in a car with four cats [laughter]. [inaudible] have four cats. But yes, these thoughts go through my mind. So, I can't stress enough just being lucky with how it happened and having a good support system. But I think compartmentalizing a lot and just what I told you before about, that I can really focus on what I can control and focus on that and do the best I can with everything else.

JK: Which is hard for people who like to be in control.

AP: Oh, yes. I know. I like to control everything, that just having to let control go of the situation with the house. I think it helped too that I was not living in the house, again, going back to the good insurance that was paying for me to live in a hotel. Because even though it was not ideal, I did have a private place. I wasn't having to live with someone else somewhere. I had a private room. I now understand why a lot of our students have comfort animals or emotional support animals. I'm like, my animals survived. I survived. I don't think, to this day, I've even cried about any of this. I mean, I think, more fear, and I get the anxiety stuff is how it – but I have not been sad. I think I was lucky to – in having the presence of mind to try to save things that were important to me and kind of making those decisions right there; TV, not important, this, important, and pulling stuff out.

JK: Well, really showed a lot of strength.

AP: Yes, I guess so. I think now, almost is – not discounting everything that has gotten me to this point. But I think some of the hardest parts are what I'm going through now. Because it is very frustrating dealing with a lawyer, insurance, mortgage, and trying to just finish this situation. So yes.

JK: Right. Almost like 50 tons worse than buying a car?

AP: Oh, God, yes.

JK: So, after the disaster, people always talk about going back to normal. But in the disaster business, we talk about, well, that doesn't really happen. What happens is it's really a new normal.

AP: Yes.

JK: It sounds like, in a lot of ways, you've found ways to create your new normal that have helped you to adapt to all of these challenges that you've talked about.

AP: Yes.

JK: So, do you have any thoughts about that idea of new normal and how you have conceptualized that?

AP: Well, I guess, this is kind of what you're talking about. After living in a one-room hotel for a year, and then moving back home and not having the belongings that I was used to, I've really started subscribing to this idea that you don't need all of these things. I've really learned to separate what is important with what isn't. I won't say that I've totally become a minimalist, but I really – I'm very conscious about what I buy and what I bring in. I think it was just the cleaning up of the house and picking up all of this stuff and having to go through it or – and throw it away or pack it or store it. I think that over the course of the month, my hands have touched every single item that was in my house. As I packed up stuff, I was getting rid of some stuff, but even as I've been unpacking, I've taken so many carloads and donated stuff. I've just been really conscious about what's important. I don't know. So, my new normal is a lot more minimal, that I just don't want all of that stuff. It feels really burdensome and like it's filling up space. It's overcomplicating everything. It was funny, I had a room at my house that still had a bunch of plastic tubs in it with stuff. My mom had come down to help me unpack some more stuff. She said, "What's in here?" She saw the tubs. I said, "We could probably take every one of those and just go put them by the side of the road. Because I don't even know what's in them. We could just get rid of all of this." I didn't. We did go through some of it. So, I think that has been a new thing, just really not being – not that I was really a pack rat but holding on to things. I think it goes back to my sense of control, that I could control things by holding on. I've just started letting go.

JK: I have to say that really sounds like a response that really is a growth, kind of. Yes? Is that what it feels like?

AP: Yes, I think so. I found this little quote right after the storm, and it was so bizarre. But I think I was scrolling through Instagram, and there was one of these little quote things that came up. It said, "Some storms –" I think it's – "they don't come to destroy, but they come to clear your path," something like that.

JK: Wow.

AP: Yes. I thought that's really – it almost seems like what this is, not to disrupt but to make a clear way. So, I don't know, just tried to kind of use that and moving forward and – I don't know. I've become a lot more easygoing about things. Because I've had to be adaptable since things weren't perfectly the way that I wanted them. My possessions, I did not have these things with me that I've just kind of had to be like, eh, best I can do. Or, yes, it got done. Might not have been perfect, but that was okay.

JK: Right. That's pretty neat. So, we've talked a little bit about ways that you were resilient, things that helped you, your support network, your family, and so forth, being able to have your pets, which would be very important to me to have my pets too.

AP: Yes.

JK: Is there anything else that you were able to call upon that helped you with your recovery, I'll restate that, your ongoing recovery? Definitely a change of perspective, of how to look at what's important, which is a big thing – which is pretty big.

AP: Yes. That and, I guess, patience. Because here we are, a year and a half out, and it's still not totally done. You just have to be okay with it.

JK: Back to the quote about clearing the path, it's sort of a process, not necessarily a destination.

AP: Yes.

JK: So, we already talked about this, but I'll say it a different way –

AP: Okay.

JK: And ask, what will you carry forward from this experience at this point in time? It sounds like you'll continue to have insights [laughter] and responses.

AP: Very philosophical about this whole thing. I've had plenty of time to think about it. Yes.

JK: Yes. But anything else that you'll carry forward from this?

AP: Well, I guess on a very practical level, I keep saying that I'm going to have a better plan for being prepared. But I was like, well, my original plan worked pretty well because I survived. But I still need to get a helmet. I don't have a helmet yet. The week that I moved home, we had the tornado warning here. I was back in the closet again, the week that I moved home. That was a terror, having – that brought a lot back.

JK: Not fair.

AP: No. After so long not in my house too, it's taken me just to this stage, really. I've been back in, what, three, four months, and just now to start feeling like it's my house again. I was really scared, not that a tornado was coming, but I just felt very uncomfortable. I was in this weird, vulnerable place that was not mine. Because so much had changed that when I first started, that I would sleep in my bedroom with the door closed and everything. I'd never done that before. But I just felt like someone could come in the house. I don't know. It was weird that it just didn't feel safe. So, yes, so going forward, I know I need to be more prepared because this – Although I personally think that one tornado per person is really all you should ever have to go through. Living where we do, PI mean, the reality is, it could happen again. So, I know I need to be more prepared. But yes.

JK: So, would you have any advice that you might give to people about how to deal with an event like a tornado?

AP: Yes. Well –

JK: For example, you were just talking about needing to be more prepared. What does that mean in terms of what would you do? What additional things do you need to do to in order to be more prepared?

AP: Being prepared, I think, definitely having the things – I know some people have things that they permanently keep in their place where they would shelter, whether it's bottled water, flashlight, their shoes. That was one thing that night, I did not – luckily, I was in my closet because I had to put on shoes, and I thought to throw my glasses in there. So, I had my eyeglasses and just things like that that I think you do need some kind of plan. I have not put that plan together. So, let's hope that it doesn't happen here until I do. But I think a lot of the other stuff is just the things with your insurance and making sure that you are in a place where you're going to be taken care of with the things that you need after it, monetarily. That has really been it. That was my fear. That's what divided me, I feel like, from some other people, is that I had the good insurance, and I had a cushion. I know that people don't have that. So, I think that you really do have to prepare for a rainy day [laughter], for something like this to happen.

JK: Right. Mentally?

AP: Mentally.

JK: Recommendations?

AP: Yes. If you make it out alive from something like this, the people that you love, or your pets, that is all that really matters. Even what I talked about with the things that are sentimental to me, the antique furniture or some jewelry and things like that, let it go. It's not worth it. The people that you love, it's not – and I know it's weird. I was single. I was the only one in there. But I mean, that's it. I lived. That would be what I would say, that all the rest of it – houses can be rebuilt, and things can be re-bought. But if you live, you're okay. I think that's gotten me through a lot, I think.

JK: Yes, no question.

AP: Yes.

JK: No question. Well, is there anything else that you'd like to share regarding how this experience has affected you or other observations about Jacksonville, JSU?

AP: Well, I guess the only thing I can say is that this whole situation, even sitting here right now, a lot of it seems surreal, like maybe it happened to somebody else. None of us ever think that this is going to happen to us. This must be something in our resiliency as human beings and our coping mechanisms that we come up with. Because I remember, even after the tornado, when

the hurricane, I think it was, they had – was it Puerto Rico? I was watching on TV, and I was watching these people. They had it so much worse than we did, with their situation. I don't know. It was almost like I'd become desensitized to even that – I think that our minds move away from it so quickly as a, I don't know, defense mechanism or something and put us in a better place so that we forget. It's like if you ever have great pain over something, like physical pain, you forget about that. I don't know. That must just be – Because as I was watching this on TV, though, I just – I was able to just watch it. It didn't bring it back for me. I mean, I felt bad for them. But it was like – that is what has seemed surreal, that this happened to me. Even sitting here talking to you, it's like it happened to somebody else, in that this – you know.

JK: Well, certainly an experience that doesn't happen to most people. Yes, it takes a while to integrate that into our experience and who we are.

AP: Yes.

JK: But the new normal that you described for us is certainly one of moving forward and appreciation, I hear. There's that patience thing you developed, which I think many of us would like a little bit more of that.

AP: Yes.

JK: But thank you so much for contributing your story.

AP: You're welcome. [Announcement in background].

JK: We appreciate being part of this project. Thank you very much.

AP: Thank you.

JK: Let me stop.

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Reviewed by Nicole Zador, 3/06/2025